

Navigating the African-Indian Ocean as a site of re-worlding¹ in South Africa's post-1994 era

Cherise Dilrajh

Complicated, demanding, yes. But a view of heaven as life, not heaven as post-life.

–Toni Morrison

For,

those who are fighting for heaven as life.

Introduction

My location in this past which invariably shows up in the present lies within the colonial space-time vacuum: a river opening as a stream in a pathway to history. Being of a small coastal town, and having a home located on the sugar estates where my great-great grandfather worked as an indentured labourer— as well as not being able to turn away from the undistinguishable, unspeakable quiet violence that is cloaked over the province of what was known as the British colony of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal)— I am obliged to write about what is invisible but present, in the endless fields of cane that sway and swish in the humid air hanging over the city, in the traumas that the landscape still seems to carry. It is where beauty coexists with danger and disparity. Whilst my ancestry lies in a mythical India and in some ways intangible, I am located on African soil; shaped by this landscape and its people.

In South Africa (SA), the relationship of black and indian people resists a simple narrative. Even though there was a strong black and brown resistance to the apartheid regime, the term 'solidarity' can be misleading, as terms of endearment between black and indian communities are tense at times. There are reasons for these tensions such as 'racialised capitalist relations, colonial-

¹ Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'worlding' considers the world of natives which was created by colonialism. Re-worlding here means to reconstruct the world anew from the subaltern perspective, by actively undoing the worlds that colonialism has set up.

era racial hierarchies, and entrenched practices of racial endogamy'.² This holds true for colonial-born Indians in Durban, for Kenyan students in Delhi and even for Jawaharlal Nehru and Kwame Nkrumah seeking to navigate the postcolonial world system after 1945.³ Whilst solidarity is important to overcome the division that colonialism and neo-colonialism exploits, it is necessary to resist narratives that over-emphasise salvation through solidarity or those that are overly sentimental and nostalgic of the past. The polarity of victim of apartheid and perpetrator of the system obfuscate that everyday relationships between races fall outside of this binary and have not undergone a reconciliatory process. History oftentimes holds infinite hues between the solidarity of the oppressed and abuse of power by the oppressor.

Antoinette Burton highlights in *Brown over Black: Race and the Postcolonial Politics of Citation* that if Indians had to dis-identify with blackness it would reveal how interdependent and entangled they are. Undeniably, we are historically bound.

In the historiography of SA Indians, there is a certain romanticisation of subaltern history (though the stories that emerge do not necessarily make these individuals heroic or the system any less harsh).⁴ Additionally, leftists at times associate the idea of the only 'good Indian' is the 'poor Indian' – that only poor Indians can hold non-racial solidarity as they are more oppressed than middle class Indians.⁵ I hope to give an account that does not wish to victimise Indian or Black people⁶ but give light to some of the complexities, nuances, subtleties – what Brij Lal refers to as 'reasoned discourse and debate that will do justice to a complex human experience',⁷ to add to the conversation surrounding how we relate to each other post-democracy.

²Antoinette M Burton, *Brown over Black: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation* (Gurgaon, India: Three Essays Collective, 2012) p2

³ ibid.

⁴ Goolam Vahed, "Brij v. Lal: Rooting for History," ed. DOUG MUNRO and JACK CORBETT, JSTOR (ANU Press, 2017), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkk5w.11#metadata_info_tab_contents. p77

⁵ Thomas Blom Hansen, 2012 *Melancholia of Freedom, Melancholia of Freedom: Social Life in an Indian Township in South Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. xv–xv

⁶ By: Niren Tolsi and Features, "KwaZulu-Natal Races back to 1949," New Frame, July 2021, <https://www.newframe.com/kwazulu-natal-races-back-to-1949/>.

⁷ Brij V. Lal, "Indian Indenture: History and Historiography in a Nutshell," *Journal of Indentureship and Its Legacies* 1, no. 1 (September 2021), doi:[10.13169/jofstudindentleg.1.1.0001](https://doi.org/10.13169/jofstudindentleg.1.1.0001).

