

**MAKING A COMMUNITY: INDIANS IN CAPE TOWN,  
CIRCA 1900-1980s**

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## ABSTRACT

The contention underlying this dissertation is that ethnic identity and notions of community in South Africa are the result of several intertwined processes, which include historic interventions by the state to create 'groups' and 'nations' as building blocks for apartheid structures. These processes also encompass initiatives by those oppressed to constitute 'oppositional' communities. Both sets of activities have occurred in specific historical and material circumstances.

By focusing specifically on a 'group' descended largely from merchant forebears, this study of Cape Indians examines the significance over time of the class, caste and religious cleavages within a constructed 'community'. Moreover, this dissertation discusses the effects of political currents on Indians in the Western Cape whose relatively more privileged position in relation to Indians in Natal and the Transvaal has been instrumental in isolating them from most of the events in the other provinces.

It is hoped that this dissertation will contribute not only to the history of the Western Cape but, in a broader sense, also to the history of Indians in South Africa.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank all my informants for sharing their time and experiences to make this dissertation possible. I wish to record a debt of gratitude to Bill Nasson for his patient supervision and cheerful disposition, even in the face of unavoidable delays; to Ian Phimister for valuable advice and for supervising the final stages of this dissertation. I am furthermore indebted to Pramod Vassen for his loving encouragement and help in the interviewing and translation process. The Human Sciences Research Council provided financial assistance towards the completion of this dissertation. The conclusions reached in this document, however, are those of the author and are not to be regarded as a reflection of those of the Council. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated with deep love and gratitude to the memory of my parents, whose experience as first-generation immigrants aroused my interest in this area of historical research.

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## INTRODUCTION

The temporal parameters of this study have been largely dictated by the limited and uneven range of primary and secondary sources available. This factor has also led to a study which is at once both thematic and chronological.

Chapter One of this dissertation is an attempt to situate the Indian presence in South Africa in a succinct historical context. However, the body of the chapter specifically examines immigration to the Western Cape where, prior to 1902, few official restrictions existed to specifically inhibit free Indian immigration. Furthermore, no racial breakdown of immigrant statistics was made, nor were new arrivals to the Colony differentiated from residents returning from a sojourn in their country of birth. (Among Indians it was common practice to return to India for periods of up to three years to fulfil obligations there.) The absence of reliable statistical registers for the early years of settlement makes the task of approximating Indian arrival and settlement in the Colony very difficult. This problem has led to heavy reliance on newspaper reports as well as on a report on the findings of a committee appointed by the Cape authorities in 1908 to investigate the grievances of Asiatics in the Colony. In addition, careful use has been made of the limited secondary material, and in particular of the works of Bradlow, on early Indian settlement in the Cape.

Although census data was a major source of information, they could not be relied upon exclusively as Indians had been enumerated as Asians up to 1950. This category included Chinese and some Malays as well; therefore, cautious use had to be made of this source of information. The reports of the Medical Officer of Health of Cape Town as well as those of the City Engineer have provided many a valuable insight into

the settlement patterns of early immigrants. A heavy reliance on oral testimony has also helped to provide missing information on the lives of the early immigrants. As most interviews were taped, the testimonies of informants have been quoted verbatim. Of the 60 or more interviews conducted over a period of two years, about two-thirds were with male informants. This was a result of the customary reluctance of women to grant interviews. Many women considered their histories to be irrelevant. A frequent reply to requests for interviews from women was, 'Ask my husband [or son]; he knows more'. Patriarchal institutions and values still run very deep among most Indians. The second problem encountered in the interviewing process was also related to patriarchy. Older male informants, numbering about eight in total, refused to grant an interview to a woman; consequently, a male had to be employed to conduct the relevant interviews with these informants, who were early settlers in the country. Some interviews had to be conducted in the Gujarati language. In this instance, most of the testimony has been referred to indirectly as it is not possible to translate directly without the essence of the conversation being lost. The historiographical debate surrounding the use of oral testimony has been noted and this source of information has been verified by documentary sources wherever possible. Admittedly, a weakness of oral testimony is the selective manner in which memories operate, but this is the result of particular individuals' experiences. Written sources are also not free of bias.

Research for Chapter Two, which deals with the economic life of Indians in the Western Cape, was partly hampered by the unavailability of a valuable source of information. For the duration of the research undertaken, the Standard Bank Archives in Johannesburg were closed to the public due to their being relocated. This factor accounts for weaknesses relating to credit networks and the liquidity of small businesses. Attempts to elicit information pertaining to the

financial aspects of businesses from oral informants proved difficult as most respondents were deliberately vague.

Chapter Three, which examines housing in the Western Cape, relies heavily on primary data kept in the archives of the Cape Town City Council, but most of this information is relevant for the post-Group Areas Act period. Where available at all, information for the period prior to the Act is very uneven. This is due, in part, to the fact that housing came under focus in times of crisis only; for example, during and after the outbreak of the Plague in 1901, or during slum investigations in the 1930s', as well as in the aftermath of the proclamation of the Group Areas Act.

Chapter Four explores notions of community and the ways in which Cape Indians responded to events as a 'community'. It also examines the nature of the leadership in this province, which proved to be a key factor in shaping the consciousness of Indians here.

Finally, it was considered necessary to divert slightly in the conclusion to the dissertation. This was done by way of briefly analyzing the experiences of Indians in East Africa. The reason for this is that the reaction of Indians to the process of Africanisation in this region could be compared to the perceptions of Indians in South Africa to a post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER ONE  
IMMIGRATION TO THE CAPE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO INDIAN SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Indian immigration to South Africa has its historical roots in a generalised crisis in the Natal sugar industry. In the mid-nineteenth century, that crisis precipitated the movement of thousands of people from the Asian to the African continent. According to North-Coombes,<sup>1</sup> problems facing the industry included capital scarcity and technological backwardness, but most crucial was the scarcity of a dependent labour force. The first wave of Indian immigrants in 1860 was composed of indentured labourers who were reputedly passive, reliable and cheap to employ. It is alleged that they willingly accepted exploitative wages as well as conditions and terms wholly favourable to the sugar farmers. For example, in the West Indies, Cox writes, plantation workers were to remain on the estates at all times unless issued with a pass as a special concession. If a person was found to be without a pass, he was usually fined for unlawful absence. Passes were only available from the local magistrate or Justice of the Peace.<sup>2</sup> This was also the case in Natal.

Together with the 'pull' factor that existed in Natal, material conditions in India further created a climate which saw many thousands cross the seas for foreign shores. This was an extreme undertaking, and for Hindus in particular

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<sup>1</sup> North-Coombes, D: 'Indentured Labour and Capitalised Transformation: The Genesis and Evolution of the Natal Sugar Industry.' (Paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand workshop, May 1987.)

<sup>2</sup> Cox, O.C.: Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics (1948), p. 193.

crossing the seas was symbolic as it broke caste taboos. Moreover, a return to India implied ostracization. Yet, most indentured labourers were impoverished peasants who were attracted by the higher wages and better conditions as described by Natal recruiters. An enormous body of literature is available on indentured labour in Natal, with notable contributions by F.Meer, J.Beall, J.P.Brain and P.Brain, M.Swan, H.Tinker, S.Bhana and J.Pachai.<sup>3</sup>

Almost a decade after the entry of the first indentured labourers in 1860, another group of people, the so-called 'passengers' arrived. These persons were so called because, unlike the indentured workers, they paid for their own passage to South Africa. They arrived first in Natal, where they settled or stayed temporarily to earn some money before venturing into the interior. There were those who emigrated from Natal, either to the Cape or to the Transvaal.<sup>4</sup> Several oral informants recalled details of the passage from India to Natal, and thence to the Cape early this century. For example, an interviewee, L.G., stated:

Twenty pounds from Bombay to Durban, three pounds for food, it took 21 days from India to Durban, and from Durban to Cape Town, Union Castle Line,

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<sup>3</sup> Meer, F: Portrait of Indian South Africans (1969); Meer, Y.S.: Documents of Indentured Labour: Natal 1851-1917 (n.d.); Beall, J: 'Unwanted Guests: Indian Women in the context of Indentured Immigration to Natal' (1984); Brain, J.B. and P: 'The Health of Indentured Indian Migrants to Natal, 1860-1911' (1982); Ibid: 'Nostalgia and Alligator Bites - Morbidity and Mortality Among Indian Migrants to Natal 1884-1911' (1985).

<sup>4</sup> In her dissertation entitled 'The Impact of Race Legislation on Kinship and Identity amongst Indian Muslims in Cape Town' (1980) R.A.Hill writes that the 'new passenger Indians interested in trading...tended to choose to immigrate directly to other parts of S.A. to avoid over-competition in Natal...none of the first generation migrated from Natal; they all came to the Cape directly from India', p. 29.

used to take five days, five pounds with food included ... that time.<sup>5</sup>

Another informant, M.V., recalled that, when he came to Cape Town, the passage cost about eighteen pounds single and that he travelled by train from Durban to Cape Town.<sup>6</sup>

A newspaper report entitled 'The Asiatic in South Africa' typically commented on the arrival of immigrants: 'whereas, overwhelmingly, proportions of those with the longest periods of residence resided in Natal, the more recent arrivals were found mainly in the Transvaal and in the Cape'.<sup>7</sup> It is with this latter group that this dissertation is particularly concerned, because Cape Indians are largely descendants of merchant forbears. This is not least because the Cape Colony's restrictive immigration legislation at the turn of the century excluded contract labourers from settling there. Passengers, or free immigrants, entered the Cape Colony under the ordinary immigration laws and suffered few restrictions prior to 1902. Indentured workers, on the other hand, were governed by a body of legislation under the auspices of the Natal Protector of Immigrants. Successive government censuses enumerate the Asiatic population in the various provinces, as set out in the table overleaf. These figures should, however, be treated with caution.

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<sup>5</sup> L.G., interviewed by P.V. on 8/8/1989, is a 78 year-old ex-shoe repairer formerly of District Six.

<sup>6</sup> M.V., interviewed by P.V. on 9/8/1989, is a 70 year-old owner of a general dealer's establishment.

<sup>7</sup> Cape Times, 30 December 1924.

CAPE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: TABLE 1

YEAR	NATAL	CAPE	TVL	O.F.S
1891	41 142	1700	-----	-----
1904	100 918	10 712	10 948	253
1911	133 419	7 564	11 004	107
1921	141 600	7 388	14 503	103
1936	183 661	10 508	25 493	29
1946	23 2317	15 174	37 758	11
1951	299 491	17 818	49 342	13
1960	394 854	18 477	63 787	7
1970	514 810	21 617	80 563	5

According to Ginwala,<sup>8</sup> a number of free Indians were drawn from urban upper middle-classes in India, although the majority were peasants 'who were unable to maintain their traditional place in the Indian economy...and had been impoverished by heavy taxation, had lost land or access to land through debt and growing fragmentation and were thus forced to look for new opportunities and enterprises'. Unlike indentured workers, passenger immigrants followed a particular pattern, popularly called chain immigration, in which family and village networks often secured jobs and accommodation for the new arrivals, thus providing the emotional support that saw many through the initial period of adjustment.

Perhaps the most important difference between the indentured workers and free passengers lay in their perception of their class position. Whereas the indentured Indian was a part of the working class, free passenger Indians saw themselves as a commercial bourgeoisie. The latter's perception was very much the result of their structured position in India where caste, language and religious stratification conditioned the perception of one's position in society. Although many of

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<sup>8</sup> Ginwala, F.N.: 'Class, Consciousness and Control: The Indian South Africans 1860-1946' (1974), p. 96.

the free immigrants were themselves marginalised and impoverished peasants, they constituted a social stratum effectively distinguished from other orders of Indian society. While the indentured were economically on a par with them, they had the added burden of being for the most part members of the lower caste.

The caste system often exacerbated the plight of many peasants. What the system provided for was the permanent ordering of groups in society.<sup>9</sup> People were bound to take up those categories of work that were allowed by hereditary practice, but such practices were not always adhered to on their leaving India because they took up whatever positions presented themselves.

The rigid character of caste hierarchy left little room for mobility, either through education, training or sheer hard work, save in a few exceptional cases. Some protagonists of the caste system, for example Louis Dumont, have accused critics of the system - Kingsley Davis among others - of being sociocentric, of 'perceiving and judging from the vantage point of one's [their] own society and that, in contrast to the competitive Western style, which emphasised individual ambition, the caste system involves a "holism", an orientation towards the welfare of all. Certainly, the caste do not receive equal rewards, because all do not contribute equally, as judged by the underlying values of the caste system. However, although all castes are not regarded as equal, all are integrated into the system. By Hindu ideals, all are cared for as the system exists for the benefit of all'.<sup>10</sup> For lower castes, in particular - that is, those which made up the bulk of indentured workers - the

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<sup>9</sup> Cox, O.C.: Caste, Class and Race (1948), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Kolenda, P.: Caste in Contemporary India: Beyond Organic Solidarity (1978), p.3.

trade allocated to them seldom yielded sufficient income for a comfortable life. For most people of 'inferior caste', there was neither the possibility of escaping the stigma of caste nor any opportunity for upward mobility. One solution was to emigrate, in the hope that in seeking 'new beginnings' they would be assured of a more comfortable life in a new country.

Pahad writes that, until the experience of uniform legislation after 1900, the two streams of Indian immigrants had very little in common, except for the epithet Indian, as a result of the economic, religious, cultural and linguistic differences which characterised the Indian population.<sup>11</sup> In large measure, this forms the background to early Indian settlement in South Africa. Historically, the whole idea of a homogenous community cries out for critical attention, as fundamental cleavages have divided this group of people. The ensuing discussion will attempt to prove that premising studies of Indians on the concept of community is highly problematic.

#### IMMIGRATION TO THE CAPE

In many respects, early immigration to the Cape differed from that in both Natal and the Transvaal. Furthermore, the Orange Free State had prohibited Asiatic settlement for residence and trade since 1891. Those Indians resident in the Orange Free State prior to the passing of its Statute Law of 1891 were deported, without any compensation for the expropriation of their property or businesses. Indian settlers in the Cape were perhaps less heterogenous than in either the Transvaal or Natal, because most were passengers who had come in response to the retail opportunities available. Also important in attempting to explain the

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<sup>11</sup> Pahad, E.: 'The Development of Indian Political Movements in South Africa, 1924-1946' (1972), p. 16.

particular class of immigrant to the Cape was the effect of local legislation which was quite specific in its application. These restrictive requirements acted as a deterrent, because the ex-indentured were often unable to meet the conditions of entry stipulated in the Immigration Acts of 1902 and 1906. It is interesting to note that Cape legislators mooted the possibility of introducing Indian indentured labour between 1874 and 1879, presumably because of the success of the Natal example. The colonial government opposed the scheme mainly because 'the systematic inspection demanded by the Indian government would be disliked at the Cape where people were inclined to manage their own affairs'.<sup>12</sup>

Some early insights into local Indian settlement can be gleaned from the proceedings of the Select Committee on Asiatic Grievances, which was appointed in 1908 in response to Indian agitation. Certain leading representatives of the Indian community were interviewed before the Committee, notably Ebrahim Norodien, a representative of the South African Indian Association, who vented the grievances of the Indians against immigration restrictions. In reply to questions pertaining to Indian settlement, he argued that some Indians had been in the Cape for substantial periods of up to 20 years. He himself had been in the Cape for 14 years and already owned 20 stores.<sup>13</sup>

The Worcester Advertiser<sup>14</sup> made reference to a large 'influx' of Indians into the town in the mid-1890s, charging

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<sup>12</sup> Bradlow, E.: 'The Cape Community during the period of responsible Government' in Pachai, B. (ed.): South African Indians: The Evolution of a Minority (1979), p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Worcester Advertiser, 5 January 1895.

them with 'swamping' white shopkeepers and trading stores.<sup>15</sup> The Cape Times also made oblique reference to the palpable reality of Indian settlement in an article on the death of Ganie Parker in 1921. Parker had been in the Colony for some 30 years, which further suggests that Indian immigrants had been finding their way to the Cape long before 1900. Bradlow<sup>16</sup> writes that Asians were enumerated separately for the first time in 1891 and that Indians numbered approximately 1452 persons, 915 of whom lived in Kimberley, with the remaining 537 scattered over the rest of the Cape Colony. The 1899 census data then detailed settlements in the different areas of the Colony, with Indians in Cape Town and its environs numbering approximately 600 persons. Although such data is valuable, a certain amount of caution should be exercised in its interpretation because illicit or prohibited immigrants and residents absent from the Colony were often not enumerated in the census data for a particular year.

An interview with N.E.<sup>17</sup> revealed the following about early Indian settlement in the Cape:

As a historical fact, let me tell you about Indians who fought here during the Anglo-Boer War, with the British against the Boers. The Government granted Indian soldiers or troops who fought alongside the British in the Anglo Boer War the right to stay...they stayed here but it happened that many of them found this a land of honey and they were so impressed with the country and applied to the immigration department to bring their families over. The Imperial Government, in consultation with the South African Government,

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<sup>15</sup> Vienings, T.: 'Stratification and Proletarianisation: The Rural Political Economy of the Worcester District, 1870-1910' (1985), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Bradlow, E.: 'The Cape Community During the Period of Responsible Government' (1979), p. 135

<sup>17</sup> N.E. interviewed by Z.D. on 20/2/1990 is an ex-school teacher and was also a District Six community leader.

agreed to their request.

Interviews with older male informants also proved useful as most could recall approximate dates of entry of parents, especially of their fathers. Thus M.V.<sup>18</sup> inferred that his father was one of the earlier late-nineteenth century immigrants to the Cape, adding 'I think at the same time all the old people came to South Africa'. Another informant, L.G.<sup>19</sup>, who had come to South Africa himself in 1922, recalled that his father had already been in the Cape by 1922, and that his father had had an uncle there, which actually prompted his nephew to immigrate to South Africa. E.K.<sup>20</sup> remembers that his father was in the Cape at the age of twelve and that he had 'talked about something like 1908; he came to help his brother here who had a shop at the corner of Van der Leer and Gore Streets, right apposite the Castle'. A rather unusual case was that of a female respondent, F.O.<sup>21</sup>, whose parents had come to South Africa together at the turn of the century. It was unusual because men were mostly the first to emigrate from their towns and villages, and only once established, invariably in trading, did they return to India to fetch their young sons and, even later, their wives. Consider the classic case of L.G. whose father had come to Cape Town in 1902. He himself had emigrated in 1922 but his mother had remained in India. In his own words, 'what used to happen that time, people here they leave their families at home so every few years they used to go home'. M.V. recalls that, at the age of eight years, he had arrived with his mother but that his father

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<sup>18</sup> M.V. interviewed on 9/8/1989.

<sup>19</sup> L.G. interviewed on 8/8/1989.

<sup>20</sup> E.K., interviewed by Z.D. on 1/3/1990, is an ex-shopkeeper

<sup>21</sup> F.O., interviewed by Z.D. on 5/4/1989, is a housewife who was also one of the last people to be moved out of District Six.

had already been resident in the Cape Colony for over a decade.

In the case of the female respondent F.O.<sup>22</sup>, her parents had been orphaned and there would have been no extended family to take care of her mother, even if she had desired to remain behind in India while her husband established himself at the Cape. This throws useful light on the significance of family structures in determining the social framework of immigration priorities for women. Children, especially sons, were left behind to be nurtured by mothers until they were old enough to join their families in the new country, where they were expected to help in businesses. L.G.'s<sup>23</sup> story about the painful parting from his mother is particularly poignant:

When I came to this country, I was only nine years old, the day I left Bombay...mother sitting there, father here. That night she gave me a sign on the boat, the sign she gave me I still remember. When I came with your grandfather [referring to the interviewer's grandfather], I used to sleep, I had the habit of putting my leg on my mother, you know what a child is, nine years old, so my mother gave me two cushions, one for my head and one for if I feel like putting my leg over. Someone else is lying there, so I had to use that other cushion to put my leg on. So what happened, your grandfather's father gave my cushion to your grandfather. He reckoned I don't need the two. He doesn't know the reason for the second one. You get the point. Then my mother gave some money for me to spend. In this ship that twenty-one days is boring so they play cards to pass time so I ask your grandfather's father I want to buy cards so he reckon that is gambling stuff, no good for children. His point was right, but I reckon that my mother gave me the money for my pleasure, why he refuse. That time I was young.

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<sup>22</sup> ibid.

<sup>23</sup> L.G. interviewed 8/8/1989.

L.G. was also one of the few oral informants who vividly recalled events of the period of early immigration. In his own words:

Seeing that I didn't have my mother here, B.C. didn't have his mother here, so weekends, some weekends I use to go to his place, stay there for the weekend, some weekends they use to come to us, seeing that the mother is not here, seeing the boys are alone with their father so we used to that sort of contact. When I came from India I couldn't talk English, so six month I had to lay off and then I started school at York Road, Salt River that Seventh Day Adventist Church was running a private school. My father's workman belonged to that church so I got in there and I still remember my teacher's name, it was Mr Julius. Then, couple years back he passed away, I still went to his funeral, still bachelor, he died a bachelor. My father's workman is still alive, he's over 90. He's a coloured. He still praises my father because when I came here in 1922 he was 16 years old and was living with my father and whatever my father told him to do, he took him as a father. He kept my mother and father's photo in his pocket.

The testimony of other informants, too, was enlightening about the lives of early settlers. M.V.<sup>24</sup> commented on the experience of his family:

My parents lived about quarter miles away from other Indians when he came to Cape Town. That helped, especially my mother, you know, they couldn't speak English and how they lived, I mean it's something that everyone should know how they lived here. I heard some stories that if they wanted to buy some groceries or so they had to make signs. When we came that time there were no tables and chairs, we had to sit on a box and eat.

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<sup>24</sup> M.V. interviewed 9/8/1989.

A younger informant, T.P.<sup>25</sup>, recalled:

My father used to stay in one double-storey house in District Six. They were all singles. They didn't have their wives here. They used to cook themselves. I remember they used to tell me that.

#### LEGAL CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION

No discussion of immigration would be complete without a fairly detailed look at the vexatious Immigration Act of 1902, amended by the Immigration Act of 1906. As mentioned previously, no restriction on immigration into the Cape had been enforced prior to the passing of the 1902 immigration legislation. This Act was passed after the South African War, when the country was in the throes of an economic depression and restrictions on new immigrants were being enforced. The Act stipulated specific conditions of entry to the Cape. Two conditions in particular were, first of all, Section 2(a), which concerned an education test for immigrants. When asked to do so by any duly authorised officer, an applicant should not, through deficient education, be unable to write his name and sign in the characters of any European language; secondly, Section 2(b) of the same Act required proof of visible means of support, such as 'family or friends resident in the Cape to aid an immigrant by providing him with money to exhibit to the immigration officer as evidence of visible means of support, or that he can be furnished with a contractual engagement'.<sup>26</sup> These entry requirements were more effective in keeping women out of the Colony than men, because the

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<sup>25</sup> T.P. interviewed by PV on 13/8/1989 is a shopkeeper in Cape Town but had spent all his life in District Six up to the passing of the Group Areas Act.

<sup>26</sup> Bickford-Smith, V.: 'The Impact of European and Asian Immigration on Cape Town, 1880-1910' (1987).

latter controlled patriarchal structures and were better able to learn the basics to gain entry. Once settled in the Colony, they were able to communicate with men. The foregoing quote referred specifically to Jewish immigrants, but Indian immigration to the Cape followed much the same pattern, as did that of Greeks.<sup>27</sup> Yet a crucially important difference between Indian and Jewish immigration, for example, was the fact that Yiddish (through the efforts of City Councillor Morris Alexander) became recognised as a European language, while Indians, on the other hand, had a more difficult task trying to master sufficient English to be eligible for entry to the Colony. These two sections discussed above were designed to restrict new immigrants, not to penalise those already domiciled in South Africa. According to one informant, many of the Natal ex-indentured moved to Kimberley, East London, Queenstown and to the areas of the Eastern Cape before moving to Cape Town where, for the most part, they joined the ranks of the working class, especially in the service industry.<sup>28</sup> There were also others who settled in the Cape, but who went back to India on periodic sojourns, mainly to visit wives, parents and children, and who were still eligible for open entry on return, however long they had been away.

It was partly to end this aforementioned practice that the Immigration Act of 1906 was introduced, amending certain clauses of the 1902 Act. Section 5(g) referred directly to the desirable regulation of Asiatics 'who, having, when lawfully resident within the colony, obtained from the

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<sup>27</sup> A wealth of literature exists on Jewish immigration, much of which is housed in the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, UCT. Also see Feldman, B.I.: 'Social Life of Cape Town Jewry, 1904-1914, with special reference to the Eastern European Immigrant Community', B.A. (Hons), UCT, 1984.

<sup>28</sup> E.C., interviewed by Z.D, 5/5/1989, a former waiter and hotel clerk, was also one of the last persons to move out of District Six.

Master a permit issued under such regulation as shall be proclaimed thereof by the governor, authorising him to temporarily absent himself from the colony, returns in accordance with the terms and conditions of such permit.<sup>29</sup> Failure to obtain a permit resulted in a person being regarded as a prohibited immigrant and re-entry into the Colony was denied. Furthermore, a permit was required for each occasion an Indian intended to leave the Colony, and the applicant had to pay one pound; even babies were required to have permits issued for the same sum. The permit, which was previously valid for one year only, was extended to three years. The Immigration Act of 1906, Bradlow writes, 'reflected both the pre-industrial agricultural character of a colony losing its leading position in South Africa and the widespread economic depression in South Africa during which the law had been framed. Furthermore, in a period of economic stagnation, there was a limited capacity to absorb new settlers.'<sup>30</sup>

The question as to what was meant by domicile was a particularly irksome issue as was evident from the proceedings of the Select Committee of 1908. The Committee referred to was the Cape of Good Hope Select Committee on Asiatic Grievances, which was appointed in August 1908. Its chief function was to investigate the grievances of Indians in the Cape Colony regarding the question of domicile as well as to investigate the effects of the Immigration Act of 1906 and the General Dealers Act of 1906. In reply to a question posed by the chairman, E. Powell, concerning grievances as to domicile, Ebrahim Norodien replied:

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<sup>29</sup> Brand, C: 'Solidarity Patterns in a Minority Group: A Study of the Indian Community of the Cape Pensinsula' (1966).

<sup>30</sup> Bradlow, E.: 'Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948: Policies and Attitudes' (1978).

What domicile is, is not defined when Indians go to the Immigration Department; they are at one time told that domiciled means those who are married here, at another time they are told that it is one who has property here or who has lived here for several years. We do not know what is the definition of domiciled.<sup>31</sup>

Natal law, unlike that of the Cape, provided domicile certificates which were always valid and which, moreover, granted domicile after a period of three years' residence in the Colony. In order to circumvent problems concerning domicile or even initial entry into the Cape, many resorted to bribery. It is alleged that about 90% of Indians in the Cape were allowed in by paying between five and thirty-six pounds each. Furthermore, Norodien said that Indian agents appointed by the Immigration Department extorted money from people by employing the following tactic: 'When the steamer comes in, they delay the landing of these people a day or half a day and this man comes along and says, "If you will give me so much, I will get him landed"'. Norodien himself had employed a prohibited immigrant who had come to the Cape posing as a priest and gained entry after paying Cader, an agent, ten pounds, even though he was unable to read or write a European language, nor did he have visible means of support.<sup>32</sup>

Another witness, Samodien Cassimali, agreed with Norodien's evidence and added that he could produce evidence to the effect that he had applied 'for people to come in who were here before and had a right to be here and I was refused a permit while the very same men came in through Cader'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> ibid, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> ibid, p. 14.

The name of this particular agent, Abdol Cader, also mentioned by an informant as being in charge of the Immigration Department, was to recur during the proceedings of the Select Committee of 1908 and also in a court case in 1916, when he, as an official of the Immigration Department was tried on counts of bribery, corruption and fraud. It was alleged that Cader had been scheming with members of the Immigration Department, paying them a large portion of the extorted fee. In his own defence before the Select Committee of 1908, Cader emphatically denied any charges of bribery and extortion and only admitted to accepting money in his capacity as agent. When pressed to divulge details of his financial affairs, in particular his business books, he confessed to having written off any moneys received from people requiring his services as an agent, but insisted on having kept an account of the money received for his services as an interpreter of the Supreme Court and as a general importer. Moreover, he emphasised his 27-year period of residence in the Colony and his social standing in the community, in particular as secretary of the British Indian League.

Cader's name was to recur in an interview conducted with N.E.<sup>34</sup>, a prominent participant in District Six community policies:

Many Indian people came here, many of them, but strangely many of the records also mysteriously disappeared, and they came in great numbers and they swelled the numbers of the trading population in District Six and elsewhere and so you had what we call the cornershop babbie...so therefore you find especially the Kokenie population dominated the business sector. You see Abdol Cader was also a Kokenie and if you put two and two together then you see what happens.

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<sup>34</sup> N.E. interviewed 20/2/90.

In February 1916, Van Oudshoorn, chief clerk in the Cape Immigration Department was tried for fraud.<sup>35</sup> He was acquitted on all charges, but he implicated certain Indian agents (including Cader, who, he said, had been relied upon by the Department but who had betrayed trust.<sup>36</sup> The defence claimed that it was impossible to convict Van Oudshoorn because 60 Indians who had testified against him had been proved by the Court to be liars and perjurers. Cader himself was conveniently transferred to Pretoria before the trial and was not present to testify in his own defence or against any official of the Immigration Department lest he were to divulge the extent of the bribery and corruption which clearly pervaded that agency.

The question as to what constituted domicile remained vague, and officials at the Immigration Department were said to routinely 'fix' their own interpretation as to what entitled one to domicile in the Colony.

#### THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION

The Government's growing concern with halting the entry of Asiatic immigrants was applied Unionwide in 1913, and was embodied in the Immigrants' Regulation Act no. 22 which tightened up on inter-provincial movement by requiring a special permit for such movement.<sup>37</sup> This piece of

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<sup>35</sup> The two main charges against him were that he had fraudulently induced prohibited immigrants to enter the Union, and that he had corruptly received sums of money contrary to the provisions of the Corruption Act.

<sup>36</sup> Cape Times, 12 February 1916.

<sup>37</sup> The question of free and unrestricted inter-provincial movement was to dog Indian politics. From time to time, minor changes were introduced. Agitation by Indians in Natal in particular had begun from the 1910s, and their reasons for wishing to settle in the Cape were basically of an economic nature. All barriers were removed in 1975, but the Orange Free State was to remain closed for Indian

legislation was partly enacted due to India's refusal to allow the further shipment of indentured workers to South Africa from 1911, and the latter country's reluctance to accept non-indentured settlers. More far-reaching was that aspect of the ordinance which concerned Indians in the Cape, for it even forbade the ownership or lease of land by prohibited or illicit immigrants. Little evidence exists as to the reaction of Indians in the Cape, but in the Transvaal and Natal, this clause - especially the clause regulating inter-provincial movement - led to a march in 1913. Tamil women were instrumental in organising strike action by Indian men on the mines in the Transvaal and Northern Natal, and a commission was immediately appointed to look into Indian grievances.<sup>38</sup>

Women were directly affected because they, too, suffered economic deprivation if forced to remain in Natal, because most of the Tamil women worked as domestics and hawkers and the labour market in Natal was fast becoming saturated.<sup>39</sup> At the risk of generalising, one could say that Indian activity at the Cape tended to be accommodationist rather than

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residence and trade until the early 1980s.

<sup>38</sup> Hill, R.A. : 'The Impact of Race Legislation on Kinship and Identity amongst Indian Muslims in Cape Town' (1980), p. 188.

<sup>39</sup> Indian women came to be included in the indentured labour system due to a regulation stipulation by the Government of India. For every 100 men that were indentured, 40 women were to leave for Natal as well. Women were used extensively as labourers for lighter tasks, but for as many hours as men. Furthermore, they were paid half the wage of male workers and received half of their rations. Even on completion of periods of indentureship, the restriction on skill acquisition for Indians in general but for women in particular (due to a combination of patriarchy and racism, together with the lack of educational opportunities) curbed chances of alternative forms of employment, and many men and women worked as market gardeners, hawkers and domestics. For a detailed analysis of women and the system of indentureship, see Beall, 'Unwanted Guests'.

confrontationist. Relative Indian quiescence at the Cape may well have resulted from the fact that the inhabitants were not subject to as many discriminatory practices as were Indians in the Transvaal and Natal. Furthermore, the relatively small Indian population at the Cape enjoyed a more privileged political position in relation to the franchise as well as being eligible for municipal election office. Such factors may have contributed to the lack of initiative on the part of local Indians to involve themselves forcefully in countrywide campaigns. As a mostly commercial class, Cape Indians attached themselves to the discourses of an older Cape liberalism. At a meeting in the 1920s, Dr A.H. Gool, president of the Cape British Indian League, stressed that,

it is only proper that this important session of our Congress should take place in Cape Town, the Mother City of South Africa and, to a certain extent, still the home of liberty and just treatment of the non-Europeans. Here in the Cape, the Europeans still hold sacred the great traditions of the British people and fair play to the coloured man - and I trust will never bow their heads in shameless submission to the reactionary and un-Christian doctrine of the North.<sup>40</sup>

The following extract from the same speech bears testimony to the brand of accommodationist politics advocated by Gool:

This, the unofficial parliament of Indians in South Africa, will serve to voice in a moderate and sober manner, the grievances of our people who are left without vote and power in this land of their birth and adoption. We have a just cause and we shall endeavour not to jeopardise our position by violent and revolutionary methods which can only heighten the tension and stimulate the

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<sup>40</sup> South African Indian Congress Emergency Conference, Durban, 1926.

prejudice against us.<sup>41</sup>

However, such moderate and sober constitutional methods did little to improve the positions of Indians, and a year after Gool's speech the Immigration and Indian Relief Act No. 37 was passed. The essence of this legislation, which was passed due to the Round Table Conference in 1927 between the governments of India and South Africa, concerned the ameliorative condonation scheme and domicile rights as well as the question of the repatriation of Indians. Emerging from the conference, the Indian Agent General<sup>42</sup> urged the South African Indian Congress to co-operate with the government, which it unanimously agreed to do. Important to note at this particular juncture is the merchant interest represented in the SAIC. The issue of repatriation was agreed upon because this interest group perceived a change of heart on the part of the South African government if fewer and 'better-class' Indians were permitted to remain and hence initiate a process of upliftment of the remaining Indians.

Any analysis of Indian merchant politics relies heavily on Swan's works - that is, on both 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics 1891-1949' as well as the book Gandhi - the South African Experience. What emerges is that levels of

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<sup>41</sup> The South African Indian Congress was formed after Union, in what was an attempt to create a more national political organisation. In 1912, the Cape British Indian Union decided to sponsor a South African Indian Conference in Cape Town to coincide with the opening of parliament, but this initiative failed, and a national conference was to meet in February 1919. See Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control', p. 350.

<sup>42</sup> Agents General were appointed between 1927 and 1946 to provide a diplomatic link between South Africa and India. For the most part, they proved to be ineffective, save in the cultural sphere. Their status as British employees was to be a further restraining factor.

stratification encompassed both the religious and economic spheres. Merchants were drawn largely from the Gujarati Hindu and Muslim communities who were mainly from North and West India; whereas what Swan calls the underclasses were mainly Tamil-speakers from South India, especially from the Madras Province. The latter were dark-skinned, which in itself constituted part of the barrier between the commercial classes and this group which formed the bulk of the labouring classes.<sup>43</sup>

A furore which erupted over the issue of condonation was wholly unexpected from this quiescent group of Indians in the Cape. The Cape Times became much preoccupied in reporting on rival bodies in the Cape vying for support of the Indian constituency over the issue of condonation. Under the condonation scheme, the government offered to pardon those Indians who had by some means or other entered the Union prior to July 1924. Pardon was to take the form of the issue of protection certificates which allowed that individual to reside in the country, but not other members of his or her family. The authorities, under the guise of benevolence, assured the Indian population that the only reason for this scheme was entirely administrative and, furthermore, that it also 'freed the condoned from the constant fear of exposure of an old offence - a fear upon which a certain type of Indian does not scruple to make blackmailing pay'.<sup>44</sup>

The Cape British Indian Council (hereafter CBIC), which did not foresee opposition on this issue, became involved in a war of words with the Cape Indian Vigilance Committee, which was formed around the issue of condonation. At a meeting in

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<sup>43</sup> Swan, M.: Gandhi - The South African Experience (1985), p. 192.

<sup>44</sup> Cape Times, 12 June 1929.

the National Theatre in Cape Town in February 1928, the latter questioned the mandate of the Cape British Indian Council to act on behalf of the Indian population in the Cape.

The chairman of the Vigilance Committee, H. Mia, condemned the actions of the SAIC in a strongly worded statement, saying: 'The Congress has no right whatsoever to act on our behalf, and we take the strongest exception to their underhanded ways.' In his reaction to the CBIC (which was a member of the SAIC), Mia called for the resignation of its officials who, by reason of its actions, had forfeited any support they had once commanded, and he also questioned the failure of this body to produce statements pertaining to its finances.<sup>45</sup>

On the same day, the Cape Argus published an equally strongly worded statement by the CBIC in which it deprecated the attitude of the so-called Cape Indian Vigilance Committee in misleading the Indian community of Cape Town in regard to the condonation of illegal entrance into the Union, and warned everyone not to take heed of the exhortations of the above Committee. In an interview with the opposition evening daily <sup>46</sup>, the secretary of the CBIC, Ahmed Ismail, reassured its mostly white readership that 'the mass of the Indian opinion in this country is certainly in favour of the condonation scheme; in regard to those in the past who had entered illicitly...we feel that we have no moral or legal rights to claim consideration for people who have broken the laws of the land in entering the country'. Furthermore, Ismail added, those Indians in the Cape who had applied for protection certificates were patiently awaiting official sanction to be allowed to remain in the country.

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<sup>45</sup> Cape Times, 28 February 1928.

<sup>46</sup> Cape Argus, 13 June 1928.

The reason for Ismail's lack of sympathy for these illegal entrants is that deportation did not apply to the Muslim and Gujarati Hindu merchant community, but would largely affect members of the ex-indentured Tamil working class, who were concentrated in the catering trade. Most of the latter had moved from Natal to the Cape because of the limited economic opportunities in the former. This clearly demonstrates that, although many entry restrictions were racially determined, the response of Ismail and the CBIC was determined primarily by the specific economic interests of this sector of Indians and not by ethnic bonds.

At this stage in Cape Indian political history, Ismail could clearly not claim to have been speaking on behalf of the entire Indian population, because the Cape Indian Vigilance Committee was still agitating and had contemplated convening a mass meeting of Indians during September 1928 to embark on a definite line of action. The writer of this report went so far as to cast doubts on the actions of the Vigilance Committee and moreover discounted its opposition as being rooted in personal differences at the leadership level, which 'amounted to little more than manoeuvring for position by some malcontents who coveted the seats of authority in the local Indian social and political world'.<sup>47</sup>

Opposition to the CBIC did not stop with the Vigilance Committee, but a new organisation composed of members of various constituencies from as far afield as Vryburg and Kimberley gathered in the Fidelity Hall, Primrose Street, Cape Town, in September 1928 to discuss the specific effects of the condonation scheme on Indians in the Cape. Calling itself the Cape Indian Conference, it vented a tirade of criticism against the SAIC and CBIC, which were considered to represent little more than a rubber stamp of the

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<sup>47</sup> Cape Times, 31 August 1928.

government.<sup>48</sup> Evident from the proceedings of the Conference was a particular concern with guarding the privileges that Cape Indians possessed. For example, B. Desai (Cape Town Central) articulated his concern over the vote because, by accepting the condonation scheme, a voter would be temporarily disenfranchised as a voter in the Cape by a certificate of exemption. The conference resolved, among other things, that:

1. The SAIC had failed to serve the purpose for which it was originally formed;
2. The SAIC accepted the condonation scheme introduced by the Minister of the Interior - a scheme which this conference had unanimously rejected without first consulting and obtaining the sanction of the Indians in the Cape Province.

Criticism was also levelled at other pieces of legislation, for instance The Wage Act; The Liquor Act; The Nationality Act; The Old Age Pensions Act; The Colour Bar Act - all of which discriminated against Indians, but were not discussed between the Agent General, Strinivasa Sastri, and the South African Government. Moreover, a member of the conference implied that the SAIC had misled the Agent General in view of the conciliatory attitude which Sastri displayed in negotiations with the government.

Again, Ismail resorted to the correspondence columns of the daily papers to express his grievances against any opposition.<sup>49</sup> Concerned as he was with pacifying non-Indian

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<sup>48</sup> Cape Times, 13 September 1928.

<sup>49</sup> Ahmed Ismail owned and published his own weekly, The Cape Indian, which enjoyed a brief lifespan between 1922 and 1924. It was supported mainly by Muslim merchant interests in the Cape. Ismail was also elected to the Cape Town City

sympathisers, he denounced the members of the Cape Indian Conference as a very small minority of malcontents who were out to cause suspicion and strife among Indians. In his words,

the Cape British Indian Council, SAIC, and other bodies which are in a large majority have the utmost confidence in the assurance of the Minister of Interior; Mr Sastri; and the advice of Mr Patrick Duncan (Governor General of the Cape), against that of the Conference and have and will do all we can to gain the confidence of the people of the country and bring nothing but credit upon ourselves in the land of our adoption.<sup>50</sup>

At the Cape Indian Conference, delegates voted to form themselves into an organisation called the Indian National Association of the Cape Province. Very little affirmative action was taken by this or other organisations, especially the Vigilance Committee, except to urge Indians to oppose condonation on the grounds that it was intended to 'weed' the Indian from the Colony.<sup>51</sup> An interesting question for the history of the Cape Indian Vigilance Committee and the Indian National Association of the Cape Province was why the two bodies never merged, thereby strengthening opposition to the CBIC. Attempts to glean information about this issue from either newspapers or oral sources have proved unsuccessful.

The question of condonation died a quiet death, with prohibited immigrants being forced to leave the Colony. The CBIC remained the official representatives of the Cape

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Council in 1940 by virtue of Cape Ordinance 22 of 1935 which reaffirmed legislation granting eligibility to all adult men to sit as equal members of the City Council - however, with a proviso relating to property ownership and occupation.

<sup>50</sup> Cape Times, 14 September 1928.

<sup>51</sup> Cape Times, 11 June 1929.

Indian population through the interwar period. Personal and ideological dissension was to persist up to 1945-1946, when the CBIC ceased to be the official representative of the SAIC because the latter organisation was then taken over by the so-called 'Young Radicals' - Dadoo, Meer, Naicker and, to a lesser extent, by Sundra Pillay of Cape Town - who strove to introduce an ideological shift in Indian political thinking. Such contested political thinking was strongly bound up with assertions of community identity.

## CHAPTER TWO

## INDIAN ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE WESTERN CAPE

This chapter is concerned with an analysis of Indian economic life in the Western Cape. Up to the declaration and implementation of the Group Areas Act, Indians were concentrated in the distributive section, especially as owners of small amounts of capital, and trading mostly in working-class areas of the Peninsula, or as hawkers of fruit and vegetables on the Grand Parade in Cape Town. Indians engaged in wage labour other than in the retail sector were few in number and, from the limited primary sources available, it is evident that these Indians, who were mainly ex-indentured Tamils, were concentrated in the hotel and catering trades. The conclusion of this chapter analyses the position of these workers in the hotel industry.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part analyses legislation affecting economic participation of Indians, focusing on the General Dealers Act of 1906 and on the Select Committee Report on Asiatic Grievances of 1908. It furthermore examines some of the attempts made to curb Indian economic activity. The second part examines the work and ideology of small shopkeepers in relation to their mainly working-class customers. This section relies heavily on the testimonies of oral informants, mainly due to the paucity of documentation on Indian retailing in the Western Cape. The last part attempts to provide an analysis and explanation of the ethnic and occupational correspondences between particular immigrant groups. This part has drawn on studies of Cubans in Puerto Rico, Japanese in America, Indians in South and East Africa, as well as studies of Jews and Greeks, in Southern Africa, all of whom are characterised by the particular role they play as marginal trading people or as intermediary minorities. A conceptual

analysis of middleman minorities draws on the work of Blalock, Bonacich, Modell and Light.<sup>1</sup> Indians in the Western Cape fit this middleman minority model because they came to the Cape for the most part as traders from more deprived classes.

#### LEGAL CONTEXT OF INDIAN COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Prior to the declaration of the General Dealers Act of 1906, Indians in the Cape were relatively free and unrestricted in the commercial field. Most were either hawkers, peddlers, general dealers, shoe repairers or other small-scale independent business people. Economic opportunities dictated settlement patterns, and some Indians, like Jewish immigrants to the Cape, penetrated outlying rural areas to set up shop as general dealers or alternatively hawked or peddled goods from farm to farm. Insufficient information for this period impedes the reconstruction of early Indian economic life in the Western Cape, but one oral informant recalled hearing that some of the earliest Indian settlers in the Cape had worked as stable hands until they were able to accumulate the initial capital to set up business. Others came to the Colony with small amounts of money and were thus able to engage in trade on a small scale. The Indian presence in trade did not go wholly unnoticed and Mantzaris writes that "the first official fears of a continuous alien presence into the colony were reported to the Commission of Inquiry into Labour in the Cape Colony in 1893."<sup>2</sup> Indians, Chinese and later Russian Jews and Greeks became targets of the more established British traders who resented this alien invasion into an occupation they considered to be their

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<sup>1</sup> Also see the work of Duany, Benson, Bechhofer and Elliot, Nord and Hosgood listed in the Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Mantzaris, E.A.: *Class and Ethnicity: The Politics and Ideologies of the Greek Community in South Africa*. (1982), 98.

monopoly.

Certain avenues of employment, artisanry for example, were closed to Indians, mostly because of trade union exclusivity. By 1900, many crafts and other skilled occupations were regulated by colour-bar restrictions,<sup>3</sup> even for those Indians skilled in particular occupations. Artisanal employment was a far more difficult field to enter, but independent business was nevertheless that which was most aspired to. Most of the available data focuses attention on the period of the passing of the General Dealers Act of 1906, because Indians were then no longer able to obtain general dealers or hawkers licences freely. The passing of this Act, together with that of the Immigration Act of 1906, can clearly be attributed to the post-1904 depression. Bradlow, for example, writes that 'the small Indian trader was viewed as a formidable competitor and that the exacerbation of the poor white problem by the war led to a growing fear that those already declassé people would be further depressed.'<sup>4</sup> The colonial authorities in the Cape were forced to deal with 'the presence of large numbers of destitute white men and, although employment schemes were initiated, these proved unsuccessful. A certain amount of pressure was exerted on the government by the Social Democratic Federation, for example, which was an organisation composed of recent British immigrants who were determined to remind it of its responsibilities.'<sup>5</sup>

While the General Dealers Act was not explicitly anti-Asiatic, the effect was to limit aliens, which included

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<sup>3</sup> Goldin, I.: Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa (1987), p.6.

<sup>4</sup> Bradlow, E.: 'Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948', p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Hallet, R: 'The Hooligan Riots: Cape Town, August 1906' (1978), pp 6-7.

Jews, Greeks and Indians. The General Dealers Licence Bill was introduced in 1905 and desired to destroy the small trader. The British dominated Progressive Grocers Association "was the moving force behind the Bill and used the Progressive Party as its political front to have the Bill passed in the Legislative Assembly." Mantzaris writes that some of the factors that gave rise to this move by the Progressive Grocers Association included the depression, unemployment and overstocking by bigger merchants, who now attempted to capture the buying power of the working class.<sup>6</sup> The two sections that were effective in restricting "aliens" from obtaining licences were numbers five and six of the General Dealers Act of 1906. Section five required every applicant wishing to obtain a new general dealers or hawker's licence in any municipal area to apply to the municipal council. An application could be turned down if two-thirds of the city councillors opposed the application. Section six regulated applications for licences in village management board or divisional council areas outside of a municipality. Applicants had to petition the relevant authorities and, once again, if two-thirds were opposed, the application was rejected. Unsuccessful applicants had to wait for six months before reapplying for a licence. In itself, the above was not sufficient to bar Indians from obtaining licences but, when one considers that all the members of the council and boards were white, and that the village management boards boasted a number of shopkeepers with vested interests, it is clear that racial bias and economic hostility influenced the decisions of many board and council members. Witnesses before the Select Committee of 1908 emphatically stated that the composition of the councils and village management boards directly affected their chances in their attempts to obtain licences.

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<sup>6</sup>. Mantzaris, E.A.: Class and Ethnicity, 1982, p.106

Moreover, an article in The Cape Indian<sup>7</sup> commenting on the history of Indian traders in the Western Cape stated:

Our initial objection is that on these councils the numbers of traders who, themselves, hold licences to trade from the respective bodies on which they sit; knowing human nature as we do, applications for new licences in certain districts where the interests of those councillors lie as well as applications from certain classes of citizens do not receive the impartial consideration which might be meted out to all alike... We assert that this licensing machine (was) and is in wrong hands entirely and places a tyrannical weapon at the disposal of councils, which has been used to give expression to race antipathy... The granting of licences to trade must be remodelled and must be placed under the control of persons whose neutrality and sense of fairness is beyond question. Such a body, if it consisted of (say) three members, such as a magistrate and two non-traders, would meet the situation. Is it fair that men in the same line of business should adjudicate on these applications? Every judicial body must be above suspicion, and to think or to argue otherwise is to strike at the very foundation of enlightened opinion.

Other sections that restricted those already in possession of licences concerned the fixing of shop hours as well as the barring of Sunday trading. The power to decide what constituted reasonable shop hours was vested in those councils and boards, and any contravention of this regulation resulted in as severe a penalty as that imposed on a person conducting a business without a licence. The Act recommended that the hours of opening should not be earlier than five a.m. and that closing hours should not be earlier than eight p.m. or later than eleven p.m., if a particular village council or board did not set its own hours.

Hawkers, in particular, were adversely affected by the limitations set out in section 19 of the Act. Whereas,

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<sup>7</sup> Cape Indian, October 1922.

previously, hawkers had been entitled to trade throughout the Colony, licences issued after the passing of the Act prescribed certain areas in which hawkers could trade. Moreover, the cost of hawkers licences rose from one pound to three pounds, which caused great distress to those who derived their livelihood from a trade yielding only marginal profits, involving much labour as well as the travelling of great distances by push cart or, for the more fortunate, by horse and cart. Although it was not possible to obtain information on the monthly or yearly turnover of the average hawker in the Western Cape, Woods estimates that hawkers (and peddlers) in Natal in the early 1900s earned an average of eight shillings a day, but much of this sum went towards repayment for goods bought from large merchants.<sup>8</sup>

Response to the restrictions placed on hawkers took the form of a petition by certain Indian merchants to the Governor of the Cape, in the hope that Parliament would resolve the problem surrounding the issue of hawkers' licences. (The reasons for merchants responding on behalf of hawkers on the issue of licences is elaborated on later in this chapter.). Unfortunately, this office did not respond favourably and, in the late-1910s, the petitioners were notified that the responsibility in this matter of administration had been vested by an Act of Parliament in the local authority and that the ministers could not interfere with the exercise by the local representatives of the powers conferred on them under the Act in question. Between March 1907 and June 1908, there appears to be little evidence as to further action by either the Indian hawkers or the authorities, which was surprising considering the effects of the legislation on the former. By July 1908, an Indian lobby representing a wide spectrum of interest and calling itself The Indian Conference of the Cape Colony, convened a meeting at which

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<sup>8</sup> Woods, C.A.: The Indian Community of Natal: Their Economic Position (1945).

it was resolved that 'the governor be informed that although as legal subjects of the Empire, Indians are theoretically in the full enjoyment of all citizen rights in the Cape Colony, yet in view of certain legal restrictions imposed on them as a community they, with confidence, rely upon the powerful protection extended to them at all times by His Excellency'. It was further resolved that:

No restrictions whatsoever should be placed on Indian traders so long as they fulfil the conditions as to character, previous convictions, etc., and that should it be found impossible for Parliament to sanction the free and unrestricted issue of licences, then the power vested in the municipalities and other public bodies be abrogated and the right of issue of licences be placed in the hands of resident magistrates. In view of the vested interest of hawkers long resident in this colony, they should in the event of a denial of their needs, have a right of appeal to the Supreme Court in the same way as in the case of general dealers.<sup>9</sup>

The government's position had not altered and it reiterated that the question of trading licences was vested with the local authority. It furthermore pointed out that the Government was powerless to remedy the hardships of Indian general dealers and the even greater ones affecting the hawkers. The latter enjoyed even fewer avenues for the redress of their grievances. N.F. de Waal, the Colonial Secretary who received the deputation of Indians, sympathised with the plight of Indians in the Cape Colony, but expressed regret that 'owing to certain reasons - reasons of State - they had had to deal with the Indians as they had...the country had to protect itself from being overrun with that class, and to protect itself from the overwhelming influx, so that it had become necessary to

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<sup>9</sup> Cape Times, 7 July 1908.

legislate.<sup>10</sup>

Although the restrictive sections were not repealed, a Select Committee was appointed in 1908 to inquire into the Immigration Act as well as into the workings of the General Dealers Act. The racist character of the City Council members serving on the Committee, together with the evidence of white shopkeepers, permeates the findings of the Committee. Various representatives of Indian organisations testified before the Committee. One of them, Ebrahim Norodien, a member of the South African Indian Association, highlighted the difficulties encountered by Indians in obtaining licences to deal in the suburbs and emphatically stated that refusals were not so much a result of abstract economic forces but that they were related to the colour of the applicants. Moreover, licences were granted with less difficulty in Cape Town than in other municipalities. Norodien implied that this regional unevenness in the granting of licences swelled the numbers of traders in one particular area and resulted in overtrading. The witness also cited incidents where licences were refused because the applicants were Indians, for example in Piquetberg.<sup>11</sup> Norodien himself owned twenty stores and was exempt from the workings of the 1906 Act because, like a small number of other Indians, he had acquired general dealers licences before the passing of the Act and was therefore entitled to trade without making fresh application if he wished to acquire other stores. A single licence entitled these traders to own as many stores as they desired merely by registering a new business. The favouring of larger businessmen was probably a result of their being more established and stable financially, and there was less likelihood of this group becoming insolvent, whereas the

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<sup>10</sup> ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, pp. 6-14.

small trader conducting a business on a daily and weekly basis was faced with the real threat of bankruptcy.

Another witness, Gidvomat, a businessman and also treasurer of the British Indian League, was particularly indignant about the losses he incurred in hiring male apprentices from India for three years, only to have hawker's licences revoked, thus obliging him to support these apprentices for the stipulated period, even though they were unproductive from lack of work. Merchants like Gidvomat had a vested interest in having prohibitions on hawkers lifted because it was a necessary part of their own accumulation. Commenting on the restrictions imposed on hawkers, the Cape Times wrote that the first people to suffer were the merchants of Cape Town because these hawkers used to buy goods from them for hundreds of pounds and then sell these goods in areas where no shops existed, especially in outlying farming areas.<sup>12</sup> Merchants usually sold goods on credit to these hawkers, and they were effectively still the owners of their stock.

Fredrick Boose, an estate agent who represented a number of Indians in their attempts to obtain premises and also licences, testified before the Select Committee of 1908 that one of his clients was refused a licence by the Woodstock municipality on account of his being Indian. He furthermore added that 'it is a well-known fact that every application to the Cape Divisional Council for a licence by an Indian is refused because the applicant is an Indian. We have read from time to time that Mr Gibbs, who is a prominent man in business and a member of the Cape Divisional Council, has repeatedly jumped up at meetings of the Council and said, "No, we won't grant this licence because he is an Indian"'.<sup>13</sup> Boose also commented on the power that the Kalk

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<sup>12</sup> Cape Times, 7 July 1908.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 15.

Bay and Muizenberg Municipal Council members wielded because three of the five members were local tradesmen who could eliminate competition by refusing to grant licences. This begs the question whether racism was the primary motive and whether economic fear, in the face of Indian competition, was expressed in anti-Indian racial form .

Unlike hawkers, general dealers had recourse to the Supreme Court if they wished to contest the decisions of any licensing body, but often the time and, more importantly, the cost precluded many from making use of this avenue to obtain a satisfactory remedy. However, the records of the Trade Licensing Committee indicated that, in the case of persistent refusal of licences, some Indian traders employed legal counsel. One of these traders was Cassim Valli, who made frequent appeals through his counsel to the Committee. The records of the Committee do not indicate whether Valli sought redress through the Supreme Court. Although hawkers did not enjoy this remedial measure, many of them in the Mowbray municipal area, in particular, resorted to obtaining a census of approval from twenty local constituents to hand in with their applications, after which the relevant bodies granted the licences. It is impossible to ascertain why this practice was more common in Mowbray. Almost every Indian witness before the Committee stated that he would have preferred magistrates who were thought to be less biased arbitrators to consider licence applications. During the proceedings of the meeting, the white commercial sector, on the other hand, spoke out strongly in favour of power remaining vested with bodies prescribed by the Act, because these bodies had a better understanding of local conditions.