To critically understand, consciousness of who you are is a product of historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

- Edward Said in *Orientalism* quoting Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*⁸

To go about the task of compiling such an inventory, I will (1) supply a history of Indians coming to SA under colonisation; (2) demonstrate that colonial separatist tactics involved displacing Africans from their land. The decentralisation of power passed from colonial to local authority, enforcing tribalism, the migrant labour system through apartheid and xenophobic attitudes towards African migrants. (3) I will outline some of the structures present in the apartheid era that facilitated separate development. Under Afrikaner minority rule, people were forced into a neat racial identity box that dissolved a complex structure of indenture, passenger, and trader Indians; which were coupled with the racialisation of capital and labour through hierarchy. I will give an account of the situation of riots in the beginning and middle-to-end of apartheid sustained into the post-colonial era to show the cyclical nature of these tensions if they remain unreconciled. In the 'post' colonial era, the constructed systems are present so that Black people are fighting each other instead of the 'remote powers' responsible. Finally, I look to a unification in the seas between two lands as metaphor. I contend that the African-Indian Ocean acts as a mobilising tidal force of resistance against colonialism to undo the evils of colonial ways of being in the world and to envision a future beyond these structures of harm that have been entrenched since colonisation.

*When I refer to Black with a capital B, I am using Steve Biko's definition of political Blackness. When I refer to black with a small 'b', I am referring to the racial identity constructed under apartheid. Indian with a capital 'I' refers to those who came from India, and the lower case refers to the racial identity known in South Africa (SA).

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

A post-reconciliatory contradiction

When apartheid supposedly came to an end in 1994, South Africans were told that we were a nation of different people who coexisted peacefully, despite a troubled past of racial segregation and discrimination that had not been addressed. This is infamously known as the ‘rainbow nation’. This nation-building ideology is problematic as it makes us believe that we are a harmonious mosaic of people, and that there are no problems between races in the ‘post’-apartheid era.

The reality of South Africa after 1994 society reveals the folly of the rainbow. There are many issues awash: land reparation has not taken place, and colonial powers still dominate through indirect rule, of which the white minority and Black elites of government form part of. Majority of black people remain ‘trapped in a state of stasis’, forgotten behind on the bridge to transition in the supposedly ‘new South Africa.’⁹ Reconciliation and supposed social cohesion were privileged over the pursuit of socio-economic justice. Neoliberal ideology is favourable towards the white elites and Black middle class, not responding to massive inequality.

There has not been real unity and transformation since the enduring legacies that haunted most South Africans during apartheid has cast a long shadow. Pumla Gqola once remarked that we have been in a national state of celebration since 1994 without properly confronting our troubled past due to the sentimentality attached to our history and overcoming apartheid.¹⁰ Partially in fault of this was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was created to deal with these issues— but did not involve everyday citizens, just victims and perpetrators.¹¹ Apartheid being reduced to a ‘terror machine’ (which it was, but that is not all that it was) removes the everyday violence that became a part of life, including (especially) our relativity. Truth being privileged *without* the pursuit of justice is an embracement of evil, as the truly healing aspect of reconciliation has been denied— an honest confrontation with the past. Although apartheid's

⁹ Tshepo Madlingozi., *Social justice in a time of neo-apartheid constitutionalism: Critiquing the anti-black economy of recognition, incorporation and distribution*. Stellenbosch Law Review, 28(1), 2017. 123-147.

¹⁰ Pumla Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Chapter 4.

¹¹ M. Mamdani., *Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)*. *Diacritics*, 32(3/4), 2002. 33-59.

It should be stated that this commission was necessary but should not have been the only attempt at reconciliation, and we can learn from its limitations.

borders have been abolished on an ideological level, though not sociologically or even geographically, how individuals interact (and the state in relation to people) still tells a story at odds with the one represented in the rainbow. A lack of redress of these systems to make our society anew favour the conditions for colonialism to thrive and mutate— where hatred is harboured, and violence has festered. Under linear time, we may look to the past for answers.

A brief historical re-enactment

After years of fighting over land that was not theirs, the Union of SA was established in 1910 by the British and the Afrikaans descendants of the Dutch. The Cape of Good Hope in 1684 served as a stop on the journey of the Dutch on their way to loot and plunder the east; they had taken slaves from India to where the Indian ocean meets the Atlantic. This was the first known ‘indians’ to be brought to SA, however they creolised into what is today known as the ‘coloured’ community.

Preceding this pact of the Union following the abolition of slavery in 1847, the British started hiring replacement labourers for plantations all over the world. Using indentured labour as a continuation of the labour exploitation system, they relocated Indians to British possessions in Fiji, Jamaica, Suriname, Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, and South Africa over eight decades.¹² Indentured labourers were hired between 1860 and 1911 to work in SA on sugar cane fields, railways and coal mines. My hometown of Natal acquired 152 184 Indians overall through indenture with disproportionately more men than women. This is reportedly the greatest concentration of Indians outside of India. They sprang from a diverse range of social and geographic origins: most originated in the poor, prone-to-migration regions of the north, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and the Madras Presidency in the south.¹³

Both India and SA were part of the empire’s colonial mission, positioning indentured labour within bound labour regimes, such as slavery and convict labour.¹⁴ Where it differentiated from slave labour was that there was a promise of freedom, labourers were paid a menial stipend,

¹² Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman : The Odyssey of Indenture* (London Trust & Company, 2016).

¹³ Brij V.Lal, 2021. ‘Indian Indenture: History and Historiography in a Nutshell’, *Journal for the Study of Indentureship and Its Legacies*, 1.1, p 1–15

¹⁴Goolam Vahed, “Brij v. Lal: Rooting for History,” ed. DOUG MUNRO and JACK CORBETT, JSTOR (ANU Press, 2017), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkk5w.11#metadata_info_tab_contents.

and some received plots of land when their contracts were up. Some violences of the slave system was retained. The long labour hours, high suicide rates amongst men, whippings of labourers, and rape and beating of Indian women made them particularly vulnerable to this unjust system.¹⁵ Suicide rates as a result of these conditions were second highest in Natal, totaling around 182 lives. The free land grant was abandoned in 1891 in favour of a ticket back to India. The British then introduced a £3 tax in 1895 on all ex-indentured indians. The goal was to convince them to re-indenture in order to get around this tax.¹⁶

The British specifically desired people with "strong hands and sound healthy bodies"¹⁷ who were primarily from "poor, backward" castes except for a small minority of brahmins (upper caste). The reasons for moving varied and included socioeconomic status, being deceived or kidnapped by recruiters promising a better life, the destruction of Indian artisanship due to new taxes and legislation, the commodification of goods, industrialisation, or droughts in Madras.¹⁸

Indenture then provided the incentive for other Indians to migrate. These indians became known as 'passenger indians' and constituted a high number of Gujerati and Muslim people (many of whom had wealth, but also a percentage who did not, as studies like Uma Dhupela-Mesthrie's foregrounds¹⁹). A low number of Gujerati/Muslim people had initially come as indentured labourers, estimated to be around 3%. Most of this class who came as traders were economically sound and were soon to become the bourgeoisie of the group.²⁰ The reasons of this group migrating may have been that there was opportunity for trading in SA, but it was also possible that Hindu nationalism as well as a feeling of alienation of Muslims who did not belong to a caste could have been a motivating factor.

The subject of how Indians arrived in South Africa is important because, as I'll show a bit later, the diverse castes and backgrounds of people who were imported to SA meant that colonialism and apartheid would quickly homogenise their identities. The points of interaction and

¹⁵ Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From Cane Fields to Freedom : A Chronicle of Indian South African Life* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2000).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920, ACLS Humanities EBook* (University of California Press, 2007), <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/rb68xc55p>. Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Brij V.Lal, 2021, p 1–15

¹⁹ Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "The Passenger Indian as Worker: Indian Immigrants in Cape Town in the Early Twentieth Century," *African Studies* 68, no. 1 (March 2009): 111–134, doi:[10.1080/00020180902827498](https://doi.org/10.1080/00020180902827498).