Dr Murray, a member of the Committee, ventured to speak on behalf of the white public when he rather arrogantly stated that refusals were motivated not only by the desire to eliminate competition but, more importantly, by the fact

that municipalities had to respect white voters' refusal to have these traders on account of their alleged unsanitary habits and general life style. Murray failed to elaborate on what exactly was meant by the general manner in which Indians lived. In defence of the Indian trader, Boose noted that 'the Indian of today is very different to the Indian before the Plague.'<sup>14</sup> 'He now lives in more sanitary buildings, he takes more care of himself, is more particular with regard to the care of his goods, more cleanly in his habits and there is no reason on these grounds why the licence should be refused.'<sup>15</sup> It is important to note at this juncture that, before licences were granted, municipal health officials inspected the business site and their decision to grant or refuse a licence took account of this factor. Furthermore, frequent inspections of established businesses were carried out and heavy fines imposed on those guilty of keeping unsanitary conditions. During the proceedings of this Committee, one member went so far as to advocate placing Indians in a bazaar,

where they could live socially better instead of scattered among the white people...you must know that the social life of the Indian and the white race is quite different and in case an Indian was to put a place next to a house of mine, it would almost ruin it. It is not that I have anything against the Indian but the social conditions are different, would it not be a protection to the Indian to have a certain street, say in Wynberg, and they could do all their trade there.<sup>16</sup>

In his evidence before the Committee of 1908, Abdol Cader's testimony as a local businessman throws light on the effects

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<sup>14</sup> The plague issue of 1901 is discussed in the housing section of the next chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>15</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 25.

of the General Dealers Act on Indian business-men, even though his credibility as a witness had been somewhat tarnished by allegations that he had been party to acts of bribery and extortion.<sup>17</sup> He categorically denied the allegations and stated that, to his knowledge, linked as he was to the Immigration Department, the numbers of Indians in Cape Town, despite their being traders, were lower than those of the preceding twelve months. Data quoted in Chapter One bears out Cader's assertion. Reasons for the decreasing numbers could be attributed to the refusal by municipalities to grant licences and because larger merchants were increasingly limiting terms of credit: whereas previously traders had between four to six months to pay the merchants, they now had to pay within a month or even buy goods for cash. This could be attributed to the more unstable economic climate of the 1900s. Cash transaction was not feasible, especially in view of the kind of low-earning customers most Indian traders dealt with (shopkeeper-customer credit networks will be discussed later in this chapter). Cader added that Indians in India were being made aware of the difficulties they would encounter through the Indian Opinion<sup>18</sup>, and many were even choosing to leave the Colony in the face of these difficulties. Before the passing of the General Dealers Act, Cader estimated that there were some 5 000 Indians in the suburbs but, by the time of the appointment of the Committee, there were fewer than 2 000 persons. This sheds light on the rationale for Indian

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<sup>17</sup> ibid, pp. 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> The Indian Opinion was a newspaper founded by Gandhi. According to the Archives Yearbook for South African History, 1961, in its very first issue, the Indian Opinion, stated editorially that the policy of the paper would be to advocate the cause of the British Indian in this sub-continent. The advocacy of this policy meant the incursion of Indian Opinion into various matters affecting British Indians in South Africa, the most important being the indentured system and the immigration laws; economic activities of Indians, particularly trading, social problems and political disabilities.

immigration to the Cape, where any curbs on trading rights consequently affected immigration to the Colony and also limited competition against white traders.

The evidence of white shopkeepers and also that of members of the House of Assembly before the Committee displayed a combination of racism and trade jealousy. White shopkeepers rationalised their position by arguing that their class interests were identical to the interests of the Colony. In their appeal to the authorities, they argued that their demise would be detrimental to the future of the Colony.

The Cape Town Chamber of Commerce was represented before the Committee by George Job, who testified that licences were not being refused on grounds of race but on account of the unsuitability of the character or general capacity of the applicants. At the same time, he argued that there were sufficient Indian traders and that any increase would result in a decrease in the number of white traders.<sup>19</sup> Although unable to furnish figures for the years prior to 1907, he totalled the number of licences issued to Indians at 815 as against 3149 to whites in Cape Town, Sea Point, Woodstock and Maitland, and he estimated figures for other districts to be between 40-50% of all licences issued. He also presented evidence before the Committee on the prices at which Indian traders sold goods, arguing that their prices were lower than those of wholesalers because, owing to their low standard of living, they were able 'to live very cheaply, being able, I believe, to live on about one-fifth possibly more of the amount required for a white man'. Other reasons why Indians were able to sell so cheaply were that

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<sup>19</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, pp. 43-59.

they were often recipients of stolen goods,<sup>20</sup> which they then claimed to have bought from the Grand Parade. Job also claimed that Indian traders were guilty of short-weighting, and he cited an instance where a white trader in Long Street, Cape Town, had sent an employee to buy rice and sugar which were later found to be between a quarter and half a pound and three to four pounds short. When pressed to elaborate on this issue, Job admitted to having no direct evidence to support his allegation. It is interesting to note that, as a representative of an organisation that professed to have the interests of the consumer at heart, the Chamber of Commerce had never reported any instance of an Indian trader being found guilty of short-weighting goods to the municipality or to any other relevant bodies.

Job also claimed that Indian competition was forcing Coloured and Malay people to close up shop. This is, of course, contrary to statistical data from government sources. By 1904, there were changes in the occupations of coloureds in the Cape and the number of coloured petty entrepreneurs, greengrocers and fruiterers had increased; moreover the number of coloured general dealers and shopkeepers showed a significant rise from 358 in 1885 to 518 in the early 1900s; and the number of hawkers and peddlers rose from 289 to 1125 during the same period.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, a search through so-called coloured newspapers such as The Sun failed to reveal any large-scale protest on the part of coloured and Malay people. There was also a conspicuous absence of coloured and Malay witnesses before the Committee.

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<sup>20</sup> Numerous cases were heard in magistrates courts against Indians who were alleged to have received stolen goods. The Cape Times (10/2/1908) quoted a prosecutor at Caledon Square, Cape Town, as saying that 'it is remarkable that in nearly all receiving cases, the accused are Indians.'

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, G.: Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics (1987), p. 12.

Job recommended to the Committee that certain resolutions be adopted forthwith to halt the demise of the white trader. Job's comment was grounded in sensationalism rather than in reality, because the particular localities in which these two groups of traders conducted business were very different as were the classes and races who patronised their businesses. The following were recommended:

1. A trading licence be granted after a period of five years only, during which time Indians should become involved in market gardening or some such enterprise because plenty of opportunities existed in this field;
2. Absolutely no trading licences be granted after a certain period;
3. Books be kept in English or Dutch (this also applied to Jewish traders);
4. Better sanitary conditions be enforced;
5. Transfer of licences not be permitted.

He also added that these conditions would impose greater restrictions on Indians as they tended to be transient, making use of the country largely as a trading ground, earning as much as possible and then either returning to India or remitting most of their money. Job produced the following unsubstantiated 'evidence' of money-order transactions between the Cape Colony and India for the years 1904-1907:

Table 2.1

YEAR	VALUE	NUMBER OF MONEY ORDERS
1904	£ 26,632	2949
1905	£ 100,243	9827
1906	£ 81,959	6720
1907	£ 69,799	5478

The fact that most money was alleged to have been remitted in 1905, is probably the result of the depression after the war and the insecurity which dictated investment strategies. Indians were by no means draining the Colony, because most of these people were small traders and the money remitted was usually in support of social obligations.

George Ferguson, vice-president of the Grocer's Association of Cape Town, agreed with much of Job's testimony but, after running through a list of grocery items supplied to the Commission, he added that, in total, only 25% of goods had to be weighed: the other 75% were sealed items. Job's allegation of short-weighting was therefore an exaggeration.<sup>22</sup>

The evidence of two managers of large wholesaling concerns highlighted the buying habits of Indian traders. Both concurred that Indians were underselling white traders, but Phillips from Searight and Company added that most traders employed the following tactic in a bid for trade: they would initially lower their prices of goods, even if this meant sustaining a loss for a certain period; but once established as a competitor, they increased business turnover by periodically lowering prices of select items to attract business. The evidence of these particular witnesses throws useful light on the credit networks that operated among traders and also between the latter and larger merchants. Both companies represented by these witnesses were particularly diligent about monitoring business transactions

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<sup>22</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 67.

with Indians, and one confessed to spending three times as much time on the accounts of Indians as on those of whites. At the slightest sign of irregularity, representatives were dispatched to investigate and, if need be, to call in the credit. This was probably because most Indian traders, poorly capitalised as they were, proved to be a credit risk. As a safeguard, wholesalers sold goods to Indians on credit conditional upon full collateral and also limited credit facilities to a fixed sum. This is said to have limited the liability incurred by wholesalers. As far as a total wholesalers' boycott of Indian stores was concerned, these witnesses thought that such a strategy would be unworkable as this group of traders made up a large percentage of their clientele.<sup>23</sup>

The question of the threat that competition by Indians posed to white traders was one that every white witness ranked high on his list of reasons for the partial or total removal of Indians from the Colony. The white commercial sector employed political means to eliminate competition.

In his argument against the limiting of Indian licence holders, Cader said that if the authorities 'only allowed a dozen or six shops here, they raised the price, but by allowing competition and everybody to sell and supply it is good for trade'.<sup>24</sup> At an annual conference of the SAIC in the 1930s, the president, O.H.O. Jhaveri, commented on the discrimination that Indian traders had had to contend with since the early days of settlement, arguing that limitations placed on Indian traders had handicapped them in competing in the market. However, more importantly, "it led

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<sup>23</sup> ibid, pp. 71-77.

<sup>24</sup> ibid, p. 33.

to intensive and unhealthy competition." <sup>25</sup>

The bulk of Indian traders catered for a particular class of clientele, which usually comprised poor working-class people living in areas such as Salt River, Woodstock and District Six. These customers habitually bought in small quantities and at cheaper rates, and were generally dependent on the shopkeeper for credit. These factors created a dependence that was mutual. The shopkeeper had a steady clientele and, likewise, the poor were assured of provisions on credit conditional upon regular payment. With the exception of Jewish traders, other white shopkeepers trading in poorer areas such as District Six and Salt River, for example, were reluctant to employ the same business methods as Indians, as is evident from the testimony of an informant, N.E.<sup>26</sup>:

Frankly, we never bought from white shopkeepers because, firstly, so few of them traded in the area, but with the Jews and Indians, we bought on credit, because these people were forced to adapt, there was no way we could buy for cash and the Jews and Indians sold on credit. I must add that perhaps it was because these people lived in the area, they knew the circumstances that was how they understood us.

In his evidence before the Committee, The vice-president of the Grocer's Association blamed Indian competition for the alarming rate of bankruptcy among whites since Indian settlement in the Cape and cited the case of one trader who, in the face of competition from an Indian on the opposite side of the street, had to declare himself bankrupt and leave for Australia because 'the Indian had made it too hot

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<sup>25</sup> South African Indian Congress Annual Conference (1935), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> N.E. interviewed 20/2/1990.

for him'.<sup>27</sup> This particular source was not verifiable and the motive for quoting the case of a white person having to leave the Colony on account of Indian competition was calculated to instigate further anti-Indian propaganda.

The following quote from the findings of the Commission sums up white reaction to the competition posed by Indian business people:

Evidence of the European shopkeepers on Indian competition is striking. They declare that the Indian represents a lower standard of civilisation than their own, that he lives meagrely, is poorly housed, pays his staff at a rate at which Europeans could not live and consequently compels European competitors to close their doors. It is impossible to view the extinction of the European shopkeeper without the gravest fears for the future of the colony. Indians have as a rule no domestic establishments to maintain, so that they remit nearly all the money they make to India. It is also in evidence that Indian competition has driven away nearly all Malay and coloured shopkeepers. It was alleged that if as Indians do somehow live, while their prices are scarcely distinguishable from wholesale prices, there must be some sinister explanation. Insolvencies are somewhat heavier than among Europeans: many Indians keep no books and in some case though no allegation can be proved on this head, resort to short-weights.<sup>28</sup>

These very factors that made for accumulation, such as the capacity to work long hours and engage in low consumption, were viewed as essentially unseemly by these white traders who perceived domestic and business life to be divorced from each other. Moreover, it is evident from the tables below, that by sheer numbers, Indian licence-holders were in the minority. The number of licences issued to Asiatics for the

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<sup>27</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> ibid, p. iv.

period 1900 to 1910 were as set out in the table overleaf:<sup>29</sup>

Table 2.2 (A)

YEAR	GEN. DEALERS	BUTCHERS	AERATED WATER SELLERS	TOBACCONISTS
1903	790	72	6	---
1905	994	53	6	---
1907	958	105	27	---
1908	866	132	39	4
1909	766	105	37	28

A comparison of European and Asiatic licence holders for 1910 reads thus:

Table 2.2 (B)

GENERAL DEALERS		
Europeans		1868
Asiatics		651
BUTCHERS		
Europeans		169
Asiatics		109
AERATED-WATER SELLERS		
Europeans		201
Asiatics		18
TOBACCONISTS		
Europeans		109
Asiatics		17

The views expressed by the Committee displayed gross ignorance about the lives, needs and practices of Indians in business or otherwise. Criticism failed to take cognisance of the labyrinth of discriminatory legislation and attitudes faced by Indians. A witness before the Committee,

<sup>29</sup> Cape Town Chamber of Commerce Annual Reports, 1900-1910.

Jerome Donovan, testified that:

...all the Indians that come here, that is the Cape Colony, seem to run into the little shopkeeping business. For instance, several of those Indians who keep shops are saddlers or stone cutters and other different trades, but when they come here, on account of the trade unions, they are not allowed to work at these trades, so they run into the one business and that is done to the detriment of the trade. My opinion is that these people have as much right in that business as they have to be in the Commissioner's office as a secretary. First of all, they are not qualified, they do not know the trade and they do not know the article they are selling nor can they keep books of their business which in my opinion is the most serious of the whole matter. I would like to see them working on the new Cathedral getting 3s. 6d a day. If we are going to have Indians here we had better have them in every position ... have a couple of baboo clerks in Mr Sauer's office, and have them in the post office. Indians should be allowed to get into every other trade as well as the grocery, that would take the pressure off the grocers. I ask what is to prevent them? Let any of these men go and do bricklaying work on the government buildings, they would be willing to work for 4s 6d but you will find the unions will not allow it.<sup>30</sup>

From the 1900s, coloured artisans were increasingly prevented by the segregationist policies of craft unions from being employed on government buildings, for example, and the chances of Indian artisan employment would have been even more remote. The Stone Masters Union was the first union in 1901 to effectively bar coloured membership and this was followed by the Bricklayers and Plasterers Unions.<sup>31</sup>

There was certainly some truth in Donovan's diatribe. The

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<sup>30</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, pp. 96-102.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, G.: Between the Wire and the Wall (1987), p. 16.

preponderance of Indians in the retail trade can to some extent be ascribed to the lack of alternative employment in the face of union exclusivity in particular, and also to the fact that even for those Indians skilled in tailoring, for example, the market they attempted to enter was already monopolised in the Western Cape. The coloured and Malay presence also ensured that they were given priority over Indians as workers. A more penetrating analysis reveals that certain factors have to be taken into account in attempting to explain why so many Indians were drawn to independent business or to self-employment. As wage employment was more difficult to obtain, except in the catering trade, Indians in the Cape were forced into shopkeeping. I would argue that the answer to why Indians were drawn to independent business should first of all be sought by examining passenger Indians' perceptions of their occupations; secondly, it is necessary to consider the ways in which they evaluated self-employment compared with the previous occupations. These two areas will be analysed in the ensuing discussion.

The General Dealers Act remained on the statute books and very few new licences were granted. From 1910, however, Indians increasingly resorted to transferring licences: the records of the Trade and Licensing Committee (a sub-committee of the Cape Town City Council) indicate that the majority of transfer applications were from one Indian to another. In this way, Indians remained actively involved in the retail distributive sector.

Attempts to curb Indian preponderance in the distributive sector continued, and in 1921 Indian traders were required to complete two application forms for trade licences and also to have their thumb prints taken. At a meeting of the Indian Traders Association of the Cape Peninsula, it was reported that on 11 January 1929 'a rigorous protest was raised against the government's decision and it was

unanimously decided to take action against the authorities to test the legality of the actions.<sup>32</sup> The situation was resolved before legal action was taken by the traders, and D.F. Malan, a member of the Opposition Party, retracted this offensive rule affecting Indian traders.<sup>33</sup> The pressure exerted on Indian traders was not justified in view of the far smaller number they represented compared with the white business sector. Figures for the two groups in the Union read as follows:

Table 2.3  
*Cape Chamber of Commerce: 1929*

CLASS OF LICENCE	CAPE		NATAL		TRANSVAAL	
	W.	A.	W.	A.	W.	A.
Aerated Water Dealers & Manufacturers	1534	297	435	397	672	27
Butcher	1896	172	435	154	1676	157
Fresh Produce Dealer	1591	598	157	400	720	317
Gen. dealer	12793	1473	3336	1684	10673	3129
Hawker	3026	581	252	188	1484	923
Patent medicine	2742	288	419	267	1361	751
Pedlar	144	57	809	2500	2054	632
Eating house	236	25	134	188	435	45
Restaurant, etc.	1066	61	588	323	1151	63
Fireworks	480	215	111	118	353	141

<sup>32</sup> Cape Times, 12 January 1929.

<sup>33</sup> ibid, 18 January 1929.

The Indian Traders Association of the Cape Peninsula<sup>34</sup> also embarked on a campaign against the Cape Municipality in 1937 to protest against Municipal Regulation no. 1569 which restricted the amount of paraffin and petrol that could be stored on any premises. The Indian delegation pointed out that 'the regulation is causing great hardship to the vast majority of members, because it is impossible to provide the special kind of accommodation to paraffin required by the regulation. Moreover, retailers are unable to carry on business when they are not permitted to hold more than four gallons of paraffin in stock at any one time'.<sup>35</sup>

#### INDIAN HAWKERS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

Among Indians in the Western Cape, a large proportion of Muslims were concentrated in the hawking sector, usually of fruit and vegetables as well as of other non-perishable items. This group of Muslim traders were mostly Surtis and Kanamias, who had their origins in Surat and Kanam (in India) respectively.

Prior to the declaration of the General Dealers Act, hawkers required only one license to trade in the whole of the Peninsula, but with the restrictions imposed by this Act, hawkers who had obtained a licence in Cape Town, for example, were now required to apply for another licence if they desired to trade in Woodstock. In evidence before the Select Committee of 1908, a farmer, J. de Beer, said:

We farmers live so far from the village and are so widely spread over the country that we need the

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<sup>34</sup> Although little information is available on the membership of this traders' association, it was decided in 1962 that the ethnic title should be abandoned to reflect the increasing membership of non-Indians. This body now called itself the Cape Traders' Association.

<sup>35</sup> Cape Times, 6 October 1937.

hawkers very much, the hawkers bring the goods to our door much cheaper than we can get them from the shops.<sup>36</sup>

But Divisional Councils, on the other hand, disputed the vital role played by these hawkers and inferred that, if Indian hawkers were barred from country districts, they would provide for the interests of these farmers. Moreover, members of the Council claimed:

The majority of farmers did not like the hawkers, and there were many of them who traded illegally or bought things they ought not to buy, and farmers had asked to be protected from the visitors to their farms, whom they did not want.<sup>37</sup>

There were also large numbers of hawkers who traded on the Grand Parade in Cape Town. Most of this group resided in the Muir Street area of District Six and were forced to augment their Parade income by selling fresh produce in mostly white suburbs, either by pushcart or by horse and cart. Some Indians were employed by larger hawkers. Moosa, for example, was a successful banana wholesaler who had a number of Indian hawkers in his employ. An informant, F.O.,<sup>38</sup> whose husband had been in Moosa's employ, remembers:

My late husband's father had a small shop, that shop couldn't support the whole family, so my husband had to go out and work, he was young then, about fourteen or fifteen years, and this was common practice, youngsters had to go and work and they usually worked in other people's shops, for Indians mind you, or they worked for Indian hawkers, and in this way they eventually saved

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<sup>36</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Cape Times, 7 July 1908.

<sup>38</sup> F.O. interviewed 5/4/1989.

enough to open their own businesses, they were not so fortunate, their fathers couldn't afford to help them make a start, so they first worked and then went into their own business. But in my case, my family was large, so we could never really save, but in a way I'm happy, you see I never wanted my husband to get a shop, because then all my sons would not go to high school, they use to go straight into the shop, and believe me that's no life, my father had a shop, so I know what I'm talking about. I wanted all my children to become educated, even the girls, that shop life was not for me. So my husband worked for Moosa from age fifteen to the day he died, it was back-breaking work, up early to the market, carry boxes of bananas on the shoulders, pack the carts, he use to be so exhausted every day. He had to take the cart and go sell stuff in Sea Point, Green Point, yes all over that area and even with his wages, that wasn't enough to support my family, so my family use to help here and there.

The monopoly that Indians had on the Parade caused much consternation among a section of the white electorate after the end of World War Two after the end of World War Two. An anonymous letter to a Cape Town daily sums up these feelings:<sup>39</sup>

Every time I cross over the Parade and see all these fruit stalls occupied by Indians my blood boils, to think that these trading sites, the best in the Union, should be given to those who have insulted and belittled our Premier in the eyes of the world. These stalls on the Parade should be let to ex-servicemen, no matter whether they be white or coloured. They are entitled to it. So, why not give these who did nothing notice to quit and the sooner the better.

With the implementation of the Group Areas Act, many of these hawkers were resettled away from the market and the Parade, making hawking economically unprofitable. The position of hawkers after the implementation of the Group

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<sup>39</sup> Cape Times, 4 May 1947.

Areas Act will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

#### THE INDIAN WORKER IN THE WESTERN CAPE

Unlike in Natal, where the process of proletarianization had begun with the introduction of indentured workers, Indians in the Cape constituted only a fraction of the working class, who were concentrated for the most part in the catering trade. In figures obtained from the records of the SAIC, it is evident that, even by 1930, the Western Cape had still but a very small working class, although these figures relate strictly to factory employment. It was particularly after the implementation of the Group Areas Act that Indians were forced to seek salaried employment, and clerical and other office jobs were usually preferred. The Indian professional class also grew rapidly, and a frequently heard saying was that 'every Indian family ensures that one of its members is a medical doctor.'

The Indian proletariat in the Western Cape were Christian and Tamil people who had emigrated from either the Eastern Cape or from Natal after the completion of their indentureships. For the former, immigration into Cape Town was common, since no restrictions were enforced concerning movement within the Cape Province. After the Immigration Act of 1906, only those Indians born in South Africa were permitted into the Cape. Living close to the city centre, especially in District Six, many of these new arrivals were largely employed in hotels and restaurants in the city centre or along the Sea Point promenade and surrounding suburbs. A very small percentage was employed in factories.

Scant data is available on the numbers or experiences of Indians in the catering trade up to the mid-1940s. Thus the

testimony of an oral informant, E.C.<sup>40</sup>, is valuable in providing some of the missing information:

I worked at the Queen's Hotel in Sea Point as a waiter, there I get a promotion because my boss liked my handwriting and from then I did general clerical work, you know, like writing out wages slips. When war broke out in 1939, the storeman Pat Kelly joined up, so I get his job, at which I worked for 40 years, from 1939 to 1979. As a waiter though, I worked with other Indians, a few coloureds, oh, there were not unions, no sick pay, not holiday. Most of the waiters were Indian people. For the first three years at Queens, I worked eight to five, 365 days a year waitering. I could travel easily, District Six was so central. Bosses were strict, I had to even take my own lunch, yes, we paid for our own uniforms too, but what can you do, we needed to work, but I remember on one occasion, I can't remember when exactly but we went on strike, for more money and we called the boss, you see the white people knew that we Indians were the best waiters.

In 1946, there was a sudden focus on waiters, because it was alleged that a substantial number, which the Cape Times<sup>41</sup> put at 350, were living illegally in the Cape. The Minister of the Interior, D.F. Malan, ordered the mass deportation of these illegal residents. This action was probably influenced by the war because returning white troops were faced with lack of employment prospects and some of the positions occupied by illegals could be filled by ex-servicemen. At a meeting, these affected waiters resolved that a deputation be sent to the relevant authorities asking that the waiters be allowed to remain in the Cape; if this attempt proved futile, then deportation orders were to be collectively defied.<sup>42</sup> The affected waiters also appealed to the Cape Indian Congress, but Ahmed Ismail, spokesman of this

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<sup>40</sup> E.C. interviewed 5/5/1989.

<sup>41</sup> Cape Times, 30 January 1946.

<sup>42</sup> ibid, 28 May 1946.

organisation and, at that stage, City Councillor as well, was unbending. In his view, the law ought to be enforced and these illegals or prohibited immigrants be returned to Natal. It is, therefore, evident that Ismail and the Cape Indian Congress were not representative of all Indians, but only of the merchant class.

The Café and Restaurant Association of the Cape<sup>43</sup> spoke out against the deportation of their employees and issued a serious warning that chaos would result in the catering trade if these so-called prohibited Indian waiters in Cape Town were deported to Natal. A member of this Association pointed out that the best waiters in South Africa had been recruited from among Indians in Natal.<sup>44</sup>

Without the support of the organisation which purported to represent Indian interests, most of the illegal immigrants were forced to return to Natal where their economic future was even bleaker. By 1949, according to a survey conducted by the Cape Times<sup>45</sup>, there were only isolated cases of prohibited immigrants working in hotels and restaurants. The vast majority of Indians employed in the catering industry were residents of the Cape Province at this stage.

The restrictions on interprovincial movement clearly affected the mobility of labour which, in turn, led to an uneconomic distribution of the population in relation to the growth of economic opportunities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This Association represented white hotel, restaurant and café owners.

<sup>44</sup> Cape Times, 30 January 1946.

<sup>45</sup> ibid, 19 August 1949.

<sup>46</sup> Mitha, M.: 'Indian Minorities in South Africa' (1968), p. 28.

## SHOPKEEPING: WORK AND IDEOLOGY

Much of the conceptual and historiographical analysis of shopkeeping in this section relies heavily on British studies which are, however, equally pertinent to the ideology of small shopkeeping in the Western Cape prior to the declaration of the Group Areas Act. The work of Crossick, Haupt, Parkin, Hosgood, Bechhofen, Mantzaris and Kosmin has been drawn on extensively. What characterises their work and what emerges strongly in interviews as well is that the value most coveted by many who chose the occupation of shopkeeping was that of independence. The long hours spent in the shop, the effect it had on family life, the insecurity that came with a business largely dependent on credit, among other things, were not enough to deter these individuals. A quotation from 'Mr Polly' by H.G. Wells sums up the attraction of this trade: 'in a shop there's this drawback and that, but one is one's own master.'<sup>47</sup>

Before emigrating, only a small number of 'passengers' had been involved in trading, for many had been marginalised peasants, while others hawked and peddled goods from town to town. There were also those, especially the Hindus, who were craftsmen and whose caste names also serve as occupational names: the Mochi are cobblers; the Dhobi are the laundry people; the Patels are landowners; the Sutaria are the carpenters; and the Sonis are the goldsmiths. Although most numbers of this group practised their caste occupations in India, the process of 'upcasting' was not unknown. This entailed the abandoning of those activities that characterised a particular caste and adopting the norms of a higher caste. Muslims, on the other hand, tended to be concentrated in the commercial sector in India, possibly because, while caste taboos forbade Hindus from serving

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<sup>47</sup> Hosgood, C.P.: 'The "Pygmies of Commerce" and the Working-class Community' (1988), p. 451.

those of lower rank in the social hierarchy, Muslims were not constrained in this way. Many of the Muslim traders who had come to the Cape were from the Kokan and Gujarat regions, while the Hindu craftsmen derived from Surat, Porbander and Kathiawar. Kosmin writes that there is a perception that Jewish and other minority group settlers entered commerce by default, an immediate result of their minority position. This may have been the major factor, but the trend was reinforced by inherited cultural values and skills derived from the Jewish historical experience.<sup>48</sup> Although Indians were not subjected to the same historical experience of especially Russian Jews, cultural values and skills played a big part in ensuring that many people maintained their occupational links upon emigrating.

A common reason cited by most informants for emigrating concerned the greater economic opportunities in the Cape compared with those in India. There, in the late-nineteenth century, a combination of crises in the rural economy, heavy taxation, and the caste system, among other factors, precipitated a flow of people to South Africa in search of economic betterment. One oral informant, F.O.<sup>49</sup>, recalled hearing her poor tenant parents talk of the struggle to survive on a smallholding, while another, T.P.<sup>50</sup>, spoke of the hardship endured by his grandfather (a seller of watermelons) in his Indian village prior to his emigrating in the early 1900s. E.K.<sup>51</sup>, was the son of a fisherman from the Kokan coast. The income derived from this occupation fluctuated, depending on the seasonal catch, and this sense

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<sup>48</sup> Kosmin, B.A.: *Ethnic and Commercial Relations in Southern Rhodesia: A Socio-Historical Study of the Asian, Hellene and Jewish Populations, 1898-1943*, 1974, p.105.

<sup>49</sup> F.O. interviewed 5/4/1989.

<sup>50</sup> T.P. interviewed 13/8/1989.

<sup>51</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

of insecurity prompted his father to emigrate in the late-nineteenth century in the hope of finding steady, reliable income. Other informants, too, spoke of the difficulties encountered in their attempts at economic survival. These difficulties made many of the immigrants determined to become involved in occupations that would improve their economic and social status; and for large numbers who desired this, small shopkeeping seemed the answer because it promised comfort, security, status and, above all, independence.<sup>52</sup>

For those of humble class origin, here was an avenue for the hard work and vigorous determination of the self-made man. Small shopkeeping required few formal skills and expertise, which was important as many shopkeepers boasted very modest levels of education. Consider the case of I.P.<sup>53</sup>, who in the 1920s had received formal schooling at the Palmerston Junior School in, Wynberg, up to Standard Four only, but who ran a profitable business in Cape Town and who also became one of the larger individual property owners in the Peninsula. Primary education was to be sufficient for the children of traders because, once basic literacy had been acquired, higher education was a luxury, especially when the children could be contributing to the family business. Sons could contribute directly and daughters indirectly by assuming some of the domestic duties, so that the mother could spend longer hours in the shop.

Lack of capital was also a factor in steering many into small shopkeeping and not other occupations like primary

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<sup>52</sup> Hosgood, C.P.: 'The "Pygmies of Commerce" and the Working-class Community (1988), p. 451.

<sup>53</sup> I.P. interviewed by Z.D., 22/8/1989, started off as a shop assistant to his father, and nine years later he opened his own shop in the centre of Cape Town.

production for example. The informant, E.K.<sup>54</sup>, pointed out that shopkeeping required small amounts of initial capital. Recalling his own origins as an independent businessman, he stated:

In fact, when I started my own business, I did not even have a cent, well at that time there were no cents, there were pennies, well, at that time, I did not even have a penny. I saw an empty shop in Kensington, Sixth Avenue, I remember this place and what do I see, I see three shops on the three corners and all had the same kind of business the business which I know, which I grew up in that's the grocery business, so I thought to myself, "Why would this place be empty? They are making a living, so I can also take a cut of their business". I went to this property owner and he was very happy to have me as a tenant...so I had a friend, he was selling fish, a fishmonger, you know, he was a Malay gentleman. So I went to him, I remember his name, surname Karelse. I said to him, "Look Boeta" (we used to call him Boeta), "Look, Boeta, I want to open this shop but I have no money." He says, "But I'll give you a loan". I says, "Well, how much can you give me?" He says, "I'll give you ten pounds". I says, "Nee, I don't want ten pounds, give me twenty-five pounds as a loan". So I went to the Cape Municipal Market, I bought fruit and vegetables and I went to buy groceries and, there you are, the shop was open, this is how I started.

The above testimony is a typical example of the informal credit structures that operated in the early 1900s, and it also highlights the ease with which businesses were started. Requests for loans from formal financial institutions were usually met with refusals:

They, Standard Bank and Barclays Bank didn't give us loans very easily, you had to first have collateral which was usually property, bond-free property, mind you, and so they would not, did not give us loans at that time. Very few of us had bond-free property, so we had to rely mostly on

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<sup>54</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

family and friends for loans.<sup>55</sup>

Among Indian families, credit networks were commonplace. Muslims, for example, could borrow from fellow-Muslims without any interest because Islam forbids the taking or giving of interest. Debts were paid over time or as businesses were established. An interesting point made by Kharsany in a thesis on Indian business people in South Africa in the early 1900s is that in addition to family coming to the aid of their kin in times of financial distress, the exchange, in crisis situations, of employees between family members was not unknown.<sup>56</sup>

Being self-employed and also owning small amounts of capital had the effect of shaping these individuals' consciousness of their class identity, in that they perceived their class position not as being identical to that of the mass of the working class, but to that of members of the petty-bourgeoisie, even though their material conditions would make for closer identification with the former. Notions of middle-class identity were articulated quite strongly in oral interviews. M.L.<sup>57</sup>, for example, said, 'There was no questions about that, we were middle-class then and we [are] still middle-class people now'. This definition of status was often expressed in relation to members of the groups with whom they lived or had frequent contact. The structural position of Indians in Cape Town clearly attests to this assumption. Many Indians worked among mainly coloured and Malay working-class communities. The fact that the shopkeeper enjoyed economic independence, owned some capital

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<sup>55</sup> M.D. interviewed by Z.D., 19/9/1989, is an ex-shopkeeper from Woodstock.

<sup>56</sup> Kharsany, E.E.: 'A Profile of South African Indian Business People' (1971), p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> M.L. interviewed 3/3/1990.

and sometimes even property, provided some occupational prestige and served to distance him socially and politically from the people with whom he had the most contact and who, in a real sense, ensured his survival and even accumulation of wealth. In the South African context, the racial ordering of society acted as another force in shaping individual consciousness and perception of one's place in the social hierarchy. Bechhofer and Elliot<sup>58</sup> argue that shopkeepers as a group are properly to be seen as a petty-bourgeoisie belonging to neither of the main classes in the system of class stratification. In support of their analysis, they stress the idea of marginality and the low levels of technology used by the petty bourgeoisie who tended to rely heavily on the labour power of the family, which for the most part was unremunerated. In these writers' view, the economic position of shopkeepers and the fact that their contact was almost wholly with a working-class constituency ensured that shopkeepers were not of the middle class. I support Haupt's<sup>59</sup> argument that any analysis of class categorisation must take account of people's own perception of themselves. Behaviour cannot be adequately deduced solely from the rigid socio-economic framework of analysis, for it is within the words and the discourse of people themselves that ideological complexities and contradictions are revealed.

If independence or self-employment was the factor that shaped the perception of class position, then it is imperative to analyze systematically the nature of this independence. Fundamentally, this sense of independence or

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<sup>58</sup> Bechhofer, F. and Elliot, B.: *The Petty Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies of the Uneasy Stratum* (1981).

<sup>59</sup> Haupt, H-G.: 'The Petit-bourgeoisie in France, 1850-1914: In Search of a Juste Milieu' (1984), in Crossick, G. and Haupt, H-G. (eds): Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe (1984).

of 'being one's own boss' was illusory. The very conditions under which shopkeepers laboured; the long hours of employment; their dependence on credit from larger merchants; and the granting thereof to customers; the incorporation of family labour (in the absence of the means to employ other labour); the isolation that frequently resulted from shopkeeping; the reality that security was precarious because of low profit margins - all of these factors contributed to a perception that, objectively, shopkeepers were not wholly their own masters. In their study of small shopkeeping, Bechhofer and others write that, compared with the benefits enjoyed by better-paid manual workers, the only real advantage or privilege that the shopkeeper could lay claim to was that of independence. However, it must be emphasised that, crucial to an understanding of the ideology of shop-keeping are autonomy and the absence of subordination under which wage workers labour.

Although small shopkeepers were self-employed, survival in the small corner trade was impossible without an overwhelming dependence on the system of credit which, as Crossick writes, was 'the linchpin of their success'.<sup>60</sup> For Indians trading in working-class areas, the cash trade eluded them and the existing credit structures ensured the survival of both the trader and the working-class clientele. The proletarian clientele were seldom free to shop where they chose, because many depended on a single shop or trader who was willing to supply credit until the next pay day. The shopkeeper, in turn, secured for his business a 'trapped clientele'.<sup>61</sup> An oral informant, N.E.<sup>62</sup>, elucidates the

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<sup>60</sup> Crossick, G.: 'The Petit-bourgeoisie in Nineteenth-century Britain: The Urban and Liberal Case' in Crossick, G. and Haupt, H-G. (eds): Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe (1984), p. 84.

<sup>61</sup> ibid, p. 84.

prevailing credit networks well in the following account:

That was always on a weekly basis, and you had to have a good credit rating with babbie<sup>63</sup>. If you default the first week you are on babbie's blacklist, so there was no ways of survival and you had to have babbie's money on Friday. The District Six community where I lived was so weekly-orientated, nobody owned big business there, they, the customers, were mostly workers and the money they earned or rather the money they slaved for, went into rental and food; so babbie was very kind to these people and every Friday night was what we called "ginger-beer and ice-cream nights", because you could see after the pay packets had been opened, first of all they had to square his account, and then, remember no credit on Friday nights you see, but only from Saturday. On Friday nights you were in a generous mood, you forgot on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday you have got to live off babbie again.

N.E.'s experience in District Six also conformed to the general pattern which prevailed in the Cape. E.K.<sup>64</sup> recalled:

About 95% of our business was giving credit. We had weekly customers and better-paid monthly customers. Friday and Saturday night you got in money from them, they used to pay you and buy some of their weekly goods, this was the trend. Now during the week if they ran short all they had to do was tell the child, "Run to the shop and fetch a loaf of bread", without giving him money. This was the trend and we had to have a big book and a customer's name was there, a big book on the counter, you know an index book and when a customer bought on credit we wrote down, for example, one loaf of bread, a tin of milk, a half pound sugar and we also wrote the same thing in the customer's book and that way nobody could accuse us of cheating anyone. Fridays, mostly

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<sup>62</sup> N.E. interviewed 20/2/1990.

<sup>63</sup> Please see previous comment on use and etymology of this term.

<sup>64</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

Fridays they used to come square their accounts so to say and then start all over again. Today the trend is changed, credits are no more, but of course that time we used to buy for credit and sell for credit.

The above testimony describes the credit relationship mostly between general dealers and customers. However, consider the testimony of M.L.<sup>65</sup> who owned an outfitting and shoe establishment in Vineyard Road, Claremont:

In my case, with my shoe and outfitting shop it was opening at nine because I had a shop in non-passing road, that means that no passing trade, so I thought my father was nearby and he had a shoe repairing shop and he knew most of his customers so he then recommended his customers to buy credit and so they bought credit from me. It was this credit business that is how I managed to expand my business. I did mostly credit business, let me see, in fact, ninety-five percent of my business was that credit business, you see with no passing trade I had to depend on credit ways and then I expanded and I did very well in that twenty-five years, I even managed to buy a new car every two years. I was liked very much too because there was not extra charge for credit. They could pay the same as they would pay at other shops for cash, so long as they paid within one year and my father also recommended very good customers and these customers recommended somebody else, so I had customers from Claremont right up to Kalk Bay...Kalk Bay, Retreat, Wynberg, Landsdowne, a really vast area to cover. Half of these customers used to come pay at the shop on Fridays and Saturdays, the rest that were living very far I used to go and collect on Saturday afternoons and Friday nights. They were mostly 80% coloured and the rest were Malay people.

For those Indian traders with non-food establishments, travelling to the homes and work places of the customers was not unusual, as is evident from the testimony of an ex-shoe

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<sup>65</sup> M.L. interviewed 3/3/1990.

repairer cited later in this chapter.

Hosgood argues that the economic role played by shopkeepers, especially in the credit facility which they made available, was vital because they acted as bankers of the poor and because their ideology incorporated an ingrained sense of social duty to the clientele, with the result that they were often intimately involved in the daily lives of their many clients. However, it could be argued that in the context of the Western Cape, social duty was not simply the chief motivation but that shopkeepers found it financially expedient to cultivate credit and social relationships with proletarian customers. In his shoe and outfitting business, M.L.<sup>66</sup>, for example, was mainly dependent on coloured and Malay artisans as well as on fishermen from the Kalk Bay area. By allowing them a year in which to settle debts and also by going to their homes to collect outstanding amounts, he took account of their seasonal earnings as well as the distances they would have to travel to reach his shop: 'I was really doing them a favour, helping them out, you know'.

While in many respects comparative British studies are illuminating, they clearly deal with more or less homogenous communities. The social context of the Cape was different. Shopkeepers and customers inhabited different cultures. The credit facility provided by Indian shopkeepers also caused much consternation among the white retail sector. This latter group accused Indians of taking away much of their business by engaging in certain business practices which acted as an inducement for shoppers to turn to Indian traders. These facilities, especially that of advancing credit and the practice of selling goods in minute quantities were seen as being instrumental in hurting competitors.

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<sup>66</sup> ibid.

Insolvencies among white traders were almost always attributed to the competition posed by other traders in the vicinity, but insolvencies among Indians is an interesting area. The most common reason cited for this state of affairs was the absence of the owner from his business. In almost every case before the Trade Licences Committee during the 1920s and 1930s, the insolvent party explained that during his absence a relative or friend entrusted to run the business had failed while the owner was in India. The custom of Indian males returning to India for a maximum period of three years often meant that power of attorney was usually granted to another Indian. Often mismanagement was the main reason for the business having become insolvent. In the case of H. Mahomed, his business in Albert Road, Woodstock<sup>67</sup>, had been entrusted to a relative in his absence. On his return from India, he discovered that his business had been assigned to his creditors and that he was left stripped of his livelihood. The father of an oral informant also suffered a similar fate in Port Elizabeth: on learning of his business bankruptcy in his absence, he returned directly to Cape Town from India in the hope that he would be able to obtain a new licence and restart trade there. The case of another Indian trader, A. Balla<sup>68</sup>, highlights the vulnerability of small shopkeeping. For seven years, between 1921 and 1928, he had carried on business as a general dealer in Cape Town, when his estate was assigned for the benefit of his creditors. He stated that, in his case, insolvency was the direct result of his having been ill with influenza, which meant that the shop had been forced to remain closed for three weeks. This highlights the tenuous nature of small shopkeeping, especially for the person with little capital conducting a business from one week to the

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<sup>67</sup> This particular case was cited in the records of the Trade Licence Committee of 1935.

<sup>68</sup> ibid.

next.

Together with the system of credit that operated to ensure the survival of many Indian traders, many members of this group worked arduous hours to survive and to accumulate wealth. Often the working day began at four in the morning, when most shopkeepers went to the market to buy their daily provisions, and business was conducted from 6 a.m until late at night. Shopkeepers could be prosecuted if they remained open after legally prescribed hours, the limits of which were set by the Trade Licence Committee. Sunday trading, too, was prohibited, except for permit holders.<sup>69</sup>

An interesting case is that of an ex-shoe repairer who worked long, irregular hours, so that they would coincide with those of his customers:

Now you must imagine, early morning from De Villiers Street, District Six to Sea Point, I used to collect shoes by bicycle, I used to collect among the European people. I used to go to Sea Point, Mouille Point and believe it or not, I used to go collect shoes at Groote Schuur Hospital, Somerset Hospital and City Hospital. The shoes I collected, mostly credit business from people, a lot of hospital nurses and doctors. You know a big problem for me was that the customers don't like to pay and if they don't pay, the money come out of my wages. I don't understand this kind of people, I was only a poor shoemaker and they worked in office, the nurses and doctors, you understand, they were well-off but the trouble was they complain to pay. I also had a problem, when these people get paid at the end of the month, now it is impossible for me to get everyone one time, so I go to few places and sometimes I must plead for my money, now the other places I can't make it and the next day I go to collect money, every time

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<sup>69</sup> Bribery was the means employed by many Indian traders to circumvent this restrictive trading regulation. Many of the white officials were most susceptible to bribery, and informants told how cigarettes and chocolates usually pacified these officials, who then also informed traders of impending raids on their shops.

these people tell me, "Come next month, all my money is finished". The credit don't pay. Now you tell me, I only get one pound wages and sometimes five pounds a month is short when this people don't pay me and my boss who is also my uncle, my own father's brother, he used to charge me. So I too got little cunning. I can't do anything else, so my plan used to be to charge these people extra and so every time I collect money, my uncle get his money and sometimes, not always, I must say, I make a little bit extra, you get my point, there was no other way otherwise I go bankrupt and the twelve pounds I make a year I used to send to my poor mother in India, because over there things are hard and she wait for my money to come. For sixteen years I worked like this, I had a lot of trouble with these people. Life was hard then but what can you do, you chase the customers for your money even very early in the morning by their houses, because you know very well that you have big responsibilities. Always I have to argue with the customers because when they don't pay, they say I rob them and also they say my work was no good, but they only say that because they don't want to pay, they call me a crook, they big crooks because if they don't pay they don't know that my uncle won't pay me and then my mother in India will starve. So they don't know that I also learnt tricks and get them too, that's life, you understand.<sup>70</sup>

This informant was employed by an uncle who was not above resorting to a certain amount of coercion to keep L.G. in his employ, even though the informant had been offered a better deal by another Indian who wanted him to manage his business for two years during his return to India:

When my uncle heard this, he called me on one side and he told me, "If you going to work by that man, you don't need to come to my door again", and you see I had no other relatives, so I thought how can I stay there and accept that when my own relative act like this, so I had no choice, I had to cancel that job and I carried on working for my uncle, sixteen years I worked for him, and what do I get,

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<sup>70</sup> L.G. interviewed 8/8/1989.

nothing, nothing, I was just a worker to him, and I was his own brother's son, but like I say that's life.

Typically, most of these traders employed very few, if any, paid staff, preferring to make use of immediate family labour or that of assistants. The latter were usually young males newly arrived from the same village in India. Assistants were accommodated by the family, had meals with them, were entertained when time permitted and also received a small salary. The payment of low salaries was often justified by shopkeepers who felt that these assistants were mere apprentices being taught the trade. This was despite the fact that these assistants worked as hard and as long as the owner of the business. Naturally, there were cases of exploitation in work conditions and, of course, salaries. With the increasing restriction on new immigrants, fewer young men were allowed into the country and therefore the children of shopkeepers were increasingly incorporated into the business. Similarly, however, if an assistant had accumulated sufficient capital, he was able to set himself up in business, often with the support of his former employer. Workers were also encouraged to escape wage dependence for small proprietorships.

Women's labour, especially that of wives (or in their absence, that of sisters), was incorporated into the business. Although their participation was seen as marginal, it was a far cry from being so. The vital role women played is clear from the following testimony of an oral informant, A.V.<sup>71</sup>:

They were slaves unto their husbands and their families. They sacrificed long hours, they were

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<sup>71</sup> A.V., interviewed by Z.D. 26/8/1989, is a retired nurse who lived in District Six.

often the shop assistants of their husbands. While he went down to the market, the local population called on the mochi...every Indian woman behind the counter was mochi. She played her role absolutely diligently because while her husband had to go and fetch the daily provisions at the market, where you could buy your cheese, butter and a host of other things there, then Mrs Shopkeeper had to virtually give birth behind the counter and she raised her children behind the counter. Many of the husbands used to enjoy their afternoon nap, so there you are, someone must mind the shop, again it was mochi who had to hold the fort, in addition to having to see that the school-going children were fed. Often the husbands took time off to chat to friends and reps who came from the wholesaling companies and again mochi had to take over serving the customers. She had to serve her customers behind the counter and she also reared her children in a manner that befits any mother, and apart from being shop assistant she had to cook and be housecleaner as well; and all these many, many chores she did. She never had people to help her, because these people had such a great distrust of strangers. They were always scared that you would pilfer or so, so she had to have not only one pair of eyes but many, because she had to watch the onions and potatoes outside, where women would come snatch an onion or potato from time to time for their pots, so mochi had to be wide awake at all times, and while baby is crying on her arm, she had to watch the fruit and vegetables outside, she had to serve, she had to cook and then when the shopkeeper comes home, or after a nap, he took over the duties in the shop.

The entire family was incorporated into the routine of the shop and their labour was of vital economic importance. There was usually little respite from the monotony that came with shopkeeping. The role of women in these businesses is usually underplayed. In a study of artisanal bakeries in France, Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame<sup>72</sup> observed that these bakers appropriated the labour of their wives because 'a

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<sup>72</sup> Bertaux, D. and Bertaux-Wiame, I: 'Artisanal Bakery in France: How it Lives and Why it Survives' in Bechhofer, F. and Elliot, B. (eds), The Petty Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies of the Uneasy Stratum (1981), p. 163.

wife is a woman you can trust and one you do not have to pay. If a young baker had to give a salary to a cashier and had to run the risk of being cheated by her, he could not make ends meet.'

This form of independent economic activity brought with it isolation. Divorced from a workshop, office or a factory, the lack of social interaction, in particular, was compounded by cultural and language differences. Equally important, the long working hours were certainly not conducive to any social life. A feature of the limited leisure activities Indians pursued were the weekly Indian films screened at an Indian cinema in District Six. T.P.<sup>73</sup> remembers that there 'were lots of cinemas in District Six, but there was the one, the Avalon, owned by an Indian and we used to go and see Indian films there and that day you could see all the Indians there, dressed up and all'.

The greater isolation was experienced by women because, while men had contact with people outside the family sphere, women were seldom free to leave the home or shop to pursue their own interests or activities. Children were basically free only during school hours because, after school, activity was confined to the shop. Every male informant recalled having had to help his father in his shop, or with some activity related to his father's occupation, while females were expected to take care of younger children and help with domestic chores. Residences were often attached to the shops, thereby causing the distinction between working and non-working hours to become blurred.

The isolated existence led by Indians is also emphasized by an informant's observation of Indians in District Six.

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<sup>73</sup> T.P. interviewed 13/8/1989.

N.E.<sup>74</sup> recalls:

Many came from Indian villages and they couldn't speak the language. Their prime desire and occupation was to own a shop and they had insurmountable difficulties in communicating with other race groups. The Indian shopkeeper, well, they kept very much to their little traditions, their laws, their legends...and they never mixed freely because they were always, for eighteen to twenty hours, behind the shop counter. So they didn't really experience what life was like beyond the counter. Normally when the wife was in the shop, the babbie bought the fish at the fish market, the meat at the butcher shop, the material at Katz and what have you. She never had the free reign to go out, he was the master and he was the one who controlled the finances and yes, she was like his slave in many ways, he was the ultimate master in his domain. For example, if she wanted some material for herself or for the children, he bought it for her, it was his choice and she had absolutely no choice, you know it was the same with children, he decided when they would stop having children, so you always saw mochi pregnant or with a young baby in her arms while five, six, seven even played around her feet. These poor women led such isolated lives, I suppose for all Indian people they felt alienated from the communities around them, but these women, what sad lives they led. The shopkeeper too, he was looked upon as nothing else but a shopkeeper. You couldn't fraternise with him and he did not fraternise with you. They mixed with their own people, sometimes visiting or receiving visitors, going to the cinema as well, but generally I would say that these people lived for their shops, they were so one-tracked, sticking together like that too.

To the casual observer, the relationship between shopkeeper and customer may have seemed impersonal or largely restricted to business. Hosgood's observation, however, sums up a more invisible relationship between shopkeeper and client:

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<sup>74</sup> N.E. interviewed 20/2/90.

Shopkeepers were intimate with the domestic economies of their customers; their ability to advance credit enabled them to exert much influence over the purse strings of the working-class families. The shop also acted as the clearing-house for gossip. Shopkeepers' absence from formal working-class institutional life is indicative of both the long hours that they kept and their association with the neighbourhood's informal domestic culture.<sup>75</sup>

The above was applicable mostly to those Indians in working-class areas whereas, for other Indians operating businesses in 'white' areas, the relationship was more impersonal, mostly because transactions tended to be on a cash basis, hence the absence of long-term dependency. An informant, M.V.<sup>76</sup>, who had traded in the Muizenberg area, a customarily middle and lower middle class white area during the 1930s and 1940s, said, 'I had no links with white people, it was only business, I don't call them, they don't call me'. Moreover, this informant added, 'I had to smarten up my shop for these better-class clients, unlike those people in District Six who did not worry about untidy shops'. The attention paid to the shop usually extended to the house adjoining these businesses, because it was not unusual for local white residents to draw up petitions to complain to the municipal authorities.

Indian small traders in the Western Cape lived rather frugally, because of the limits on their earnings and the constraints of their social obligations in the Indian villages, besides having to contribute to the cost of bringing other families over to South Africa during the initial years of immigration. Another important

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<sup>75</sup> Hosgood, C.P.: 'The "Pygmies of Commerce" and the Working-class Community' (1988), p. 452.

<sup>76</sup> M.V. interviewed 9/8/1989.

consideration for Indians was their willingness to contend with short-term deprivation if they saved as much as possible to acquire assets, especially fixed property, which ranked highest on their list of investment priorities.

#### INTERMEDIARY MINORITIES

The intermediary position occupied by Indians was by no means unique to South Africa. Indians in East Africa, Cubans in Puerto Rica, Jews in Europe, Chinese in South-East Asia, Japanese in America - all occupied a middle position. As a group, they were characterised not only by more obvious cultural, religious and racial differences from the majority of other population groups but also by the fact that they occupied a particular niche in the economy of the countries of immigration.

Studies on the role of intermediary minorities were first developed by Blalock<sup>77</sup>, who sought to explain the ethnic and occupational correspondence of particular immigrants. Other writers since Blalock have variously referred to middleman minorities as middleman trading people and marginal trading people because these groups occupy a position not at the bottom of the social structure but somewhere in the middle, typified by a concentration in independent small business.<sup>78</sup>

According to Bonacich and Modell, it is possible to conceptualise middleman minorities in three ways:

1. They acted as buffers between the elite and masses, at once being shopkeepers to the masses

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<sup>77</sup> Blalock, H.M.: Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations (1967).

<sup>78</sup> Bonacich, E. and Modell, J.: The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity (1980), p. 4.

while distributing the products of the elite;

2. they tend not to be primary producers; instead they help the flow of goods and services through the economy;
3. they can be seen as a petty-bourgeoisie, rather than as capitalists.

As mentioned earlier, most of the members of middleman minorities were not involved in small business in their homelands and 'emanate from more deprived classes; only in the diaspora can they improve their economic conditions, which is perhaps the primary reason for [their] leaving'.<sup>79</sup> Social features characteristic of this group include tendencies towards ethnocentrism, strong family structures, future orientation (short-term deprivation was accepted) and an extremely high rate of urbanisation. They also tend to distance themselves from surrounding communities, forming themselves into self-contained kin or village organisations. One such Western Cape organisation operative since the early twentieth century, when most Kokanies came to Cape Town from India, up to the present, is the Morba Society, which is composed of all those Kokanies and their descendants originally from the village of Morba in the province of Kokan, India. An informant, F.J.<sup>80</sup>, saw the primary function of this society as raising funds among its members to build schools and mosques in the village. She recalled that funds were collected at some time during the 1970s to electrify the village.

Economically, middleman minorities are further characterised by a concentration in small businesses which were almost exclusively family-owned and managed. Kharsany observes that:

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<sup>79</sup> Bonacich, E.: 'Middleman Minorities in American' in American Sociological Review, 38(2) (1973), p. 588.

<sup>80</sup> F.J. interviewed by Z.D., 5/6/90, is a housewife.

'...most business concerns are family-owned, family-managed enterprises. Even where partnerships are formed, the partners of the new venture are normally members of the same family. Rarely do business unions include members of different families. When such a company is formed, the members are well-known to each other, belong to the same religious groups, speak the same language and in several cases, are offspring of parents or grandparents who came from the same village in India'.<sup>81</sup>

Undoubtedly, one problem with this kind of analysis is stereotyping. Although most of these characteristics fit, there are exceptions to the rule. For example, most members of middleman minority groups tend to marry within the group, but many Indian Muslims in the Cape do not fit into this mould, because they marry Malay people. It follows that common religious ties rather than ethnicity are of primary importance. But as has been stated earlier, economic activity is the chief criterion in any conceptual analysis of middleman minorities.

The economic niche that middleman minority groups occupy has excited the antagonism of the surrounding communities whose hostility often takes the form of discrimination against the immigrant's race, religion or culture. The evidence of white shopkeepers before the Commission of Inquiry of 1908 discussed earlier in this chapter is sufficient testimony to the manner in which competition posed by Indians became translated into an attack on Indians as an ethnic group and into sweeping generalisations about Indians as a community. For example, Indians were accused of being unhygienic, of being shrewd and unethical business people and also of being nothing more than birds of passage who fled once they had accumulated enough money.

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<sup>81</sup> Kharsany, E.E.: 'A Profile of the South African Business Community - Reasons for Success and Failure' (1971), p. 21.

If the relationship with the dominant group in the country of immigration is one of antagonism, then it is important to analyze the relationship between middleman minorities and the dominated groups. The 1949 riots in Durban are an example of the friction between middleman minority trading groups and the mass of indigenous inhabitants who, in the South African context, are African consumers. Friction arose because Indians had the monopoly in the retail trade and Africans were forced to patronise their trading concerns. Furthermore, African people were obliged to lease property from them. Mabel Palmer writes that the mounting crisis in the economy was basically the source of escalating food prices but, as this was not perceived to be the root cause of Africans' distress, Indians became the immediate target of their collective anger.<sup>82</sup> Eddie Webster on the other hand, writes that Indians were in an ambivalent position, "Indians could be seen as part of the white power or as potential allies. This was reflected in the Indian response too, which was dualistic as Indians alternated between accommodation of whites and resistance with Africans." In summary, Webster writes, "riots are manifestations of economically based class conflict with a profound racial dimension."<sup>83</sup>

In the Western Cape, however, the antagonism may have taken a more subtle form. The popular term used to refer to the Indian shopkeeper was 'babbie' which, according to Achmat Davids<sup>81</sup> is a term derived from the Javanese word meaning pig. Moreover, Davids writes that the distance Indians put between themselves and other blacks was also a contentious issue because 'they were essentially a trading community who had developed petty-bourgeois attitudes, considered

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<sup>82</sup> Palmer, M.: The History of Indians in Natal (1957).

<sup>83</sup> Webster, E.C.: The 1949 Durban Riots. A Case Study in Race and Class. (1976), p.13.

themselves culturally, economically and religiously superior to the labouring classes, whose sons were not good enough to marry their Indian daughters.'

The position of Indians in South Africa has always been structurally different from that of 'coloureds' and 'Africans', not only because of the perpetuation of a racial hierarchy but also because this group was able to highlight its plight in the international arena, mainly through India, which took the struggle of Indian South Africans to the U.N. Moreover, many Indians were imbued with a sense of social superiority which was derived from the ancient, 'superior' culture of their homeland and which served to alienate them from the rest of the oppressed people. When the National Party came to power in 1948, its policies, as expressed in the Group Areas Act in particular, served further to isolate the prescribed racial groups, not just physically but psychologically, too.

## CHAPTER 3

THE EFFECTS OF HOUSING SEGREGATION AND THE GROUP AREAS ACT  
ON INDIAN SETTLEMENT IN URBAN CAPE PENINSULA CIRCA 1900-1980

This chapter examines the context of Indian settlement in the Western Cape ca. 1900-1980. The first part examines the period prior to the declaration of the Group Areas Act, when most Indians frequently resided and traded on the same property, with residences attached to shops. The location of residences was dictated by economic opportunities, as opposed to Indians consciously forming ethnic pockets in certain localities.

The second part of the chapter concentrates on the period from 1950 to 1970. With the implementation of the Group Areas Act, and the declaration of the 'Indian' group areas, the settled pattern of residence and trade was disrupted. In new segregated areas, the absence of facilities, such as trading sites in particular, was critical in ensuring that many Indians were forced to seek other avenues of earning a living. The economic and social effects of the Group Areas Act were devastating to all sections of the black population, but Indians were affected by the Act in a distinctive way. As so many of them had resided and traded on the same site, in areas customarily considered 'white' or 'coloured', great numbers were unable to restart businesses due to a lack of capital and also to the absence of appropriate trading sites in 'Indian' areas.

## PRE-GROUP AREAS ACT

Up to the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in 1901, the areas and even the dwellings occupied by Indians were under little scrutiny, but after the outbreak of the plague, there was a new concern with the housing of Cape Town's black

populations. The response to the outbreak was tainted by racial prejudice and was 'directed not only at Africans, but all Asiatics, Russian Jews, Italians, Portuguese and others of Mediterranean origin'<sup>1</sup> who were variously thought to have been the cause of the plague because of their allegedly unsanitary and overcrowded lifestyles. Agitation took the form of calls for halting the immigration of these persons as well as for segregating the ones already resident in the Cape. Swanson writes that it was not just the plague issue that gave rise to calls for segregation but, 'during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, other historical changes were taking place in South Africa. These led to the evolution of segregationist ideology. In this context, the accident of epidemic plague became a dramatic and compelling opportunity for those who were promoting segregationist "solutions" to social problems'.<sup>2</sup>

Municipalities in Port Elizabeth and East London were particularly diligent about enforcing regulations to keep out Indians and, in particular, those thought to have brought the disease from India. Ships were turned away from several of the ports concerned. In East London, a location was provided for Indian settlement, and it was thought that, in the event of the outbreak of the plague, it could be contained in this area. Responding to the measures taken by the Port Elizabeth authorities, the Cape Times suggested that it was 'more anti-Coolie than anti-Plague'.<sup>3</sup> The correspondence between the Cape Town Medical Officer and the Colonial Secretary is interesting because the possibility of

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<sup>1</sup> Van Heyningen, E: 'Cape Town and the Plague of 1901' (1981), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Swanson, M.W.: 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony 1900-1901' (1977), p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Van Heyningen, E.: 'Cape Town and the Plague of 1901' (1981), p. 7.

setting up locations and lodging houses for Indians was mooted, but came to naught. In 1901-1902, the authorities in the Cape Colony sought to establish a location for Indians like that in East London, and selected Maitland for this location. The Medical Officer of Health vetoed any moves in this direction because 'the matter of dealing with Asiatics is on quite a different footing from that of Aboriginal Natives'. He also suggested that, in the light of their smaller numbers and because 'the question of Asiatics only affects one or two places in the Colony, and when the war is over and with the adoption of restrictions in regard to their entering the Colony, the question will resolve itself'.<sup>4</sup>

In August 1901, the Cape authorities bought land in Maitland for the establishment of a 'permanent eviction camp'<sup>5</sup>, where those 'coloured' people who had been evicted from infected areas of the city were resettled, while 'Africans' were moved to Uitvlugt. Further agitation for the segregation of Indians continued and a delegation from the municipalities of the Cape Peninsula met at the Town House in March 1903 'for the purpose of discussing the question as to the segregation of Asiatics, Indians and undesirables'. These bodies resolved among other things that power be given to any municipality to segregate Indians'; furthermore, that townships or bazaars be allocated for their accommodation and, most important, that municipalities be able to frame regulations on behalf of the City Council in regard to these locations.<sup>6</sup> The City Council, however, denied the powers they sought and Indians continued to reside in those areas

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<sup>4</sup> Correspondence between the Medical Officer of Health (Cape Colony) and Under-Colonial Secretary, Cape Town, 3/1/1902.

<sup>5</sup> Van Heyningen, E.: 'Cape Town and the Plague of 1901' (1981), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Meeting of Delegates from the Municipalities of the Cape Peninsula, Town House, Cape Town, 27/3/1903.

as they had done previously. But the agitation left a legacy of unease, judging from the testimony of a witness before the Commission on Asiatic Grievances of 1908 who said that, after the plague, Indians had become more diligent about sanitation and living conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the wish of municipalities in the Western Cape to achieve 'positive social controls'<sup>8</sup> the problem of slum eradication was far more problematic than was generally realised. Pinnock writes that, after the South African War, there was an influx of refugees into District Six, where there was a surge of building activity of two and three-storey structures in particular. Although the number of refugees levelled off after the War, with the depression following the War, and also throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were increasing numbers of people moving into the towns. As a result of growing underdevelopment of the reserves and the rise of capitalist farming, black peasants, 'squatters', labour tenants and sharecroppers, together with white bywoners and small farmers, were increasingly being shifted off the land.<sup>9</sup>

This urban shift caused overcrowding and an increase in the number of landlords operating in the Western Cape. Although little research has been carried out on landlordism in the increasingly crowded tenements of Cape Town up to the passing of the Groups Areas Act, Pinnock claims that whites and Asians made up the bulk of the landlord class and that, until the 1930s, there were a number of City Councillors among the white landlords. To maximise profits, landlords

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<sup>7</sup> Report of the Select Committee of 1908, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Swanson, M.W.: 'The Sanitation Syndrome' (1977), p. 410.

<sup>9</sup> Pinnock, D.: 'From Argie Boys to Skollie Gangsters: the lumpen-proletariat challenge of the street-corner armies in District Six' (1979), p.4.

squeezed as many people as possible into the tenements, thereby exacerbating the slum conditions. In reply to a question concerning property ownership, an informant, N.E.<sup>10</sup>, commented:

'Well, let me put it to you this way, in 1901 we had an outbreak of Bubonic Plague and most of District Six was destroyed by the City Council and then it was rebuilt and at that time when the immigrants came to the Cape Colony, District Six was prime land. You may have noticed, ag, it was before your time, but anyway most of the architectural structures had the Star of David on the pinnacles of the buildings, and you see these landlords were very shrewd because they built these new tenements and on the ground floor were the shops and the upper levels were dwellings so that they could let out the shops and the dwellings upstairs. At first they, I mean the landlords, resided upstairs and traded downstairs, but District Six was always a magnet for people, people came from all over and they were drawn to this magnet all the time so we had lots of overcrowding and then most of the Jewish traders moved out of District Six from their residences and they went into the suburbs and what they did was they rented the tenements to families and many families could not afford to pay for three bedrooms, lounge and a kitchen and they, in turn, these families sub-let again, and shared the rent and the electricity or the candle light or whatever, and so that's how District Six, for example, the tenements especially became overcrowded. The owners of these tenements realised that they could actually increase their profit by letting one room out at a time, so there would be no sub-division you see, so that caused very unsavoury conditions. They allowed the buildings to go into neglect and become dilapidated, when it was beyond them to have all these repairs done, they just allowed these buildings to become slumlands and so they became slumlords instead of landlords.'

There was little regulation of the system of rack-renting, and the City Council did not involve itself to any great

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<sup>10</sup> N.E. interviewed 20/2/1990.

extent in the plight of the rising urban population. Changes began to manifest themselves when, by the outbreak of World War 1, the balance of power in the Council began to alter as the manufacturing sector grew under the protective tariffs of the Pact Government and South Africa's abandonment of the gold standard in 1932.<sup>11</sup> What was now desired was the elimination of the slums and overcrowding and the creation of a small but stable working-class. From the late 1930s, City Council policies worked towards achieving this end.

By 1934, a Housing and Slums Clearance Committee had been set up under the auspices of the City Council. The City Health Department as well as the City Engineer tendered detailed reports to the Committee. One report from the Health Department in October 1937 advocated that, instead of demolishing condemned buildings in terms of the Slums Act of 1934 (whereby the City acquired properties deemed unfit for human habitation), such structures be left to stand because, while occupants were being displaced, no new houses were being built to accommodate them or the increasing population. In the light of an acute shortage of working-class accommodation, this Department also decided not to list any more buildings for demolition. The report recommended that 'the fundamental need in Cape Town is to carry on with building schemes to make up for the housing shortage and the immediate need is rather a five-year programme of new buildings than for a programme of slum demolition'.<sup>12</sup> Later in the same month, the City Engineer submitted a report which quoted the Medical Officer of Health as saying that for 1931-32 there was already a shortage of 8 000 dwellings and each year another 400

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<sup>11</sup> Pinnock, D.: 'From Argie Boys to Skolly Gangsters' (1979), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence between the City Engineer's Department and Housing and Slum Clearance Committee, 30/10/1937.

dwellings were added to this shortfall. If District Six and the slum area of Cape Town were cleared, a further 2 500 new dwellings would be required. What faced the City Council then was the provision of between 10 000 and 12 000 dwellings for an estimated 50 000 people. A recommendation from the City Engineer's Department as a solution to the housing crisis entailed the adoption of a twelve-year programme.<sup>13</sup> Those who were at the bottom of the housing list would be accommodated, but only in twelve years' time. This meant that they would remain in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions until accommodation became available. The proposed new accommodation would be owned by the City Council, thus making it the biggest landlord in the Union. The Housing and Slum Areas Committee adopted the recommendations of the City Engineer, estimated to have amounted to £500 000 a year, for a thousand houses or flats, plus an additional cost of £80 000 to provide necessary services.

From 1940 onwards, residents of District Six were reportedly being ejected by the City Council to the Cape Flats<sup>14</sup> because of overcrowded conditions in District Six. In the same edition of the Cape Argus, it was reported that, while residents were making their objections felt at the offices of the City Council, the Non-European Unity Forum<sup>15</sup> welcomed efforts by the authorities to 'eliminate the unsightly slums which were such an unfortunate feature of District Six'. It pointed out that the City Council should arrange for a

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<sup>13</sup> Correspondence between the City Engineer's Department and the Housing and Slum Clearance Committee, 30/10/1937.

<sup>14</sup> Cape Argus, 22 June 1940.

<sup>15</sup> The Non-European Unity Forum was inaugurated in April 1938. It was formed on the basis of co-operation between African, Indian and coloured voters in the struggle against the colour bar in South Africa. For more detail, see Goldin, I.: Making Race: the Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa (1987).

scheme which would 'provide for the erection of Municipal flats and houses' to turn the area into a 'modern, properly developed area for the benefit of non-Europeans'.

During the war, the City Council continued its demolition schemes, but by 1941 it had consolidated its report and recommendations and planned to build 160 flats in the vicinity of Constitution Street; 322 flats and a community centre at the Bloemhof Centre; 242 cottages at Maitland; 455 cottages at Bokmakierie; 258 houses at Alicedale; and 26 cottages at Claremont. It also planned to provide 500 flats in Schotsche Kloof eventually.<sup>16</sup> The schemes were aimed at providing accommodation to the unpropertied classes. According to the article, these schemes would give the tenants an opportunity to learn how to live in decent surroundings:

'While climbing the social ladder was a cliché to Europeans, it was a very real and has a rather novel meaning to these people, for them it means the transition from an overcrowded room in the slums, to say a flat or cottage, with only one bedroom and no bathroom, then a home with a bathroom and two or more bedrooms.'

Throughout the 1940s, the City Council desired to stabilise housing conditions, in part to defuse widespread popular protest against the formation of a Coloured Affairs Department. However, municipal housing strategy was also part of housing reconstruction, because overcrowding and rack-renting in the inner-city posed a two-fold threat to white residents who were 'faced with the spectre of epidemics in their midst, and employers were increasingly confronted with demands for higher wages to meet workers' rents. This led to a contradiction between the rent demands

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<sup>16</sup> Cape Argus, 26 July 1941.

of landlords and the need for a cheap labour force'.<sup>17</sup>

Although Indian interviewees were reluctant to discuss the question of landlordism and rack-renting, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Indians made up a substantial portion of the landowning class in Cape Town. An informant, R.W.<sup>18</sup>, recalled that at the end of each week his family and many of the other people in his street would go to the Indian shops and pay their rentals. Another informant, D.M.<sup>19</sup>, said:

'The thing is, these houses belong to Indian people. they rented it out to anyone so long as you paid the rent on time and they didn't do any repairs, all the babbie wanted was money, no complaints they know that if you go, ten other people are waiting for the house, so babbie thought to hell with the tenants.'

From the mid-1940s, landlords who had few qualms about exploiting the scarce housing market were somewhat more restrained due to a combination of factors, such as the greater degree of caution exercised by building societies in granting loans, especially in investment-risk areas; the passing of the Rents Act in 1951, which served to curb arbitrary rent hikes, which in turn had the effect of halting property purchases in mainly working-class areas; and, finally, the passing of the Group Areas Act.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pinnock, D.: The Brotherhood: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town (1984), p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> R.W. interviewed by Z.D., 5/9/1989, is a former resident of District Six who was unemployed for the better part of his life.

<sup>19</sup> D.M., interviewed by Z.D., 6/10/1989, is a labourer from the Salt River area of Cape Town.

<sup>20</sup> Pinnock, D.: The Brotherhood, pp. 49-51.

## INDIAN PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

In the late-1940s, the question of Indian property ownership came under discussion and the Cape Argus<sup>21</sup> quoted Prime Minister Smuts as saying that, although he had not warned the Indian community that the land tenure provisions of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act<sup>22</sup> would be extended to the Cape if they made undue purchases of property in predominantly European areas, he had warned them against provoking undue irritation in the Cape by penetrating European areas. Soon after the publication of the above facts, the Cape Argus launched a scathing attack on middle-class Indians who presumed to wish to live where they could afford to, for the areas concerned were invariably occupied by a majority of whites. This time the National Party representative in Moorreesburg, Erasmus, moved that immediate steps be taken to halt the acquisition of land in urban, village or rural areas anywhere in the Province, arguing that such action was necessary because Indians had failed to heed earlier warnings. He also made available the following statistics of increasing conspiratorial property acquisition by Indians:

'In the period January to June 1946, Indians in the Cape Province had completed 136 acquisitions of land to the value of £180 000. In the following six months, transactions in the Cape Peninsula

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<sup>21</sup> Cape Argus, 5 March 1947.

<sup>22</sup> Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act no. 28 (or the 'Ghetto Act') ensured that the practice of the holding of land by nominees came to an end. This Act stated that, if the controlling shares of a company were held by an Asiatic, such a company could be regarded as Asiatic. No person, other than an Asiatic, was allowed to form an agreement with an Asiatic, except by permit. This Act also offered communal franchise to Indians with white parliamentary representation. This move was rejected by Indians in Natal, who then embarked on another satyagraha campaign. This Act was the major pretext for the Indian government to take the cause of South African Indians to the United Nations.

alone numbered 222 and the property involved was valued at £280 000. In January 1947, Indians acquired property to the value of £430 000, in other words, the tempo had increased to £460 000 from £430 000 in the first month of 1947... they operated systematically purchasing land in European areas which they occupied with the deliberate intention of bringing down the value of adjoining properties.<sup>23</sup>

Erasmus's claim made little financial sense, because fixed property was invested in to generate greater returns if sold in the future, and not to devalue the property in the surrounding areas. His motion was rejected in the House of Assembly, when the Chief Registrar reported that Erasmus's statistics were valueless as the names of Malays and Cape coloureds were often the same as Indian names. (Natal, unlike the Cape, kept a strict register of Indian transfers and property holders.) In his rejection of the motion, Smuts said that registrars were asked to keep statistics of property bought by Indians and that, in the event of large-scale property transactions by Indians, as reported by these registrars, there would be justification for legislation.

D.F. Malan, leader of the Opposition Party, asked why equally stringent legislation as was implemented in the Transvaal and Natal could not be applied to the Cape. He was particularly appalled by the idea that an Indian had almost succeeded in buying a property next to his own in Stellenbosch. Opposition to Indian property transactions was also voiced by the United Party representative of the Cape Flats, who was aghast at the fact that an Indian had bought a building opposite the Cape Town City Hall and that a syndicate of Indians had acquired a number of cinemas for £25 000. He also cited the instance of a sale in Simonstown, where all five properties, including one directly opposite

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<sup>23</sup> Cape Argus, 9 April 1947.

the entrance to the dockyard, had been bought by Indians. The emphasis on Indian property ownership close to 'strategic' sites was calculated to heighten anti-Asiatic agitation and to imply sinister motives on their part.

In defence of Indians, Hassen Mia, Acting Chairman of the Cape Indian Association, released a statement on behalf of Cape Indians in which he suggested that the wild and extravagant statements concerning social penetration and property ownership be put into perspective. The gist of Mia's argument was as follows:

1. In view of the stringency of the Immigration Laws, hundreds of Indian men in Cape Town had married either Malay or coloured women according to the tenets of their religion. Because such marriages were considered irregular, children assumed the status of their mothers, but frequently a large proportion of the land owned by fathers was passed into the hands of these children.
2. A large percentage of land had been bought by one Indian from another, either owing to the impending departure of these Indian settlers to India or due to their precarious financial situation. The acquisition of one Indian's property by another could most definitely not be construed to constitute penetration.
3. Mia also disclosed that very few Indians had bought property from Europeans and, if so, it was mainly in non-European areas.<sup>24</sup>

In the Cape Province, Indians were not legally prohibited

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<sup>24</sup> Cape Times, 19 May 1947.

from buying property, except in East London, where an Asian bazaar was allocated to Indians, both to reside and to trade in.

The election victory of the National Party, based on its drive to entrench racial segregation, as embodied in particular in the Group Areas Act, had profound effects on Indians. With the National Party in power, Indians came increasingly under attack, and by September 1948 the appointment of a commission was announced by the Minister of the Interior to report on the desirability of introducing legislation on the ownership and occupation of property by Asiatics in the Cape. The Cape Indian Congress, led by Ahmed Ismail, took up the cudgels on behalf of local Indians. At a meeting soon after this official announcement, there was general consensus that this move was yet another indication of the government's hostility towards Indians. The general body present also expressed alarm at the government's determination to 'deprive non-Europeans of their rights'.<sup>25</sup> The meeting resolved to ask the Cape Indian Congress to appoint an action committee to combat restrictions of the part of the new apartheid government.

#### POST-GROUP AREAS ACT

In its manifesto prior to winning the election victory, the Nationalist Party spelled out its solution to the "Indian problem". What it proposed was mass repatriation with a call for the boycott of Indian businesses to induce this process. In April 1950, the Union Government introduced the Group Areas Bill which embodied its plans for compulsory segregation of the main racial groups in the country. In introducing the Bill, the Minister of the Interior, Dönges, stated:

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<sup>25</sup> Cape Argus, 27 September 1948.

The Bill does not itself proceed to make the demarcations for these various areas. It merely creates the necessary machinery for doing so over a period of years and in a fair, equitable and judicial manner [Dönges also claimed that it was a non-discriminatory measure] ... the restrictions imposed on the group are also imposed on other groups. Each group surrenders certain of its rights for the common good of all groups. That, I think, is a very important feature of this Bill. I contend that they have no reason to feel concerned about the restrictions of the Bill, because the restrictive provisions of this Bill apply to all.<sup>26</sup>

A controversial guillotine procedure was ruled to limit all readings of the Bill to 52 hours in total.<sup>27</sup>

In March 1961, the Group Areas Bill became an Act and was almost immediately implemented in three of the four provinces of the Union. On account of sheer numbers, Indians in Natal were most adversely affected. In the Transvaal and the Cape, on the other hand, Indians were almost exclusively concentrated in the retail sector and, with the ban on trading in non-Indian areas, these traders suffered hardship and loss. In the Cape, Indians were not the main targets of the Act as was the case in the Transvaal and Natal, which was probably the result of their far smaller numbers in the province. Venter<sup>28</sup> writes that, because Indians were more prosperous than either the 'coloured' or 'African', and because they were concentrated in commerce, the effects of property losses under Group Areas legislation were more easily measurable than in the case of the other two black groups. Furthermore, as Indians had the right to land

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<sup>26</sup> Pirie, G.H.: 'Race Zoning in South Africa: Board, Court, Parliament, Public' (1948), p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Venter, D.J.: 'The Social and Economic Consequences of Group Areas Legislation for the South African Indian Community' (1978) p.2.

tenure, expropriation of property, especially of trading sites, would have a more devastating effect on them than on other blacks because fewer 'coloured' people owned trading sites and 'African' people were not allowed outside of their allocated 'homelands'. Mesthrie writes that after the passing of the Group Areas Act and its' practical implementation in the Cape, a permit system operated. Where there was uncertainty around the right of an individual to trade or reside in a particular area, a permit could be applied for. The effect of the permit system "traumatised individuals in search of a home, it also served to stifle business enterprise. Indians in Cape Town, who were mainly traders, found it difficult to get new premises." <sup>29</sup>

The question of the repatriation of Indians, as advocated at this stage by the Nationalist Party, was stymied because the two countries considered to be vital links in South Africa's strategy made it clear that each was burdened with its own problems associated with its recent independence. However, both India and Pakistan emphasized to the South African Government that, on emigrating to South Africa, those Indians concerned were considered to be settlers in South Africa. To some extent, India took up the cudgels on behalf of South African Indians by approaching the United Nations in the 1940s and 1950s. As was to be expected, resolutions by the U.N. which called for South Africa, India and Pakistan to enter into talks were arrogantly ignored by South Africa.

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<sup>29</sup> Mesthrie, U.S.: 'No place in the world to go to' (1991), p.23

## CAPE INDIANS AND THE GROUP AREAS ACT

In an article in the Cape Times<sup>30</sup> in 1958, a journalist advocated that, for the purposes of the Group Areas Act, Indians in the Cape be classified with Cape coloured people, because they enjoyed, together with the latter, 'all the rights and privileges' and were 'subjected to the same disabilities'. The position of Indians in the Cape was in contrast to that of Indians in either Natal or the Transvaal, where specific legislation governing the lives of this group was passed. The same article continued:

Environmental, educational, conjugal and linguistic factors are fundamentally assisting the social and cultural integration of the Indian community with the coloured group. Should this state of affairs be allowed to continue unhindered, the Indian people, with the lapse of time will completely identify themselves with the coloured community. Generally speaking, Indians at the Cape are politically inactive. The reason no doubt is because they do not wish to incur the displeasure of the authorities, on whose permission, their commercial activities are dependent. Others again, who are originally from India, fear that by taking an active part in the politics, they might become undesirable elements in the eyes of the government and be deported. Under the Groups Areas Act, the Indian people see the sword of Damocles ready to disorganise and disrupt their livelihood, and be compelled to seek other ways of making a livelihood, either by competing in the labour market or seeking other avenues in the economic field. Indians have rendered invaluable services in the commercial field. They have established retail shops among the other sections of the population and have been instrumental in the distribution of essential food and other commodities. Healthy competition among them has made for efficient service and kept prices low. Many, especially among the coloured section of the population are coveting the position currently occupied by Indians in the commercial field, but it is doubtful whether they will be able to take over completely from the

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<sup>30</sup> Cape Times, 4 February 1958.

Indian owing to lack of sufficient businessmen among them. For the Government, the decision will not be an easy one, should they retain the status quo, they will somewhat defeat the aims and objects of the Group Areas Act. Should they however separate the Indian people from the coloured people, they will be perpetuating the identity of the Indians, and the thorny Indian problem.

The question of Indian assimilation was not as simple as the writer of the article believed. The issue of Indian identity and assimilation will be discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation. What the journalist was correct about was that Indians, profoundly affected as they were by the Group Areas Act, never mobilised politically to any great extent to protest against the loss of their homes and their businesses. A perusal of the records of 'Friends of District Six', a pressure group acting on behalf of evicted residents of District Six, failed to reveal any aspecific representation on behalf of Indian residents in the area. Although the attitude of the majority was one of resignation, which feelings were also evident during interviews, some informants said that they realised that, on moving from inner-city Cape Town in particular to the townships, they were better off as far as housing was concerned, although commuting was both time-consuming and tiring.

Those Indians resident in suburbs occupied mostly by whites were the first to be evicted, while those in the inner-city were the last to be resettled. In District Six, for example, after most coloured people had been moved out, Indians were still being moved around since the Department of Community Development had no residences available for them. As late as September 1980, Indians were still being shunted around District Six.

The question of Indian housing was to dog the City Council for years. As long as eight years after the declaration of the Group Areas Act, no area had been proclaimed for Indians in the Western Cape. The National Housing Office in Pretoria wrote to the Town Clerk of Cape Town in 1956 that it would like to avail itself of 'the opportunity to make a friendly yet urgent appeal' to the Council for its cooperation as the whole matter was 'in the nature of things of vital importance'.<sup>31</sup> The Cape City Council was also criticised by the Group Areas Committee for its refusal to take a more active part in the racial zoning of the city. The City Council summed up the reasons for its resistance as follows:

Councillors have considered the question of Group Areas on more than one occasion since the Act was passed. The majority opposed the act because, in their view, it was not inspired by any lofty purpose and constituted a breach of the principles of democratic government. Others opposed it on humanitarian grounds and because it seemed so blatantly stupid to risk disturbing the racial harmony and goodwill which is a happy characteristic of Cape Town, due in no small measure, to the enlightened and liberal attitude of the City Council. In resolving not to become embroiled in the impossible task of Group Areas zoning, the Council has acted according to the wishes and [in] the best interests of the people of the City.<sup>32</sup>

The refusal of the City Council to participate actively in the racial zoning of the Cape Province was perhaps further influenced by the presence of Indian councillors. Despite City Council resistance, the law had to be implemented. With the establishment of the Department of Indian Affairs in 1962, the City Council was compelled to pay closer attention

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<sup>31</sup> Correspondence between the Committee of Inquiry into Housing for Coloureds and Indians (Pretoria) and the Town Clerk, Municipality of Cape Town, 2/7/1959.

<sup>32</sup> Cape Times, 24 August 1956.

to the housing needs of Indians. The delay in the provision of Indian housing was not entirely the fault of the City Council, as the divisions among Indians themselves had contributed to it. The Tamil community, who comprised the bulk of the working class, wanted access to the City Council housing, while the better-off Gujarati and Muslim traders preferred to live in areas where they traded and could afford to buy their own houses.

The friction within the Indian group came to the fore when the City Council decided that, before embarking on any housing scheme in Rylands Estate, it needed to establish exactly what the need was. At the time, the only areas suitable for the development of a housing scheme was the farm 'Doornhoogte' (later renamed Rylands) owned by the Rix brothers and which the City Council had allegedly bought for a large sum in the mid-1960s.<sup>33</sup>

Reacting to the City Council's proposal for the development of a housing scheme for Indians, H.E. Parker, a Cape Town City Councillor and Chairman of the newly-formed Cape Indian People's Alliance (which had been formed to oppose the creation of a Department of Indian Affairs in 1962), released a statement to the effect that Indians were neither in need of a housing scheme nor would they occupy any residences if they were built.<sup>34</sup> The same organisation also wrote to the Town Clerk on 29 June 1962, reiterating its view on the housing proposal. Claiming to be the only representative body of the Indian people of the Cape, it stated that it was entitled to be given the opportunity of appearing 'before your responsible committee to place certain facts before the committee for its kind

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<sup>33</sup> Correspondence between the Town Clerk's Office and the Regional Under Secretary, Department of Community Development, 1/6/1962.

<sup>34</sup> Diamond Field Advertiser, 7 June 1962.

consideration'. In defence of its stand on the housing issue, the letter continued as follows:

For many years now, your Council, in building up its numerous housing schemes, allowed members of the Indian community to reside in them, and as such there was not need for a separate housing scheme for Indians. We feel it is a propitious time to reiterate that the Indian community is diametrically opposed to the Group Areas Act and to the City Council implementing this Act. While there is a need for housing, we feel it is not necessary to create a separate scheme for Indians, and that, they as in the past, be absorbed into these existing schemes.<sup>35</sup>

In the light of the objectives of this organisation, the City Council decided to shelve all plans for an Indian housing scheme in Rylands.

The Council's decision was immediately challenged by the Cape Tamil Institute the moment it was made public:

We of the above institute, which is a welfare organisation, have had discussion with a Miss Clear in connection with the housing problem that confronts the community who are a majority of the poorer class being employed mostly in the catering trade. The Tamil community consists of at least 700 members and we are in dire need of houses, in view of the existing problem. We also wish to state that the Cape Indian People's Alliance do not represent us and that they are a political body and we are in no way connected to politics, and we do not intend participating in politics at all and they have no right to speak for us.

The secretary of the Tamil Institute is also reported to have said that, as a body of working-class Indians, his organisation was anxious to have affordable housing made

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Cape Indian People's Alliance, 296 Hanover Street, Cape Town, to the Town Clerk, 29/7/1962.

available in Rylands and also in Cravenby, a second area designated for Indian occupation. He furthermore added that the Cape Indian People's Alliance was an organisation composed of wealthier Indians, whereas his institute was composed of working-class Indians, the majority of whom were descendants of indentured labourers.<sup>36</sup> This throws light on the broader issue of class divisions within the Indian group, where Tamil-speaking descendants of indentured labourers formed the bulk of the working-class, while Muslim and Gujarati-speaking Hindus dominated the upper echelons of the economic ladder.

Although a housing scheme was not developed on the scale envisaged by the Tamil Institute, by 1964 thirty-five houses had been erected by the Department of Housing, and private owners, too, had begun to build homes in the area. Even though the Department had erected these few houses, and was eager to encourage more Indians to move into the area, there was an almost total absence of infrastructure. This was revealed during a discussion between the Departments of Housing, Community Development and Indian Affairs and other representatives of the City Council. Eleven of the 35 houses constructed by the housing department were vacant because there were neither street lights nor navigable roads. Moreover, an even greater problem precluding settlement in the area as a whole was that of physical attacks on Indians. An official of the Department of Community Development blamed these attacks on what he referred to as the hooligan element. The term was used to denote the coloured and African people who lived in shanty dwellings in the area and were threatened with displacement. In terms of the Slums Act, these dwellings were illegal but, more important, these people now contravened the Group Areas Act and were prosecuted accordingly.

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<sup>36</sup> Cape Times, 18 June 1962.

An informant, A.L.<sup>37</sup>, who had moved into the area in 1957, explained the situation as follows:

When I came here, Rylands was mixed with coloureds and natives. We were all mixed and after two or three years after I came the natives went on their own, the coloureds started selling their land. First I stayed with my sister in Ernest Road, then I rented a house in Johnstone Road, then I rented a room, an outroom you see, back in Ernest Road, Mr Coomander was the landlord and I stayed in Coomander's place and then I got a place in Pine Road, also a shanty house. Rylands was bushy, some places houses, some places not houses,, no roads nicely built. Rylands is more developed now, but before you see coloured people staying there, natives some places all mixed up. But I couldn't see problems. The most Indian people who moved to Rylands were the Hindu people, but I know many Muslim people who bought land and built houses and they rented it out to Tamil people.

These coloured and African people, who had lived in Rylands prior to the declaration of the Group Areas Act, were evicted from the area without alternative accommodation being provided. There was the case of a coloured man, his wife and family who were forced to move into a tent because their permit to live in a wood-and-iron house in Rylands had expired and they could not afford another house.<sup>38</sup> There were also more frequent cases of prosecution against coloured people living illegally in Rylands. Among these was the case of nine coloured persons who were prosecuted and convicted in the Wynberg Magistrates Court for contravening the Group Areas Act. Each was sentenced to a R90 fine or 90 days in jail.<sup>39</sup> The harassment of 'illegals' in Rylands prompted a letter to the editor of the Cape Argus, in which

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<sup>37</sup> A.L. interviewed by Z.D., 5/3/1990, is the owner of a cookery school.

<sup>38</sup> Cape Times, 2 June 1961.

<sup>39</sup> ibid, 19 May 1964.

the writer pointed out that all Indians and some whites were still permitted to occupy their homes and run their businesses in the Athlone area, while coloureds were heavily fined for illegal occupation in the Indian area of Rylands:

If apartheid must be carried out then it must be done with justice, and where we coloured people are the weakest group, we have the right to seek the protection of the Minister of Coloured Affairs and we are entitled to some explanation. Why do some have more privileges than others?<sup>40</sup>

The continued scarcity of affordable housing was highlighted by the Rylands Tamil Institute (formerly the Cape Tamil Institute). This organisation pointed out that plots in Rylands were increasingly being bought up by those Indians who had been evicted from the suburbs and who were in a position to build their own homes. This group of people frequently let out portions of the houses, mostly to those working-class Indians represented by the Tamil Institute. In a petition to the Mayor on 1 July 1969, Naidoo, Chairman of the Institute, wrote:

We in the catering trade find housing a real problem as our earnings are a meagre wage and as the Indian landlords charge us exorbitant rents which we cannot afford, at present we share houses which are uncomfortable in order to supplement the rental. Could you not use your good office by referring the matter to the City Council to build low cost houses for the lower income group. I herewith enclose signatures for housing... .

Among the petitioners was I. Rajen who lived in Ruth Road and worked as a waiter for R15 a week out of which he paid a rental of R36 a month and supported a wife and three children. Then there was the case of Moonsamy, also a

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<sup>40</sup> Cape Argus, 5 January 1965.

waiter, who earned R15 a month, half of which was spent on rental and the rest in support of a sickly mother, a wife and two children.<sup>41</sup> For this group of people, represented by the Tamil Institute, home ownership was a remote prospect without the assistance of the City Council.

In contrast to the Tamil Institute's pleas for very basic accommodation, the United Hindu Association, a body representing the Gujarati Hindus in the Cape, approached the City Council for a site for religious, educational, cultural and charitable purposes. In the late-1960s, this organisation, which had been formed in 1912 to promote Hindu culture in the Cape, was forced to vacate its premises in Newlands and had its property expropriated. In a letter to the Town Clerk in July 1968, the Chairman of the Association wrote: 'We are faced with the problem of accommodation and a site to erect a school, hall-cum-temple, to serve the needs of our community.' Among Indians it was common for each group to articulate its own needs and make representation to the relevant authorities.

From the mid-1960s, Tamil and Gujarati Hindus were moving into the Rylands area and appealing to the City Council for more housing and facilities for cultural and religious institutions. This was in contrast to the large number of Indian Muslims who continued to reside and trade in and around Cape Town. It was this latter group who derived their livelihood from hawking, especially on the Parade. The move to Rylands was almost certainly the death knell as far as their business activities were concerned. Many informants, such as O.C., R.W. and A.L., who had been forced to rent accommodation in Rylands, pointed out that large numbers of the Muslims who had continued to reside in the inner-city were actually the absentee landlords.

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<sup>41</sup> Approximately 70% of the petitioners were waiters, while the remaining 30% were salesmen and drivers.

Some indication of the number of Indian Muslims in central areas of Cape Town can be gleaned from a report on the reaction of people in District Six to the Group Areas declaration. Protest in 1966 took the form of a silent congregation in the various mosques in the area. Three thousand men and boys packed the Muir Street mosque in District Six, while the women stood outside. This particular mosque was frequented almost exclusively by Indian Muslims. The Imam of the mosque, Sheik Najar, said that 'the service of the mosque had been an outstanding success, heightened by the fact that every Muslim in attendance was wearing the red lapel stickers protesting "I am from District Six"'.<sup>42</sup>

A paper by the South African Institute of Race Relations in January 1956 threw useful light on the post World War Two 'position and plight' of Indians in the Cape.<sup>43</sup> According to the paper, 99,4% of Cape Indians were classified as urban and, according to the 1960 census, 17 397 lived in greater Cape Town, with small pockets living in Aliwal North, Barkly West, Cradock, Paarl, Somerset West, Stellenbosch, Victoria East and Worcester. Those Indians in these latter areas were faced with problematic choices when the Group Areas Act was passed. They were told that they would be allowed to continue to trade on their present sites, but would not be allowed to reside in those areas. Commuting between Rylands or Cravenby<sup>44</sup> and their businesses in those areas was impossible. The regional representative of the Department of Community Development informed the Cape Western Regional representative of the SAIRR that 'he had been instructed to

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<sup>42</sup> Cape Times, 28 February 1966.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Position and Plight of Indians in the Cape under the Group Areas Legislation' (South African Institute of Race Relations), 10/12/1956.

<sup>44</sup> A year after the declaration of Rylands as an Indian group area, Cravenby followed, in 1958, as the second area for Indian occupancy.

take an inflexible stand and that all Indians in his area, which stretches from the mouth of the Orange River to Albertina (just short of Mossel Bay), would have to move either to Cravenby or Rylands in Cape Town'.

By the late-1960s, with increasing numbers of Indians being squeezed out of 'specified' areas, the housing situation in Rylands in particular was becoming acute. The demand for housing in Cravenby was less acute, because Rylands was more strategically situated close to the city centre, Athlone and most amenities. In mid-1969, a consultative committee, which included local business interests, was appointed by the City Council for the Rylands area. The legitimacy of this imposed committee is questionable, with most informants recalling that the committee was ineffective. What this committee attempted to do in the early years of its existence was to draw up a report setting out problems in the area.<sup>45</sup> Among these were the following:

- 1 Most houses were occupied by two or more families.
2. Newly-weds or couples contemplating marriage could not find accommodation in Rylands.
- 3 Rents were beyond the means of the average worker. This was, of course, a further factor encouraging sub-letting; in one instance, four families shared a communal bathroom and a single kitchen. Another family shared a single room with four children.
4. Owing to the lack of accommodation, families were forced to occupy shacks vacated by squatters who had moved out of the area.
5. Because of overcrowding and primitive toilet conditions, unhygienic and slum conditions were visible.

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<sup>45</sup> Cape Times, 17 August 1969.

A list of names of people requiring houses was also submitted with the report. The following breakdown according to income was given:

30% earned more than R200 a month;

50% earned about R150 a month;

20% earned about R100 a month.

Despite this report, little response was forthcoming from the relevant authorities to remedy the scarcity of housing for Indians. In February 1971, in a confidential letter to the executive committee of the City Council, the Town Clerk revealed that no further land had been bought from the Department of Community Development for another housing scheme in Rylands. In consequence, the Rylands Civic Association (as the Rylands Consultative Committee had reconstituted itself) became more vocal in its demands for housing, especially in the face of the City Council's delaying of reasonably priced housing. In a letter to the Town Clerk (19/8/1971), the Association claimed that it was inundated with desperate pleas for accommodation and that the crisis was heightened by the removal and resettlement of people as the result of City Council road development projects, especially the construction of the Eastern and Western Boulevards in Cape town.

The Department of Community Development refused to be drawn into any discussion concerning the acute shortage of homes in Rylands; moreover, it reiterated that its primary function was to remove those people residing illegally in 'specified areas' and that the provision of housing was in the hands of the City Council. This latter authority responded by saying that, where Indian housing was concerned, it was ready to implement a housing scheme but that the delay thus far had been caused by the Indians themselves, mainly because no application for houses in

Extension Three, Rylands, had been made. The Chairman of the Housing Committee said that developments could only go ahead once applications were received. A survey by his office showed that 'only a couple of hundred people needed homes'.<sup>46</sup> This was in direct contradiction to the numerous petitions and deputations from individuals and organisations in their bid to make the City Council aware that Indian people were in dire need of affordable housing.

In response to what it considered to be a falsification of the situation by the City Council, the Rylands Hindu Women's Association<sup>47</sup> advised the Chairman of the Housing Committee as follows:

We Indians have waited for years and much longer for houses to be built in Rylands, and that there is a huge demand here. There are quite a few privately-owned houses in Rylands which are being let out, but due to very high rentals, this means that two families have to share one house. It also makes it impossible for the lower class income group to have a home of their own. The authorities should consider the position of the Indian community and pay more attention to the desperate need for houses.

END

#### THE GROUP AREAS - POST 1970

From 1976 onwards, the housing situation became increasingly

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<sup>46</sup> Cape Times, 9 June 1973.

<sup>47</sup> The Rylands Hindu Women's Association was concerned with forming women into a cultural organisation. Although little information is available on this body, save for the correspondence with the municipal authorities concerning the shortage of accommodation in the area, there is some suggestive evidence that the composition of this organisation was mainly working class. Upper and middle-class Indian women were not likely to involve themselves in issues such as housing, because they were largely well-housed.

critical. The problem was aggravated by the increase in the population as well as by the lifting of inter-provincial barriers in 1975, thus permitting Indians from Natal in particular, and to a lesser extent from the Transvaal, to enter the Cape. Statistics are however not available for the number of people who took advantage of this lifting of restrictions.

A more significant reason for the scarcity of housing was that, by the mid-1970s, almost all of the land in Rylands had been bought up by wealthier Indians, who seized the opportunity to buy vacant land because of land scarcity in newly populated areas. In so doing, these speculators inflated the prices of individual plots, making it impossible for a large number of people to buy land on which to build. An informant T.C. made an interesting comparison to highlight the price of land in Rylands in the mid-1970s. Plots in Rylands, he said, were going for between R16,13 and R17,14 a square metre, while in the elite white suburb of Bishopscourt, plots were sold for R8,60 a square metre.

Despite the obvious shortage of economic housing units, the City Council had not built houses in Rylands since 1958 and in 1977, even went so far as to contemplate cutting back on funding for housing by R580 000. According to the Rylands Management Committee, this cutback was in spite of the fact that 1250 persons were clamouring for accommodation.<sup>48</sup> The City Council, in turn, blamed the anticipated cutbacks and lack of funds on the current financial situation and also on competing demands on limited available funds. The plight of desperate working-class Indians in the late 1970s was becoming publicised through the press. In the Sunday Times Extra, the lead paragraph read:

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<sup>48</sup> Cape Times, 27 January 1977.

Rylands Estate, Cape Town's premier Indian township, is a rich man poor man district where the rich get richer and the poor man poorer. The rich live in palatial homes costing up to R150 000 and the poor live in shanty-like conditions, in garages, outhouses, in nooks and crannies because Rylands Estate is vastly overpopulated.<sup>49</sup>

By October 1977, the City Council had recognised that conditions in Rylands had reached crisis levels and funds were made available to redress the situation. In its housing budget, the Council allocated R130 640 for 38 houses in Rylands, while R1 960 770 was allocated for a house for 293 elderly white people and the remainder, amounting to R489 822, for an army house for 63 aged white men and 16 rehabilitated men.<sup>50</sup> This skewed allocation of its housing budget bears testimony to the fact that the City Council had increasingly shifted away from its early position of declared liberalism and was now implementing white constituency policies more in line with those of the Nationalist Party government.

Indians resident in areas other than Rylands or Cravenby were naturally subjected to prosecution. Some Indians who had rented accommodation in Mitchell's Plain were forcibly evicted for living in a coloured group area. The Minister of Community Development, Steyn, threatened to take severe action against landlords who permitted people to occupy premises in contravention of the Group Areas Act. An Cape Argus editorial condemned Steyn for criminalising people who merely sought homes for their families.<sup>51</sup>

From mid-1977, the City Council was forced to allocate more

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<sup>49</sup> Sunday Times Extra, 10 April 1977.

<sup>50</sup> Cape Argus, 13 October 1977.

<sup>51</sup> Cape Argus, 5 March 1979.

funds for sub-economic dwellings in Rylands and its various extensions. In Extension Three, for example, the City Council built 212 economic houses, ranging in price from R11 600 for a single-storey dwelling to R15 800 for a double-storey and, in Extension Five, 143 houses were planned. Despite these moves, the City Council continued to be plagued by the problem of land shortage in Rylands because most of the vacant land in the area was privately owned; consequently, there was a press inquiry into the City council's inability to remedy the situation. It was suggested that the council move towards a system of site rating in which most of the rates be levied on the land, rather than on the building or, as an alternative, that the Group Areas Act be scrapped, thereby dispensing with unnatural controls on the supply of residential land. The article also highlighted an important point, namely that Indian land speculators were actually detrimental to the social development of Rylands because the presence of many empty plots prevented the tarring of roads, the development of commercial sites, street lighting and so on, as the Council was only obliged to provide the amenities where a certain amount of housing development had occurred in a particular street.<sup>52</sup> Although the City Council had partly alleviated the housing crisis at the end of the 1970s by the construction of economic and sub-economic dwellings to accommodate people who had been on its waiting list for years, it was faced with further problems associated with providing accommodation for those Indians forced to move out of District Six.

#### INDIANS IN DISTRICT SIX

Indians resident in District Six were the last to be

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<sup>52</sup> Cape Times, 19 March 1979.

resettled by the Department of Community Development. As recently as 1980, the Department had still not made accommodation available to these people who were forced to live in the Dry Dock area of District Six because the rest of the area had been demolished. The plight of Indians in the area was highlighted in the Cape Herald: 'Indians are being shunted around inside the area because there isn't place for them elsewhere. Indians are being kept in limbo...because there is a serious shortage of low cost housing for them.'<sup>53</sup> The formation of a residents' action committee in an attempt to put a stop to their continuous tramping from one part of District Six to another because of demolition activities was also reported in the Cape Herald<sup>54</sup>. This action was also the catalyst that forced the Department of Community Development to speed up the relocation process.

Relocation stirred up much controversy because the Rylands Management Committee demanded that people who had been on the Council's waiting list, and also those already living in Rylands in rented accommodation, be given priority over those evicted from District Six. The situation was partly resolved by the relevant authorities who built rows of flats in the Gatesville complex bordering on Rylands to accommodate not only former District Six residents, but also those marginalised Indians like the pensioners, widows and families who could prove that they paid more than half their salaries on rentals.

#### THE EFFECT OF THE GROUP AREAS ACT ON INDIAN COMMERCE

Prior to the declaration of the Group Areas Act, the

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<sup>53</sup> Cape Herald, 29 November 1980.

<sup>54</sup> ibid.

majority of Indian trading establishments in the Cape were found in poorer residential areas occupied mainly by coloured and Malay people. Virtually every one of these small shopkeepers had residences attached to their shops, allowing them to live comparatively cheaply as they usually paid a single rental for the shop and residence or, alternatively, a single sum in municipal rates if they owned the property. As we have seen earlier, this arrangement helped to facilitate their economic survival in times of difficulty and accumulation in good trading periods, because they were able to maintain long business hours, call in family assistance when the need arose and also save on travelling time and cost.

As Indians were largely concentrated in commerce, to the exclusion of most other spheres of economic activity, the effects of the Group Areas Act ensured that many of them lost their customary livelihood. The table overleaf indicates the number of white, coloured and Indian people removed from business sites between 1950 and 1975.

Table 3.1

	CAPE	TRANSVAAL	NATAL	TOTAL
Whites	3	8	10	21
Coloureds	38	33	11	82
Indians	139	668	470	1277

The table below indicates the number removed since 1975:

Table 3.2

	CAPE	TRANSVAAL	NATAL	TOTAL
Whites	48	--	12	60
Coloureds	195	48	4	247
Indians	897	2332	552	3781

See: Kharsany: 'A Profile of the South African Business Community.'

It is evident from the above that a disproportionately large number of Indians suffered as a result of this Act. Many of these traders suffered not only because they had been trading in 'coloured' and to a lesser extent in white group areas, but more so because they were never able to bear the cost of relocation. Most of these persons experienced problems with liquidity, higher rentals in the limited number of trading sites in newly proclaimed areas, and also the grim prospect of catering for a reduced clientele widely scattered in Cape Flats townships. Between 1951 and 1960, that is between the time of the declaration of the Group Areas Act and its actual full implementation, commerce lost its place as the most important single employer of Indians who now began to move gradually into the manufacturing sector.<sup>55</sup> Nationally, there was a shift in occupational distribution, but because of the smaller number of Indians and the legal loopholes that existed in the Cape, Indians were able to relocate either to Rylands or to coloured areas in some cases. In order for Indians to trade in the latter, they had to appoint and pay coloured nominees; alternatively, Indian males increasingly resorted to the practice of marrying Malay women and registering the

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<sup>55</sup> Venter, D.J.: 'The Social and Economic Consequences of Group Areas Legislation' (1978), p. 179.

business under their wives' names. An informant, E.K.<sup>56</sup>, explained this practice as follows:

Look, I know lots of Indians who marry Malay women just to get their licence on the wife's name, well look, I even married a Malay woman and registered my business and my house on her name, but don't forget it was my business, I did the work. All my brothers did the same. But of course there were lots of Indians, especially the more old-fashioned, you know, who would never marry anyone but an Indian, those people would maar pay a nominee, I know some coloureds who liked this nominee system because they could just collect their money every month, they don't need to work, easy life, but it was our sweat.

Some Indian traders in the Cape were forced to join the ranks of the working class, but usually as assistants in the shops of other Indians. This downward mobility was very much a result of changed trading patterns. Whereas previously they had managed to operate businesses on a weekly or even on a daily basis, this was no longer possible. Traders were unfamiliar with clients in the new areas, which precluded them from granting credit whereas previously the system had accounted for most of their business. Another factor was that traders were no longer close to wholesalers and the market. An informant, A.P.<sup>57</sup>, summed up his reaction to the downward class mobility as follows:

I was so hurt when I lost my shop and I didn't have the money to open another one, I was just a shopkeeper who managed from day to do with God's help. Now when we had to move, I couldn't, where was I going to get the money. I used to keep penny this, penny that, I traded in a small way, you see, now where can I open a shop in Rylands or somewhere. After I lost the shop I worked for other Indians. Let me tell you, they made me slave for the few pounds a month. And you know, I felt

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<sup>56</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

<sup>57</sup> A.P. interviewed 12/12/1989.

so bad because people don't want to marry a worker's daughter, you know what Indians are like. When I lost my shop and started working, nobody want to know you. We all can't be shopkeepers, someone must work, but I must say I always pray to the Almighty that he lets me open my own shop one day.

To highlight their predicament, traders affected by the Group Areas Act made use of the press. In an article entitled 'Zoning, The Human Story', it was contended that, as a group, Indians in the Peninsula stood to lose the most economically. The article cited the case of the Banderkers, who ran a very lucrative business in Rondebosch and who had been trading in the area since 1879, but who were being threatened with removal. What was of particular concern to the head of this family was the feeling that 'it would be like giving up one's birthright. We have always had customers from the upper groups among the Europeans and it would be virtually impossible to establish a similar business elsewhere.' Like the Banderkers, most other traders in white occupied areas were the first to be served with eviction notices.<sup>58</sup>

The most obvious feature of the Group Areas Act was segregation of the prescribed groups into undeveloped areas. For Indians in particular, the Act had profound economic repercussions because, following the evident antagonism against them since their arrival in South Africa, the Act now threatened not only financial losses but also that of a transmitted way of life. This is most evident from the account of Abbas Ahmed, who used to trade in Claremont, Cape Town:

I have a family of thirteen and my sons could not do anything else but general dealers. They know no

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<sup>58</sup> Cape Times, 26 September 1956.

other profession and have learnt the business from me. The family is completely dependent on the business.

Ahmed added that he perceived the government's action to be a threat which would lead to economic ruin and thereby force Indians back to India and Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> The perception that the effects of the Act would have a debilitating effect on Indians was picked up by the Afrikaans newspaper Die Vaderland, which predictably observed that it was perhaps the ideal time to develop trade among Afrikaners and that this was the ideal opportunity to bring Afrikaner shops into being.<sup>60</sup>

Oral informants who had been affected by the Act spoke with much bitterness about their losses. Consider the case of M.L.<sup>61</sup>, who had run an extremely profitable outfitting concern in Claremont for 25 years, during which time he claimed he was able to buy a new car every two years:

With the passing of the Group Areas Act, I was forced to close down. Imagine I sweated and worked hard for 25 years, all for nothing. Customers were gone, they had to go and stay in other townships. The landlord of my shop, also an Indian, was forced to sell. Group Areas affected me very badly. I had to close the shop because the property was taken over by the Cavendish Square Company. So what happened there was that I lost a lot of money because I couldn't summons clients because these people lived so far now and it was so hard to find them, yet, I tried, but for nothing, so I had to write it off, that ruined me, I was finished. When I lost my business, I couldn't find anything else and I had a family to support. Believe me, you feel like you nothing,

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<sup>59</sup> Cape Times, 9 August 1956.

<sup>60</sup> Seedat, Z.: 'Political Development among the Indian People in South Africa' (1974), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> M.L. interviewed 3/3/1990.

how can you be a man if you can't support you family, I had to go out and work as a waiter, then as a salesman in an outfitting shop for an Indian, then I got a better job as a representative for Sasko Milling Company and few other jobs. I had to, oh yes, then I worked as an insurance salesman for Old Mutual. It was very hard for us. I don't ever wish what I went through even on my worst enemy.

Another informant, E.K.<sup>62</sup>, who had also been profoundly affected, said:

When the "Group" came, they moved all those people where I had my shop, they moved them to Bonteheuwel and Heideveld. When I lost the last customer, I had no business, there was no business at all, now you try to imagine that. I had been making a good living, I wasn't getting rich but just making a living. When the customers were moved, I couldn't even pay my rental. You know I struggled for a long time doing this and that, you know odd jobs and then I thought to myself, "Wait a minute, these people ruined me, so I'm going to break the law". I just decided to try and get something going in Heideveld, of course I know it was illegal for an Indian to trade in a coloured area, but I thought, "To hell with you, I'm going to get a shop in Heideveld and be able to hold my head up high". I also realised that other Indians were getting into the coloured areas for business so I said, "Why not me too, if they are caught and dumped in jail, then I'll be one of them". You must know that by now I was ready to try anything because I lost everything and like they say, a drowning man will clutch at anything, so I took the chance. Licence being on the name of a coloured person, but in actual fact, I was the man running the business. We had a lot of inspectors calling on us, but there was nothing they would do. We were not stealing, hell, we were working hard to earn a decent living. We were taking over shops which the coloured people then could not make a go of, many became nominees for us. Some of the inspectors at the time even said, "Ja, ons weet wat gaan aan, maar gaan maar aan".<sup>63</sup> There

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<sup>62</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

<sup>63</sup> 'Yes, we know what's going on, we know, but go on.'

were so many Indians who even reclassified to Malay or married Malay women so that they could open shops in coloured areas. You see the government expected all of us to move to Rylands, but it is hopeless to earn a living there. They thought they could just sit around a table and decide where we must live, how we must earn a living, where we should open our shops, nee man ['no, sir'], that's not how it should be. To my dying day I will remember how I had to close my shop in town and I couldn't even pay the rent for the last few months, no customers, so no business, you understand. The shame I felt, I used to feel like crying because I felt so much shame, I was always so proud that I always paid my rent and the merchants on time, for sixteen years. They harmed us very badly.

The alternative trading sites in Rylands referred to in the testimony of this informant were wholly inadequate to absorb all the affected traders; moreover, by 1957, the area was fast becoming overtraded in proportion to its population. There were nineteen fruit and grocery stores, two butcher shops, two hairdressers, three dairies, four shoemakers, six dry-cleaning depots, one fish and chips shop and one draper, and all this still left an additional 700 traders to be relocated.<sup>64</sup>

A member of the Indian Traders' Association said:

We rely wholly on a coloured and European clientele to keep ourselves in business. If we all have to move to our Indian group area, it would mean disaster for all of us. There would be no customers. In fact, there would be more traders than customers. Most Indian traders catered for coloured people, and the value of their trade and their properties in the Peninsula ran into millions of pounds.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cape Argus, 9 July 1957.

<sup>65</sup> Cape Times, 22 September 1957.

Evictions of Indian traders from customarily coloured areas were undertaken gradually and some were able to obtain permits, which acted as a reprieve, if only temporarily. Many of the traders realised that, with the vast numbers of clients being removed to the Cape Flats, it was hopeless for them to keep businesses in declared areas, and many followed their clients into the coloured areas in the 1960s and early-1970s. This was in fact illegal but, as stated by an earlier informant, it was tolerated by officials. As an alternative to problems encountered by Indians in finding sites to trade, the then Minister of Community Development, P.W. Botha, announced in 1961 that a strip of the Cape Town/Woodstock area would be allocated as a mixed Group area for traders only. Some of the Indian and all the Chinese traders from affected areas throughout the Peninsula would be given preference in this multi-racial zone. Botha's announcement was greeted with less than the anticipated enthusiasm and gratitude. An Indian businessman described the area as follows:

A filthy slum district, where existing traders are already struggling to make a living. The area is stone-dead from a business point of view. As a sort of haven for displaced Indian, Chinese or any other businessmen, it would be utterly useless. For the small businessman looking for a place to set up shop, it is a hopeless proposition from the start. For that sort of trade you need a reasonable residential area close by. This particular area is for the most part a slum and a filthy one at that.<sup>66</sup>

#### CONSEQUENCES OF THE GROUP AREAS ACT FOR THE MARGINALISED TRADER

For the small businessman, the Act was devastating. The

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<sup>66</sup> Cape Argus, 30 August 1961.

reason for this is that the cost of relocation and restarting a business from scratch was unaffordable. This had very directly resulted in the monopolisation of the retail trade by a handful of larger, wealthier traders. It has resulted in centralising Indian trade and industry, and consequently Indian economic power into fewer hands. In the Western Cape, a large supermarket has dominated the entire grocery trade in Rylands.

For marginalised traders, eviction from business sites was the direct cause of their financial demise. They had usually traded with small amounts of capital, employed family labour, 'carried low stocks and depended upon a quick turnover'.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned earlier, it was also the credit system which was their mainstay in business. An informant, B.G.<sup>68</sup>, stated quite emphatically that even to attempt to reconstruct former business structures and methods would be nearly impossible:

Face the facts, imagine trying to get a whole new clientele, first of all you would have only recently moved into the area, you don't know these people, they don't know you. Trust has to be built up and that could take months, years even. We lived in District Six for donkey's years. We knew people, now you move into a new area, you must first establish trust, and the way I see it, the first year you make it, great; but you can also go bust in the first few months. Let me tell you, a lot of the guys from District Six never went back into business. They couldn't afford to open up new businesses elsewhere. I know of many who had to go out and work, yes, including me because otherwise it would have costed them goodwill, it would have costed them high rentals which they couldn't afford, we never had the kind of capital to invest in that kind of business. But some poor blokes

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<sup>67</sup> Ginwala, F.N.: 'Class, Consciousness and Control' (1974), p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> B.G. interviewed by Z.D., 5/8/1988, is the owner of a small watch-repair shop.

tried to reopen their business in Gatesville<sup>69</sup>, but were simply unable to manage. It was tough, after we lost our shop my father couldn't get anything, because we couldn't afford it, so he started working from home, fixing watches, anything to keep us going. I too was forced to go out and work, I went to work at the Tedelex factory in Parow.

The losses incurred by parents and grandparents as a result of the Group Areas Act have had the effect of diversifying the employment and occupational choices of younger generations in particular. Instead of leaving school after basic literary skills had been acquired, children (especially sons) have been encouraged increasingly to enter the professions. Less conservative parents have allowed their daughters to enter the job market, but frequently members of this group are required to terminate their careers upon marriage. An interesting question for the future would be whether Indians would invest in property to the same extent as they did prior to the Group Areas Act in view of the lifting of restrictions on ownership of trading and residential sites. Those informants to whom the question was posed answered almost unanimously that they would be reluctant to relocate once more and that the high property prices would also be a deterrent.

#### INDIAN HAWKERS IN THE CAPE

Besides affecting shopkeepers adversely, the Group Areas Act also affected yet another group of traders, namely the hawkers who derived their living from selling fruit and vegetables on the Grand Parade in Cape Town. Most of this group lived in the vicinity of the Muir Street Mosque in District Six. The rezoning of District Six made it

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<sup>69</sup> Gatesville borders on Rylands and is both a residential and shopping area.

economically unprofitable for this group of people, to be forced to trade elsewhere as they were subject to problems of transport and storage. Previously, most of these hawkers could be at the Sir Lowry Road early-morning market by daybreak, because it was only a short distance from their homes in District Six. After buying fresh produce, they were able to store it in rooms attached to their residences until the Parade was open for business. Goods were then simply taken over, sometimes by pushcart, because of the short distances involved. This pattern could not be maintained when these hawkers were forced to move to Rylands, with the result that most of them gave up this trade. A.O.<sup>70</sup> explained the situation as follows:

A lot of the hawkers had to go, I think that was because most of the customers were gone. The Parade was dead, so it was really not feasible any more. All of my family were hawkers but on moving to Rylands, how could they travel up and down like that, and you must remember too that hawkers didn't make much profit on the fruit and vegetables, so they couldn't really go on. My father left the hawking business and went to work in my uncle's shop. Some of my uncles too left the business and it's actually sad to see that they never really quite settled into other professions.

#### THE ORIENTAL PLAZA

In an attempt to 'assist' shopkeepers who could not afford to restart businesses once evicted, the Department of Community Development planned a multi-million rand shopping complex for the end of the 1970s. Even before the project was completed in 1980, strong condemnation was levelled against the Department. More than assuaging resentment at removals, it infuriated the business community because it

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<sup>70</sup> A.O. interviewed by Z.D., 3/3/1988, is a nurse.

was designed expressly for Indian occupation and, furthermore, because it was built on an old District Six site.

In attempting to house Indian traders from the Peninsula under one roof, the Oriental Plaza was also intended as an exotic tourist attraction similar to the Indian market in Durban. Low rentals were offered to traders in an attempt to induce them to occupy the available shops. Dissociating itself from the scheme, the Western Cape Traders Association made it clear that, as a representative body of traders in the Peninsula, it strongly condemned the building of the complex for one group only:

'The shopping centre must be for all businessmen. District Six has had people of all groups living and trading there. Why were black businessmen forced to leave District Six in the first place? Now the Department of Community Development wants some of them back again. It is wrong.'<sup>71</sup>

Faced with eviction notices and with no alternative sites available, some of the remaining traders in District Six allowed themselves to be cajoled into accepting premises in the Plaza. The Cape Times reported that a number of the traders in District Six alleged that the Department had promised them homes in Rylands if they accepted offers to occupy the Plaza.<sup>72</sup> One trader recalled that officials of the Department were simultaneously delivering eviction notices together with application forms for premises in the Plaza. These traders were obliged to ignore the call by the Traders Association not to accept the Department's offer in a racially exclusive shopping centre. In interviews with

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<sup>71</sup> Sunday Times, 8 October 1978.

<sup>72</sup> Cape Times, 10 September 1979.

traders in the Plaza, they admitted that they had been manipulated by the Department, but explained that they had been left little choice because high rentals had made successful relocation virtually impossible. In the Plaza, they paid as little as five rand a month, and one informant, A.P.<sup>73</sup>, recalled that for the first six months traders were allowed to occupy premises rent-free:

Look, even today [12/12/1989] I still pay twelve rand for this shop, now you tell me, where would I get a shop for that? I know people call this a white elephant and all that, but at least I have a shop. To get a shop in Rylands...forget it, the rent will kill me. So, yes, I took a shop here and I know that the Western Cape Traders Association were totally against this, but I had little choice, I had to earn a living.

It was a rather ironic twist in the history of segregation in South Africa that the evicted were now offered a select shopping centre, which was also calculated to attract tourists. Parallels can be drawn between the creation of so-called Oriental Plazas in District Six, Fordsburg in Johannesburg, and the Plaza in East London. In all three cases, the shopping centres were erected after mass evictions from usually mixed areas such as District Six, Mayfair/Pageview and North-End. The intention of the planners of these plazas was for these shopping centres to cater for tourist consumption, but the isolated location and the lack of ancillary facilities in the Cape in particular made these financially unviable. The seasonal nature of tourism and the fact that even locals who could shop there have limits to frivolous consumption have contributed to the non-viability of these shopping centres.

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<sup>73</sup> A.P. interviewed 12/12/1989:

## CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNITY IDENTITY: THE CASE OF INDIANS IN THE WESTERN  
CAPE

Various local definitions of the term community have been espoused and usage has ranged from that of the radical left waging a liberation struggle to that of the Nationalist Government justifying its apartheid ideology. The far right has also not been immune to the more than occasional use of the concept, especially in its attempts to raise fervour among its constituents to counter what its leaders have perceived to be an impending threat to the cultural and political rights of the Afrikaner people.

Ramphele and Thornton, in particular, have provided a useful and interesting analysis of the concept, pointing out that in South Africa the term is commonly used as a euphemism for race.<sup>1</sup> In their respective analyses of the concept, Bozzoli<sup>2</sup> and Williams<sup>3</sup> write that, for most people, the idea or term community conjures up positive images:

Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important perhaps is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.), it seems never to be used unfavourably.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thornton, R. and Ramphele, M.: 'The Quest for Community' in Boonzaaier, E. and Sharp, J. (eds): South African Keywords (1988), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Bozzoli, B: 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict: South African Perspectives' (1983), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, R.: Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1983).

<sup>4</sup> ibid, p. 76.

John Sharp<sup>5</sup>, too, writes in the same vein that 'community is the ideal for the future, the structure of utopia, the expectation of heaven, the legitimate goal for a truly democratic politics'. Despite all these analyses, the above-mentioned studies are premised on the assumption that communities do exist in reality. Benedict Anderson, on the other hand, asserts quite the opposite by saying: 'All communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined'. He adds that 'communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Anderson argues, communities or nations are the creation of active intellectuals and ideologists. In the South African context, cases abound in support of this argument, not least of all the attempts made by 'Indian' organisations such as the Natal Indian Congress and Transvaal Indian Congress to mobilise the Indian 'community' under the leadership of a professional elite. To discount either view would, in fact, be to ignore the variables with which a concept such as community ought to be analyzed, because the process of community formation is a result of several intertwined processes. These include interventions by the state to create groups and nations as building blocks for apartheid structures, as well as initiatives by the oppressed to constitute oppositional communities. Hence both sets of activities need to be analyzed.

Earlier chapters have discussed the discrimination levelled at Indians as a group but, simultaneously, attempted to highlight divisions within this community. Fundamental cleavages which originated in India - for example religion,

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<sup>5</sup> Sharp, J.: 'Culture: A Contemporary Definition' in Boonzaaier and Sharp: South African Keywords, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, B.: Imagined Communities - Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (1983), p. 15.

language and caste - have divided this group of people. Muslim passenger Indians, for example, effectively distanced themselves in the late 1800s from the larger body of Indians in South Africa by referring to themselves as Arabs. This perception was influenced by an awareness of their skin pigmentation, religion and better economic position vis-à-vis the indentured workers. In an undated publication, an organisation purporting to represent all Indian traders and merchants in South Africa, the Indian Chamber of Commerce, implored the authorities to reassess their attitude to the Indian merchant class: 'It is sometimes not sufficiently recognised that there are social grades among Asiatics as among Europeans ...they (the merchants) live in commodious and well-appointed residences in various parts of town'.<sup>7</sup> Ginwala<sup>8</sup> writes that, in Natal and the Transvaal especially, the flowing robe worn by Muslims served as the identification of their class: 'By mutual agreement, the police did not stop and demand passes from those dressed in robes or harass them for breach of curfew regulations to which all Indians were subject'. Any identification with 'lower-class' Indians was to be spurned and it was hoped that the authorities would take heed of these differences and treat the wealthy merchant class more favourably. For purposes of legislation, this was the case as both passenger and indentured Indians were governed by different sets of rules; the former, by the general body of laws governing all immigrants while the latter suffered under the tyranny of their employers as well as being governed by legislation

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<sup>7</sup> The Indian Chamber of Commerce represented a small section of very wealthy merchants in Natal and the Transvaal. Its politics was accommodationist, and its members went to great lengths (and expense) to demonstrate that the members of this organisation were willing to accept Western standards of living. Its publication, The Indian Trader (n.d) contains numerous pictures of Indian-owned homes which closely resemble those of the English colonialists.

<sup>8</sup> Ginwala, F.: 'Class, Consciousness and Control' (1985), p. 11.

under the auspices of the Protector of Immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

From 1900, changes began to manifest themselves in the legislative processes affecting Indians. Legislators had begun formulating and implementing uniform discriminatory legislation affecting all classes of Indians, who were now treated as an undivided mass. One possible explanation for this turn of events is that it was becoming increasingly evident that the Indian trading sector as well as the number of ex-indentured workers was making greater inroads into the retail, wholesale and farming sectors respectively.<sup>10</sup> This success aroused the ire of the white commercial element who, in turn, exerted pressure on the government to halt this process. The depression following the South African War was also a factor contributing to the increasing restrictions on Indians. Important to note here is that Indians in Natal and the Transvaal reacted differently to the forces affecting them than did Indians in the Cape. Owing to their smaller numbers, the latter group were not governed by any distinct body of laws, except for the provisions pertaining to prohibited immigrants. Indians in the Cape also enjoyed a more privileged political position to that of Indians in Natal and the Transvaal because, for purposes of the law, they were governed by the same set of rules governing the Cape coloured - that is, they had the municipal vote as well as the franchise until 1956 (albeit a qualified vote for males only).

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<sup>9</sup> Protector of Immigrants: This office was created under pressure from India on the Natal authorities, and its purpose was to ensure the well-being and proper government of indentured labourers.

<sup>10</sup> Maureen Swan writes that the ex-indentured became involved in market gardening, hawking and fishing, primarily because it required little initial capital, but more importantly because the 'ex-indentured population had easy access to credit', the source of which was the Indian merchant class who are said to have charged high rates of interest. See Swan, Gandhi: The South African Experience, p. 23.

As we have seen, immigration and settlement here followed a chain pattern and settlers attached themselves to kin or members of their kutum (caste or extended family) already resident in the Colony. One of the early Indian settlers in the Cape, M.N.<sup>11</sup>, characterised this pattern as follows:

Look, when we came you were just a stranger here, you know no one here except for your uncle or father and also the other few people from your village and maybe from the village where your mother came from, because we used to go to my mother's village to visit family, but when we came here, we were all so frightened, you understand, it was a new place, a different kind of life, so what do you do, you keep to your own kind, you feel better then, we used to keep each other company, go out sometimes but slowly we became more brave.

In response to the question about his contact with Indians other than his family during the early years of settlement, L.G.<sup>12</sup> replied:

Well look, our religion was very important to us and those other Indians were different religions. When we saw them we greeted them, we were civilized people you know, but we never had what you call social contact, oh no, we eat different food, pray different, but we can talk to each other because some of us speak a similar language. Sometimes if we go to their shop or they come to our shop then we used to talk, in the school too we used to play, but mostly we stick to our own people, you see. I must say at that time all the Indian people were not like one, I feel that the Hindus and the Muslims like to keep to themselves and they just mixed with their own, we did not know each other because Indians we don't mix with them and they don't mix with you too. For business reasons we only mix, we take our shoes to them to be fixed and they do the job, sometimes we talk

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<sup>11</sup> M.N. interviewed by P.V., 29/8/1989, is a 78-year old shopkeeper, resident and trading in Rylands.

<sup>12</sup> L.G. interviewed 8/8/1989.

about this and that and they come to us to buy groceries and also fruit and vegetables but a lot of Hindus had shops too then they support their own. I feel you must support your own kind first because it sometimes happens, you go to your people, the other Indians are not your family so how can you go to them for help?

In reply to the same questions posed to M.N., another informant, E.K.<sup>13</sup>, said:

I remember my father and uncle used to talk that when they came here, things were so different from today, today we [are] more open, we [are] less prejudiced, then our people were so afraid, they were new in the country, they felt that if they put one foot wrong they will be sent right back to India and I am sure that you have heard stories about what life was like back then, so these early Indian settlers kept very much to themselves. The Muslims kept to themselves and also the Hindus, but I must add that, you see in the early days we Indian Muslims had no Mosques or anything and so we had to mix with the Malay people because we have a common religion but over time we built our own mosque in Muir Street. I must say that then the Indian people just mixed with their own, but look I don't mean to sound like I am anti-Hindu but they were a very tight community, hardly talked to us, they just stuck together, but that was probably because they were so few in number and as young as I was then, I remember with the Gujarathi people, even the different castes don't mix too much, they won't drink tea at the other's house. We Muslims, we mixed with the Malay people, because we used to meet in the mosques, then you may meet on the street, or they come to the shop, and Islam always preaches brotherhood and over time we mixed more frequently with them. Yes, you asked me about whether we mixed with other Indians. You know there wasn't a lot of contact with the Indian waiters and barmen, we hardly mixed, they used to buy from our shops but like you know they serve alcohol and they also drink, so we can't mix, we Muslims must keep away from people who drink. Even with the Hindu people they would never eat with us because even though our mutton is halaal, you see they don't eat beef,

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<sup>13</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

most of them were vegetarian, and from my experience in school, these Hindu children think we [are] dirty because we eat meat, so that's how we also kept apart but there were no problems as such, no fighting or anything, you see, I see it this way, where there was too much ignorance, we didn't know enough about them and they didn't know much about us, our ways, our eating habits, our religion, and that kind of thing, but there was a respect for each other, no doubt about that.

In a study of Indian Muslims in the Cape, Hill<sup>14</sup> writes that ethnic-based activities should be seen, not as a reactionary failure to change, but as perhaps a natural reaction to a new environment. According to her, a more pertinent reason for ethnic entrenchment during the early years of settlement was:

The impact of the arrival of women and children was that suddenly ethnic enclaves appeared. The women were not familiar with the culture symbols of a new environment and continued to utilise their own ... especially when the women were housebound and thus presented with little opportunity for learning other customs and values, the domestic domain acted as an encapsulating unit.

All of the above information suggests that, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, Indians in the Cape had formed themselves into pockets comprising members of particular caste, family and religious groups, all of whom were concerned with matters of a parochial nature, particularly as regards the issue or non-issue of trading licences. Few informants recall any early decisive events in the political arena, nor were they particularly concerned with events in Natal and the Transvaal where Indian merchants had been mobilising politically since the 1890s and where the Natal

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<sup>14</sup> Hill, R.A.: 'The Impact of Race Legislation on Kinship and Identity among Indian Muslims in Cape Town' (1980), p. 9.

Indian Congress had been formed in August 1894. Owing to the close connection between merchants in Natal and the Transvaal, politics in the latter region followed very much the same ideology as in Natal. The British Indian League and the South African Indian Association were the two principal political organisations in the Cape at the turn of the century. The League's approach to Indian politics, Bradlow<sup>15</sup> writes, was less militant than that of the Association. Despite its claim to be the representative body of Indians in the Cape, it was the Association which petitioned the authorities to investigate the grievances of Indians here, hence the appointment of a Select Committee in 1908.

An organisation called the Cape British Indian Council (hereafter CBIC) was also in existence by the 1920s. Although little information is available on the origins of this organisation, judging from the name of office bearers as set out in a letter to the Indian Opinion<sup>16</sup>, most members appeared to have been Indian Muslims. The letter referred to is interesting because it was a call by the CBIC in the mid-1920s for a national conference to be held. The letter reads as follows:

In view of the disabilities and inconvenience which burden the Indians it has been decided to call together delegates from the whole of South Africa ... as matters affecting us all will simply drift and remain in their present unsatisfactory conditions unless we join hands and lay our troubles before the authorities. It is to be borne in mind that the main object for which we are striving is to raise the status of His Majesty's subjects and this desirable and praiseworthy end will never be attained until we put our grievances in a united and resolute manner.

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<sup>15</sup> Bradlow, E.: 'The Cape Community during the Period of Responsible Government' in Pachai, B (ed.): South Africa's Indians: The Evolution of a Minority (1979), pp. 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Indian Opinion, 7 June 1918.

As a result of this call, organisations from the three provinces met in Cape Town and formed the South African Indian Congress. It was J.X. Merriman, former Prime Minister of the Cape, who opened the conference. Members of the CBIC present at the conference expressed a debt of gratitude to Merriman who, they said, had ensured that their conditions at the Cape were superior to those in Natal and the Transvaal, save for the disturbing actions of the local authorities in refusing to grant them trading licences. The resolutions made concerned the merchant class and not what Swan calls 'the underclasses'. Among these resolutions were those concerning the right of franchise (or lack thereof in Natal and the Transvaal); the problems encountered by traders in obtaining licences in the Cape; as well as problems experienced in the importation of rice from India.

In view of the greater disabilities suffered by Indian merchants in Natal and the Transvaal, it is interesting to note that the initiative for national unity came from the CBIC. Pahad writes that the position of Indians in the Cape was more favourable than that of those in the other provinces, 'especially because they were not subjected to substantial local pressures and were thus perhaps not so immersed in their own problems... Moreover, the Cape had the smallest Indian population and therefore would have felt that their grievances were better articulated on a broader basis'.<sup>17</sup> Owing to the paucity of information on the CBIC, it is difficult to decide whether the call for unity was motivated by expediency, as Pahad suggests, or by a genuine desire for unity. An article in the Cape Argus<sup>18</sup> infers that the CBIC may perhaps not have enjoyed as much support among Cape Indians as it attempted to project. The article

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<sup>17</sup> Pahad, E.: 'The Development of Indian Political Movements in South Africa' (1972), p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Cape Argus, 28 February 1929.

referred to above concerned the policies of the CBIC regarding the condonation scheme (see Chapter 1). The Cape Indian Vigilance Committee, formed expressly around the issue of condonation, lashed out against the CBIC who had claimed to act on behalf of all Cape Indians in supporting the government's initiative of expelling illegal residents from the Cape Colony.

Different factions among Indian residents of the Cape were drawn into this conflict, each resorting to the columns of the daily papers in its attempts to articulate and clarify its point of view. For example, Ahmed Ismail, Chairman of the CBIC, discounted the alleged support that the Vigilance Committee claimed to have and, furthermore, reiterated that his organisation was the official representative of all Indians in the Cape.<sup>19</sup> The same issue of this daily carried letters to the editor from A. Hamied and Daya G. Patel. The former viewed with alarm the suggestion made by this newspaper that the local Pathan community was acting against the CBIC and the SAIC on the question of condonation, and reaffirmed its support for these organisations. In conclusion, the letter urged '... my Indian compatriots who are really affected by the condonation scheme to accept it', adding that 'by accepting this scheme our duty as honourable Indians of an honourable and ancient country will be further enhanced by our determination to act as good South Africans of true Indian descent'. In the other letter, Daya Patel, writing on behalf of the United Hindu Association, went to great lengths to affirm his organisation's support for 'the sponsors of the condonation scheme; the Union Government; the Right Honourable Sastri and the SAIC'.

Press coverage of the issues and parties concerned was grossly biased, and one report discounted the Vigilance Committee's opposition as being merely due to personal

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<sup>19</sup> Cape Argus, 14 September 1928.

differences at the leadership level, claiming that the 'CBIC are sponsors of the scheme and the Vigilance Committee dislike the scheme because they dislike the Council'.<sup>20</sup> The CBIC continued to receive press coverage, especially in response to its welfare deeds, such as helping to raise funds for the Muir Street Indian School. A report quotes Ismail as saying:

Now that the condonation question was no burning one, the present era of Indian welfare in South Africa should be dominated by constructive purposes, thereby enhancing the Indian name in more than one degree. On this policy alone was the future of the council to be secured ... compatriots to take a more energetic interest in Indian and South African affairs, during the past year the Council had played no mean part in trying to cement amicably the divisions of forces and opinion among the local Indian public. Only by co-operation and goodwill would the community succeed in obtaining its legitimate demands.<sup>21</sup>

Ahmed also urged his supporters to take an active interest in the SAIC, the official Indian representative body in South Africa, which was also affiliated to the Indian National Assembly in India. Ahmed's pleas ignored the fact that this organisation was 'an amorphous organisation of the richer and more educated sections who were cut off from their own people ... the political vehicle of an established upwardly mobile middle-class'.<sup>22</sup> Many older informants recalled being virtually untouched by the political events or the call for political mobilisation made by the Cape

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<sup>20</sup> Cape Argus, 31 August 1928.

<sup>21</sup> Cape Times, 6 December 1929.

<sup>22</sup> Pahad, E.: 'The Development of Indian Political Movements in South Africa' (1972), p. 20.

Indian Congress.<sup>23</sup> M.V.<sup>24</sup> remembers:

I don't know about all this political stuff, I remember now and then something will happen and these people have meetings and all that. But I have one policy, I mind my own business and keep to myself. This chap Ismail and his people they were rich, they could afford to leave their businesses, they had people working for them, Ismail could go up and down the country, talking, preaching, because he had the money to do that kind of work, I can tell you that the majority of Indians had no time for that. We had to earn a living, if we got into that kind of thing, the politics then who was going to open our shops and stand in the shop the whole day. That time politics was for the rich people, you see I had my shop licence and I was resident of Cape Town, so why must I get involved and make trouble for myself. I just went about my business, in the evenings I read my newspaper and go to sleep. Well, look, sometimes when we have meetings, I was a member of the United Hindu Association, so we talk, but we want no trouble you see. Most of my friends and relatives too did the same thing, we know maybe we get involved in this politics business and the board can take away your licence, you know and then will Ismail feed my family, I remember these chaps had an office in District Six, Tyne Street, I wanted nothing to do with the big boys, I leave them alone and they leave me alone, don't you agree? I also remember in the early days, this chap Abdurahman, he was a doctor you know, he used to speak at these meetings and tell all the coloured people that they must have unity and all that, but we different, coloured people's problems was different from our people's.

Evident from the testimony of the informant quoted above, as well as from the quotes from various newspaper sources, was the highly sectarian nature of politics in the Cape. This was due, in part, to the fears that plagued many first-

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<sup>23</sup> The CBIC was reconstituted as the Cape Indian Congress (CIC) and was affiliated to the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) at a national level.

<sup>24</sup> M.V. interviewed 9/8/1989.

generation immigrants who lived in dread of being deported, even though this was legally impossible if they had obtained citizen rights. Furthermore, informants spoke of adhering closely to kin, caste and religious groups. Studies of ethnic and minority groups emphasized that 'it is a feature of minority groups that they develop a strong sense of belonging, a "we-feeling" or group consciousness as a result of the fact that they are singled out for differential treatment or as a result of self-consciousness of differences and a valuation of identity on the basis of religious, historical and/or ideological factors'.<sup>25</sup> Group consciousness is strengthened upon immigration precisely because, in the South African context, all Indians were and are treated as a homogeneous group, thus obscuring class, religious and caste cleavages. Yet, there is also a sense in which Indians in South Africa have formed themselves into an ethnic community because construction along ethnic lines manifested itself more strongly in the face of hostility, particularly as the result of discriminatory legislation with which all Indians had at some level to contend. Ethnic consciousness has been mobilised as a reaction to the forces pressing on this group. Indeed many Indians have not resisted this state-imposed identity: for the poor Indian, for example, who would rank among the working class, the adoption of an ethnic identity has been advantageous in a state that actively propagates a racial hierarchy. In an article cited in the Anglo-American journal, Optima, Pat Poovalingam, who later joined the President's Council, retaliated against the disdainful references regarding Indian separateness, saying that not only was this not a fault, but 'as the Jews have found in other bigoted societies, a community in such straits may develop an ethnocentrism that may ossify with time, but there comes

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<sup>25</sup> Brand, C.M.: 'Solidarity Patterns in a Minority Group: A Study of the Indian Community of the Cape Peninsula' (1966), p. 7.

with it an inner sustaining strength to hold at bay and to survive the pressures threatening to overwhelm it'.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnic national organisations, such as the SAIC, were urging the government throughout the 1920s and 1930s to remove inter-provincial barriers because they could not 'in each of the provinces be shut into water-tight compartments'.<sup>27</sup> This sentiment was expressed by Natal representatives, in particular, who felt that if Indians were allowed to migrate to the Cape, for example, then substantial pressure would be eased in that province, especially as regards the job prospects of migrants. In his address at the Annual SAIC Conference in 1935, the president of the SAIC, O.H.A. Jhaveri, said that structures within the Indian community in the various provinces would facilitate the absorption of migrants if provincial barriers were lifted. Moreover, he urged Indians to bear in mind that, as a community, they could not raise 'their standards of living unless... given full opportunities to do so'. He added, 'We plead for these opportunities and for the removal of racial discrimination ... if legislation causes hardship, attempts at self-protection are almost inevitable.'

The reaction of delegates from the Cape Congress would have been interesting if recorded, because Indians here enjoyed a more privileged position precisely because of their small numbers, and any influx of Indians from either the Transvaal or Natal would have structurally altered this position. Moreover, divorced from other Indians due to provincial barriers, Cape Indians did not perceive themselves to be part of the larger South African Indian 'community', save for within the political realm; and even within this sphere,

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<sup>26</sup> Graphic, 20 June 1979, was a Durban-based weekly published mainly for an Indian readership.

<sup>27</sup> SAIC Annual Conference, 17-18/2/1935, at the Parsee Rustomjee Hall, Durban, 17-18 February 1935.

it was a particular group of individuals who participated while the mass of Cape Indians, despite qualifying for the vote, expressed little interest in politics.

A scathingly sarcastic letter which appeared on the editorial page of the Cape Indian in the 1920s, suggesting the following:

If the Indian of the Cape recognised that he is a citizen of South Africa, then it seems he recognises his obligations as such all the better. To fulfil the latter, there is the great work of rearing the superstructure yet to be taken in hand. Having admitted and declared the citizenship of this land, Indians cannot afford to be vegetating on their past glory of India and sink in despondency. They must be up and going each and everyone to bring about the utmost uniformity. Charity begins at home. The other provinces have their leaders and know what is best for them. Indians at the Cape ought to know what is beneficial to themselves and distribute their energies accordingly and offer support to the struggles of their brethren in other provinces.<sup>28</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II, the question of Indian participation aroused much debate within the South Africa Indian 'community', with the more progressive of Indian leaders calling for non-participation until demands for greater democracy had been met. As the war progressed, more liberal elements in Indian politics retracted their non-participatory stance, even though little had changed. By June 1940, an Indian Service Corps had come into being and was later renamed the Indian and Malay Corps.<sup>29</sup> Indians in Natal and the Transvaal are recorded as having joined the armed forces, in non-combatant roles. There is little

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<sup>28</sup> Cape Indian, September 1923.

<sup>29</sup> Jialal, Y.: 'World War II: the Question of Participation, with special reference to the Indian Community' (n.d.), p. 23.

evidence to suggest that Cape Indians participated actively in the War. What does exist, however, is the reference made in the Cape Times<sup>30</sup>, as well as by an oral informant, to the arrangements made by Indians here to entertain visiting Indian troops.

Ahmed Ismail told the Cape Times in April 1941, that a committee was shortly to be formed to establish a canteen 'where the non-European visiting soldier can rest and be entertained'. The article furthermore claimed that 'recently when a number of Indian soldiers passed through Cape Town, the Afghan and Punjab Society gave them tea and, that a party of officers was entertained in the Society's hall in Pontac Street. They were welcomed by Mr Ismail on behalf of the Indian community'. The following year, another committee was formed by Cape Indians in their contribution to the war effort, this time for a Gifts and Comforts Fund. The Mayor of Cape Town, W. James, fêted several prominent (and wealthy) members of the Indian community and urged his guests to use their influence with their people 'with a view to raising a substantial sum of money...which will reflect creditably on the Indian community'. In return, the Mayor also promised to use his influence to redress some of the difficulties encountered by Indians in the Cape.<sup>31</sup> This strategy of placating authority as well as taking a non-confrontationist stance was challenged from the early-1940s when factions within the SAIC were wrestling for power.

The two emerging strands in Indian politics were diverse in the ideologies they espoused. The former holders of power in the SAIC were content for change to occur gradually and were labelled the 'appeasers' by more radical elements who were vehement in their policy of insisting that change be

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<sup>30</sup> Cape Times, 23 April 1941.

<sup>31</sup> Cape Times, 25 February 1942.

implemented more swiftly. Pahad's thesis analyzes in great detail the process leading up to the 'changing of the guard', and he attributes this ideological shift in Indian politics to, among other things, socio-economic factors, the role and growth of trade unions, the trading community, the role of the intelligentsia, the influence of the South African Communist Party and the continuous stream of discriminatory legislation.<sup>32</sup> According to Pahad, the first two factors are related because the growth in the manufacturing sector in South Africa in the mid-1940s resulted in the increasing proletarianisation of Indians, especially in Natal, which led to trade union organisation. By 1942, he writes, almost 15 000 Indian workers were members of recognised unions, among which were the Indian Liquor and Trading Trade Union, Garment Workers Industrial Union, Natal Sugar Industry Employees Union, Natal Biscuit Workers and Indian Shop Assistants Union. Members of these unions articulated not only their grievances but the need for workers to organise. D.A. Seedat<sup>33</sup>, a member of the Shop Assistants Union, said:

Although it is a European ruling class which oppresses us and exploits us...we must not allow ourselves to develop an animosity to Europeans as such...we must study everything from the point of view of exploiters and exploited...all exploiters are alike, whether they be Europeans or Asiatics. Indian shop owners are among the worst offenders in paying low wages and forcing employees to work long hours of overtime.

With increasing victories, the largely working-class union leadership was becoming more militant and radical and increasing its influence in the political arena.

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<sup>32</sup> Pahad, E.: 'The Development of Indian Political Movements in South Africa' (1972), p. 234.

<sup>33</sup> ibid, p. 239.

With the greater pressure on small traders in the Transvaal in particular, this group supported the radical element and sustained them financially, probably because the larger Indian merchants, financially secure as they were, did not take up the struggles of the small shopkeepers around issues such as licences, trading hours and trading locations. The Indian intelligentsia enjoyed the support of increasing numbers because, as Pahad points out, they were first of all 'more articulate and therefore capable of interpreting the feelings of the people more clearly. Secondly, they enjoyed a very good social standing and, finally, the people liked them and appreciated their sacrifices since this group had more to lose'.<sup>34</sup> (The bulk of this group were doctors and lawyers.) Furthermore, the members of this group were also members of the SACP and 'Indian communists were also in the forefront of the struggle to democratise the political organisations, build a solid base and to convince the people of the need for militancy and for closer relations with the ANC and the SACP'.<sup>35</sup> Although Pahad's thesis is almost wholly concerned with Indians in the Transvaal and Natal, it should be borne in mind that Cape Indians were not immune to the currents in Indian politics at a national level. An informant, C.B.<sup>36</sup>, remembers:

The Cape Indian Congress was certainly not pleased about the turn of events. The way I see it is that they were quite a complacent bunch and would never dare rock the boat. You see, Dadoo, Meer, Cachalia and the rest of the radical bunch challenged chaps like A.I. Kajee, our own Ahmed Ismail too, because it was high time Indians asserted themselves forcefully. Personally I was pleased with the changes taking place and I must add that Indians

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<sup>34</sup> ibid, p. 246.

<sup>35</sup> ibid, p. 249.

<sup>36</sup> C.B. interviewed by Z.D., 12/9/1989, is a retired teacher.

have not since seen leaders of their calibre, they fought, I remember, the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946, we were involved too you know.

The Passive Resistance Campaign referred to by this informant was a call by the new radical leadership of the SAIC, in 1946, for Indians to embark on a Passive Resistance Campaign against the government's introduction of the Pegging Act (forerunner to the Group Areas Act). The Cape Argus<sup>37</sup> reported the case of Cassim Amra who said that the Cape Indian Passive Resistance Council had been formed as an independent body with no allegiance to the Cape Indian Congress, and was actively recruiting members among Indians in the Cape. Ahmed Ismail, on the other hand, went to great lengths to distance himself from this radical element pervading local Indian politics. In a speech to the constituent bodies of the SAIC in May 1945, Ismail commented on the changes that were manifesting themselves in Indian politics:

Within recent times I have noticed that there has been a tendency for certain groups to introduce into Indian organisations ideals which differ [from] and are entirely alien to the objects of the Congress...I view this tendency with grave apprehension as harmful to the organisation of the Indian community and with implications which may jeopardise the position of the community as a minority community in the Union. This is an appeal to the community to face the disastrous implications of alien ideological doctrines, and to see that Indians are not misled into accepting the following paths, the ultimate outcome of which policy will lead to the community's destruction.<sup>38</sup>

This call and the subsequent expulsion of Ahmed and his fellow members of the Cape Indian Congress from the SAIC had

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<sup>37</sup> Cape Argus, 26 July 1946.

<sup>38</sup> SAIC Annual Conference, Durban, May 1945.

crucial implications for Cape Indians because, although a small faction of politicians from the Cape supported the new leadership of the SAIC, they too withdrew support in later years.

At a conference of the SAIC in 1950, a motion was passed calling for the expulsion of Ahmed due to his unconstitutional conduct. I.C. Meer (Natal) moved that the following resolution be passed (which was subsequently carried):

This conference deplores the action of the Cape Indian Congress in not participating in the 18th session of the SAIC and thereby denying people of the Cape Province full participation on the highest political organ of the South African Indian people particularly at a time when the Indian community of the Cape Province is facing a serious threat to their existing rights. Conference appeals to the Cape Indian Congress and its membership to preserve the unity of the SAIC particularly at a time when the political situation in South Africa demands the greatest degree of unity in order to combat the increasingly restrictive policy of the Nationalist Party government.

A further resolution passed by Y.A. Cachalia called on the executive of the SAIC to investigate and also take appropriate measures against the Cape Indian Congress.<sup>39</sup> With the expulsion of the Cape Indian Congress from the SAIC, the Cape Province was then represented at a national level by the Cape Indian Provincial Assembly. The composition of this body reflected the changes occurring in Indian politics. Previously, before the radical leadership assumed control of national Indian politics, membership had been confined largely to wealthy Muslim and Gujarati Hindus. Now the leadership of the Cape Provincial Indian Assembly was composed largely of Tamil Indians, who appealed to local

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<sup>39</sup> SAIC Annual Conference, Durban, June 1950.

Indians to forge closer links with other oppressed groups. Although this organisation would have had much to contribute to enlightening and encouraging Indians in the Cape to move towards progressive, non-racial ideologies, a split occurred when the leadership of this body disagreed with certain decisions taken by the SAIC president, Yusuf Dadoo, in 1952 and subsequently resigned from the SAIC.

While there was a radical change in the complexion of Indian politics in the 1940s, Indians in the Cape were little affected. Despite calls for joint action with other oppressed people, Indians here mostly continued to isolate themselves and the issues that concerned them were far removed from conditions that prevailed in the rest of South Africa. For example, in 1947, while the Nationalist Party was expressing virulent anti-Indian sentiments in its bid for victory at the forthcoming elections, Indians in the Cape were celebrating the imminent independence of India and Pakistan. The Cape Argus<sup>40</sup> reported on the call made by the Indian Traders Association of the Cape Peninsula for all its members to close their shops on the day India and Pakistan attained dominion status and that its members, belonging to the two religious groups, offer prayers in their mosques and mandirs (temples) on that day. Later that year, the same newspaper reported on the celebrations by Cape Indian Muslims of the attainment of dominion status by Pakistan. The article described the processions through the streets of Cape Town, with flags and banners, to the Avalon Theatre in District Six, where a mass meeting was held. There, both H.E. Parker, chairman of the Traders Association, and Ahmed Ismail commented on the role of the British in the region and on their role in the independence process. Parker asserted that the creation of the Dominions of India and Pakistan was an imperialist plan to keep them permanently

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<sup>40</sup> Cape Argus, 19 July 1947.

divided and mutually antagonistic, while Ismail, in defence of the British, contended:

The British did not want to divide India. We Muslims insisted on having an independent Pakistan. Why malign an innocent ruler who has handed over our freedom without a shot being fired? A nation had gained her freedom without declaration of war.

Among the congratulatory cables sent to various parties was one to Attlee, the British Prime Minister, to express gratitude to his government for granting dominion status to India and Pakistan.<sup>41</sup>

Owing to the unevenness of provincial legislation, Indians in the various provinces had been affected differently historically. While Indians in the Transvaal and Natal were badly off, Cape Indians had not over the years involved themselves to any great extent in the plight of other Indians. The politics espoused by leaders in the Cape continued to be conciliatory and urged political moderation. However, Indians in the Cape also appealed for support from those in the other centres when they were threatened with a commission of inquiry into Indian penetration in the Cape in 1949. So-called radicals, such as Yusuf Dadoo and Cachalia, urged Indians in the Cape to boycott this commission and, furthermore, to refuse to supply any information required of them. Under what they perceived to be a government threat to expropriate their land, Cape Indians turned out in their hundreds to hear Dadoo speak in Cape Town. It was reported that every seat in the Banqueting Hall was filled. 'Latecomers lined the walls. Apart from two plain-clothed detectives, the audience was composed entirely of Indians

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<sup>41</sup> Cape Argus, 18 August 1947.

and coloured people. There were several Natives present.<sup>42</sup> From this report it was apparent that Indians here reacted to forces directly impinging on them.

It was perhaps ultimately the influence of their leadership, together with their more privileged position and the fact that they were a small population, that accounts for the particular way in which Indians reacted to political events and trends. From the late 1940s when Indians nationally were forging closer links with the ANC in particular, the Cape Indian Congress removed themselves from political participation in the SAIC. In a letter to the SAIC executive on 13 April 1950, the Cape Indian Congress sent its official resignation to the national body, stating that its decision had been arrived at after much thought and that the committee of the Cape Indian Congress had approved the following resolution:

That whereas the present extremist policy of the SAIC is not in the best interest of the Cape Indians, this committee of the Cape Indian Congress, held at the Muir Street Indian School Hall, Muir Street, Cape Town, has unanimously resolved to secede from the SAIC, and further wish to place on record that the Cape Indians were the founders of the SAIC in Cape Town.<sup>43</sup>

With the declaration of the Group Areas Act in 1950, each ethnic group was to be assigned its own group area. It was this Act which was designed more than any other piece of legislation to separate racial groups and thus entrench ethnic identity among the four 'national' or racially prescribed groups in South Africa. Neville Alexander writes:

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<sup>42</sup> Cape Argus, 3 November 1949.

<sup>43</sup> SAIC Annual Conference, Durban, 1950.

Although there are historically evolved differences of language, religion, customs, job specialisation, etc., among the different groups in this country..., we have to view these differences historically, not statistically. They have been enhanced and artificially engendered by the deliberate ruling-class policy of keeping the different population groups in separate compartments, making them lead their lives in group isolation except in the market place.<sup>44</sup>

Indians did not arrive in South Africa as a functioning unit, and 'to assume that people from such a wide area of India share a single common culture is simplistic'.<sup>45</sup> They acted as a unit only to the forces impinging on them, especially the Group Areas Act, which constituted an erosion of their trading and residential rights as a group. With the proclamation of Rylands as an Indian group area in 1957, followed a year later by Cravenby, Indians from all over the Cape Peninsula were now legally compelled to live in these two group areas, despite the fact that Indians were still not considered a permanent part of the South African population, because of the lingering hope among white nationalist politicians that they could be repatriated to India and Pakistan.

By even contemplating the repatriation of Indians by the early 1960s, the Nationalist Government was simply deluding itself because, at that stage, the majority of Indians had been here for several generations and the only idiom they could identify with was a South African one. Yet it was only in late-1961 that the government officially gave recognition to the Indian population as a permanent entity of South Africa. This move prompted strong reaction from some

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander, N.: 'Nation and Ethnicity' (1988), p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Hill, R.A.: 'The Impact of Race Legislation on Kinship and Identity among Indian Muslims in Cape Town' (1980), p. 161.

quarters. The Cape Argus<sup>46</sup> reported on the comments made by a Professor G. Cronje of Pretoria University, who advocated the establishment of an independent Indian state on the borders of South Africa because, he said, racial and cultural differences ought to be observed. He is furthermore reported to have said that, while the coloured people were a different race from the white people, they belonged culturally to the white group, but the Indians were culturally mainly Oriental. Although the state stopped short of such drastic partition measures, a Department of Indian Affairs was created that year, which would govern every aspect of Indian life in the country, from education to obtaining a passport. W.A. Maree, on his appointment as Minister of Indian Affairs, met with Indian 'leaders' in the various provinces in an attempt to co-opt them. In the Cape, as in the other provinces, opinion was divided over the necessity of such a department. At a meeting set up by Maree in Cape Town in 1962, six Indian members were present to discuss the feasibility of setting up a local branch of the Department, while those who opposed this move condemned those Indians who favoured this apartheid structure. According to them, Maree was looking for Indians who would give a more Indian appearance to the Department. Four placard-carrying protestors were arrested outside the building where the meeting took place.<sup>47</sup> Protest against the creation of this Department resulted in the formation of the Cape Indian People's Alliance (hereafter CIPA). At a meeting of 300 people, condemnation was levelled not just at the Department but also at those Indians who had held talks with Maree, and who were described as 'traitors, sell-outs and wolves in sheep's clothing'. The Alliance also called on the government to cease perpetuating its inhumane policies in

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<sup>46</sup> Cape Argus, 10 May 1962.

<sup>47</sup> Cape Times, 27 March 1962.

direct violation of universally accepted human rights.<sup>48</sup> A few days after its formation, the CIPA executive was visited by the police who confiscated certain documents. The secretary of this organisation, H.A. Mahatey, said 'the alliance was formed at a meeting of Cape Indians in Salt River on Sunday. Our aims are clear,' he said. 'There is nothing subversive or militant about our organisation'.<sup>49</sup> Although there was little further action by this organisation in its attempts to mobilise public sentiment against the formation of an Indian Affairs Department, the CIPA later that year condemned City Council moves to accommodate Indians separately (as discussed in Chapter Three). The chairman of the CIPA was H.E. Parker, who was also a City Councillor, and the policies of this body may have been dictated by fears of increasing isolation as a group and also of being channelled into the government's policy of separate development. While the organisation strongly urged non-racialism, it nevertheless operated within and for a particular ethnic constituency.

In terms of contact with other groups, Indians in the Cape were certainly in a different position from those in the rest of the country. While by the mid-1960s many Indians in the rest of the country had moved to their own group areas, Indians here continued to reside in mixed areas. Owing to the lack of development and movement into the area, Rylands and Cravenby had not much altered. More crucial, though, to the concept of non-racialism in the Cape was the area of education. Here, owing to the small number of children of school-going age, the Department of Indian Affairs did not think it viable, before 1970, to bring education under its wing; consequently, Indian children continued to attend 'coloured' schools. In a report for the years 1961 to 1973,

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<sup>48</sup> Cape Times, 9 April 1962.

<sup>49</sup> Cape Times, 12 April 1962.

by the Department of Indian Affairs, the Chief Planner of Indian Schools, P.R.T. Nel, vetoed the idea of taking over Indian education in the Cape, even though there existed no Indian school which was state subsidised before 1970. He said that, in the light of the small numbers of pupils (5 700 in 1966), and the fact that most Indians in the Cape continued to reside in 'other' areas as opposed to Indian group areas, it was not recommended or viable to 'physically take over Indian education in the province'.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Indian children continued to attend 'coloured' schools had interesting implications for the interaction between the two 'races'. Having had ancestors in the Cape for two or more generations, these groups were not imbued with the fear and suspicion of their forebears. Younger informants spoke very encouragingly of their experiences at school. In the words of one informant, M.P.<sup>51</sup>:

During the early years I attended the Muir Street Indian School, mostly because it was down the road from where I lived, but even here, we had Hindu and Malay children, basically we went to whichever school was closer to you. At that stage of my life we were never actively aware of the differences between us, you were so caught up in learning and discovering things, but I must admit that sometimes, in jest, we'd tease each other, the others called us Indian moors and we called the coloured children hotnot, of course this was not serious. The high school I attended was Trafalgar or as we students affectionately called it Trafts. All the District Six children attended this high school or Harold Cressy, oh it was wonderful. We mixed freely, there was no such thing as keeping apart because of your racial group, I mean all our teachers were coloured. For me those were good lessons in tolerance and human relations. Unlike my grandparents and my parents, too, we never saw ourselves as being primarily Indian but just South Africans, like the rest of our classmates. I must

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<sup>50</sup> Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 3/8/1961 to 30/6/1973.

<sup>51</sup> M.P., interviewed by Z.D., 23/6/1991, is an insurance salesperson at the Old Mutual.

make the point we discussed earlier, about cultural superiority, look that's very difficult to maintain especially if you want to integrate with your classmates, good grief, imagine one of the Indian children distancing themselves because they felt superior to the rest of their mates, that would be utterly ridiculous. No, I'm convinced that later generations of Indians were more open, broadminded and of course more concerned about South African issues. Of course we can't wholly shed this Indian identity. How could we not be concerned because the only country we know is South Africa, not India. I often compare my experiences with that of my children, sadly, they [are] forced to go to a so-called Indian school here in Rylands and they tend to be more isolated in terms of contact with other race groups whereas we enjoyed the best of both worlds, in school we mixed so freely, you know, I used to even go to church sometimes with my friends and yet we also knew enough about our Indian culture and way of life.

Younger informants were also more forceful in opposing the changes that had occurred, in particular the effects of the Group Areas Act, whereas older informants were more accepting of these and viewed change as inevitable and revealed a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. In reply to a question pertaining to the Group Areas Act and its effects on them, older informants, L.G., A.P. and T.P.,<sup>52</sup> concurred. In the words of T.P.:

I knew there was nothing I could do about it so why should I fight it, yes I lost my business but I look at it this way, I got a chance to buy a house, in District Six I rented places and I must say many Indian people also got a chance to buy houses. You think I would be able to buy a house if I still lived there, and you know how crowded we lived, never mind I got a council house, but at least I got the chance to slowly pay off and buy this house. We rented from Jew people in District Six, but also Indian people were landlords and they only cared about the money. For me, the Group

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<sup>52</sup> L.G. interviewed 8/8/1989; A.P. interviewed 12/12/1989; T.P. interviewed 13/8/1989.

Areas was good, my family can live with Indian people, look my Mandir (temple) is nearby, there's schools here for my children, all the shops are here if my wife wants to go shopping so I'm very happy we came to Rylands. I remember so clearly when the government people said we must move to Rylands, I think somewhere in 1960 or something, I can't remember. Then some Indians were telling us not to go, to fight to stay where we were living, but let me tell you, these people were so shrewd, they tell us not to move yet they went and bought so much land in Rylands, you see how they work. But I don't listen to anyone, I know we can't do anything so when the council was offering places I put my name on the list, I didn't tell anyone because if I waited little bit more, Rylands get full and I will still be sitting with nothing, I didn't want to stay in District Six the rest of my life, it was nice but too much people there and, oh the noise was very bad. In Rylands I can close my front door and it's peaceful. My people can visit me and I see them, 'cause we are so nearby each other.

Rather unusual was the case of E.K.<sup>53</sup> who expressly refused to move into Rylands because:

It (Rylands) was terrible those early years, very sandy, do you know that the whole area is a swamp, yes, they reclaimed a lot of it but it was a sight, I refused to move into the area not only because it looked so bad but you see all my life I've lived among different people and now suddenly I was being forced to go and live with Indians only, I couldn't do that, that type of clannish life was not for me. You see, my wife is Malay and I know she would have felt very uncomfortable in an Indian-only area. But I do go to Rylands, say once a week or so to visit my brothers and sister, and believe me that's enough for me.

Younger informants expressed almost the opposite sentiments as those of their parents and grandparents. In the words of

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<sup>53</sup> E.K. interviewed 1/3/1990.

A.O.<sup>54</sup>:

I was heartbroken when we had to move out, you felt like your whole world was falling apart. Everything that was familiar was being left behind, and the worst part was that we didn't even know the Rylands area. From our home in District Six, we could walk to cinemas, to town, to the Parade, and that sort of thing, when we had to move, an era of my life was coming to an end. Having lived in a mixed area, we were more racially tolerant, because you went to school with children of other races, you played together after school, we use to also go to the church in District Six where we took sewing classes, we did lots of things together, we never thought of each other as superior or inferior, yet in Rylands, people there feel this contempt for other races, I mean these are the people I grew up with, there's not much tolerance to be found and that's what you get for clustering each race group together. Lots of Indians are very reactionary. I often wonder how Indians will react if for example an African family moves in next door to them, because for most Indians, an African is a servant boy or girl, not people who have a legitimate right to be anything and live anywhere. I was active in the Unity Movement in the 1970s and Indians here are so passive, you couldn't get them to react to events.

Other younger informants such as A.C., S.V. and M.P.<sup>55</sup>, opposed this move to Rylands because they, too, felt a sense of dislocation, but they have adapted to the environment. All three had been to so-called coloured schools and, except for interaction in the shop, university and the office respectively, these informants could not speak of having much social contact with other 'race' groups, as each felt that the government's programme of compartmentalising each group had succeeded in isolating the respective groups from one another. This policy, younger informants felt, did not

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<sup>54</sup> A.O., interviewed 25/9/1989.

<sup>55</sup> A.C., S.V. and M.P. interviewed on 11/8/1989, 15/9/1989 and 23/6/1989 respectively.

bode well for the future.

Post-war Indian politics in the Western Cape was shaped, not only by the more privileged position of Indians here, but also to a large extent, I would argue, by the leadership in the region. Whereas in Natal and the Transvaal, the radical leadership was able to oust the merchant elite espousing accommodationist politics, in the Western Cape, on the other hand, the leadership was successful in ensuring that its constituency did not fall under the influence of the new, radical leadership. This move had profound consequences because, after the expulsion of the Cape Indian Congress from the national body, Indians here have been even less interested in or influenced by 'political currents among Indians elsewhere in the country'.<sup>56</sup>

Indian politics in the Western Cape has in the 1980s and 1990s ~~has~~ not seen a revival of Indian separatist politics, but Indians have joined bodies like the UDF and the ANC more recently.

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<sup>56</sup> Brand, C.: 'Solidarity Patterns in a Minority Group', (1966), p. 90.

## CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES.

Bozzoli writes that the term community, which in South Africa encompasses the various ethnic groups, is sufficiently bland and broad to obscure other cleavages, especially those of class. Furthermore, 'communities are entities with strong emotional connotations which pull ordinary people into alliances they might not otherwise, given their interests, support'.<sup>1</sup> Hence it can be deduced that the idea of community is a reality at certain moments in history, under particular circumstances. The act of community creation by certain individuals or interest groups, especially political ones, has been a palpable reality in the Western Cape, particularly under the leadership of Ahmed Ismail in the 1920s and 1930s. In South Africa, organisations such as the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress have also organised Indians on an ethnic basis in their strategies against the state.

Notions of community, race and ethnicity are increasingly under discussion by political and social theorists as South Africa moves towards a post-apartheid era. The reaction of Indians in South Africa to a perceived process of Africanisation can to some extent be measured against that of Indians in East Africa who have already had to confront the victory of African liberation. Indians in East Africa (as well as 'passenger' Indians in South Africa) came principally to trade in this region and 'not to rule ... they came to East Africa not with the imperialist motives that had driven the Europeans to scramble for Africa, but with purely economic motives'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Indians as a group did not agitate for independence although a few

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<sup>1</sup> Bozzoli, B.: Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives (1987), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Tandon, Y: 'A Political Survey' in Ghai, D. (ed.): Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa (1966), p. 66.

individuals were active in this process. Most desired reform, not fundamental shifts in the ruling class. But the difference lies in the fact that Indians in East Africa had the choice, at independence, to acquire citizenship or leave the country. Needless to say, South African Indians have no such choice. Idi Amin's treatment of Ugandan Indians who refused citizenship rights has left a legacy of unease among Indians who have had to confront the process of Africanisation.

A potentially explosive situation was recently defused in the Western Cape in late 1992 when Indian and African traders clashed over business rights in the township of Khayelitsha. Indians were accused of undercutting African business in the township. There were claims that African businesses had been forced to close down because the Indian traders were "stealing our customers".<sup>2</sup> Indian traders retaliated by calling those African traders opposed to their presence in the township backward and racist. It was quite evident that business rivalry had translated itself into an ethnic problem and emotions on both sides had run high.

In their relations with other racially prescribed groups, Indians have been increasingly resisting co-optation by the state and have formed broad alliances with other groups. This is evident in trade unions, especially in Natal, as well as in ANC-linked political organisations. Although the large local Indian middle class has to some extent resisted alliances, based on notions of and on class ideology, with other blacks, there exists a significant number of Indians, increasingly among the youth, who identify with a South African idiom, instead of a narrowly Indian one. Unlike Indians in Natal and the Transvaal, who continue to organise under the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses

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<sup>2</sup> Argus 21\11\1992.

respectively, Cape Indians have not reconstituted this kind of ethnic political organisation. It would be interesting to see if Indians in the Cape form an alliance with other Indians in the country in the new dispensation and form a national Indian party or whether they continue to seek affiliation based on religious and class similarities as is the case at present.

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The following interviews were conducted from mid-1988 to early-1990:

	Name	Date of Interview	Age	Occupation
1.	L.G.	8/8/1989	78	Ex-shoe repairer
2.	M.V.	9/8/1989	70	General dealer
3.	N.E.	20/2/1990	--	Ex-school teacher
4.	E.K.	1/3/1990	--	Ex-shopkeeper
5.	F.O.	5/4/1989	65	Housewife
6.	T.P.	13/8/1989	59	Shopkeeper
7.	E.C.	5/5/1989	75	Ex-waiter/ clerk
8.	F.J.	5/6/1990	35	Housewife
9.	I.P.	22/8/1989	42	Business-person
10.	M.D.	19/9/1989	81	Shopkeeper
11.	A.V.	26/8/1989	73	Ex-nurse
12.	A.L.	5/3/1990	51	Business-person
13.	R.G.	9/8/1989	54	Headwaiter
14.	T.C.	12/8/1989	50	Shopkeeper
15.	A.P.	12/12/1989	69	Worker

16.	B.G.	5/8/1988	35	Shopowner
17.	A.O.	3/3/1988	38	Nurse
18.	M.N.	29/8/1989	78	Shopkeeper
19.	C.B.	12/9/1989	68	Ex - school teacher
20.	M.P.	23/6/1991	43	I n s u r a n c e salesperson
21.	S.V.	15/9/1989	37	Worker
22.	A.C.	11/8/1989	35	Accountant
23.	N.V.	12/10/1988	41	Teacher
24.	P.N.	15/10/1988	52	Shopkeeper
25.	A.M.	21/12/1989	16	Scholar
26.	B.L.	5/1/1990	29	Hawker
27.	F.E.	16/4/1989	64	Ex-waiter
28.	I.C.	21/6/1989	42	Doctor
29.	K.P.	29/8/1989	39	Librarian
30.	N.B.	9/1/1990	29	Housewife
31.	M.C.	10/1/1990	35	Waiter
32.	M.K.	6/6/1989	52	Salesperson
33.	B.K.	18/6/1989	50	Hawker
34.	U.M.	21/7/1989	22	Student
35.	M.V.	13/3/1990	32	Housewife
36.	D.P.	15/3/1990	25	Student
37.	D.M.	26/1/1990	32	Doctor
38.	V.V.	20/1/1989	39	Attorney
39.	R.B.	16/5/1989	60	Ex-waiter
40.	A.D.	25/2/1989	20	Worker
41.	A.A.	29/4/1989	31	Florist
42.	M.O.	16/6/1989	17	Scholar
43.	A.M.	15/5/1988	38	Printer
44.	R.M.	25/5/1988	42	Engineer
45.	C.E.	29/5/1988	39	B u s i n e s s - person
46.	Z.E.	5/6/1989	53	Shopkeeper
47.	Y.D.	21/6/1989	41	Shopkeeper
48.	A.N.	2/2/1990	28	Housewife
49.	G.M.	16/2/1990	25	Teacher
50.	S.D.	3/10/1989	33	Waiter
51.	P.C.	15/12/1989	22	Secretary
52.	H.B.	18/12/1989	29	Bank clerk
53.	K.B.	26/11/1989	43	Shopkeeper
54.	D.N.	7/11/1988	60	Shopkeeper
55.	M.P.	18/11/1988	19	Worker
56.	B.B.	22/11/1988	27	Unemployed
57.	J.L.	27/11/1988	49	Shopkeeper
58.	O.M.	19/3/1989	17	Student
59.	R.T.	25/3/1989	41	Waiter
60.	S.V.	29/3/1989	26	Worker

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