²⁰ Prakash C. Jain, *Indians in South Africa : Political Economy of Race Relations* (Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 1999). Chapter 5.

association with natives is created by their respective histories as well as the driving forces for migration²¹ and then British and Afrikaner rule. They were also seen as sojourners and ‘aliens’ of a temporary presence, soon to be repatriated back to India. This language had come to impact the way they were portrayed as temporary citizens. In 1962, however, they became part of the official population of SA. Jawaharlal Nehru had urged in 1964 that Indians should embrace the local African population and integrate as South African citizens.²²

However, it has never been that simple due to the enduring and persisting colonial legacies that extend into the current era. There are narratives of solidarity and resistance to the apartheid regime on the one hand and anti-blackness on the other, when the relations of this group to natives are quite a complicated structure influenced by a mixture of apartheid’s hierarchical system, ‘British imperial policy, Gandhian legacies, caste politics and local interactions between communities in Africa.’²³

The Pre-apartheid era and dispossession of Africans from their land

The dispossession of African black people predates the apartheid era. In 1843 Britain annexed Natal to take hold of the coastal areas so that the Boers (Dutch descendants, or Afrikaners) would not get hold of it after the Great Trek. In Natal and Zululand combined, there were around 650 000 natives, and only around 10 000 British settlers.²⁴ British settler landlords under colonial office control of this group charged natives a tax to live on the land to make return on investment before they made a profit through other means, thereby forcing Africans to engage in wage labour to pay their tax obligations.²⁵ According to Narissa Ramdhani, many ‘refugee Zulus’— those who were seeking salvation from the Zulu Kingdom in Natal reportedly complied with this tax.²⁶

²¹ Vahed 2017

²² Brij V.Lal, 2021. p9.

²³ Burton 2012. p14.

²⁴ Narissa Ramdhani, “Taxation without Representation: The Hut Tax System in Colonial Natal 1849–1898,” *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 9, no. 1 (January 1986): 12–25, doi:[10.1080/02590123.1986.11964243](https://doi.org/10.1080/02590123.1986.11964243).

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ This was known as the ‘hut tax’ and has been used in other colonies of the British as a device to subjugate the local population. Portugal had used it in Mozambique, and Germany had failed at implementing it to recruit labour in Tanzania.

As Ramdhani explains, this dispossession was integral to initiate exploitative wage labour and the building of white society by a small number of settlers: “it appears rather remarkable that a small white population of five thousand could so easily impose a tax, equivalent to six weeks of a labourer's wage for each hut, on a "barbarous" and "warlike" African population, numbering over 100 000 souls.” In Natal there was a labour shortage, a decrease in land and wages, and a doubling in hut tax. Natives were ‘squeezed off the land and deprived of a free income’.²⁷ The British settlers had used this to benefit themselves and guarantee settler society—to keep natives in a system of subjugation. Of course, the civilisation they were seeking to build was for themselves. The Slums Act of 1934 was introduced to remove those squatters who could not afford the hut tax or shacks of indentured labourers who had finished their contracts.²⁸

In the same year, the government had instituted laws relegating natives into two million acres of the land in Natal.²⁹ The Natal Colonisation Company based in London (operating directly, though externally) had been leasing to black squatters, which the settlers had a problem with as it gave them an alternative to wage labour. Natal’s planters had decided that the salvation of their economy lay in sugar cane cultivation. When it came time for the British to find a labour force to cultivate the fields, they looked to India as they saw the success of the sugar cane plantations in Mauritius. Africans were already occupied within system of wage labour, and the settlers reportedly thought their way of living would be unsuitable for this.

Thus, indenture through an outside labour force was used instead of local natives to carry out the workload. According to anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer, this was to weaken the bargaining power of black Africans. Whatever the African ‘perceptions of Indian indentured workers were in 1860... included in it must have been the suspicion, if not the knowledge, that they had been brought in ... to be used against them in ways perhaps not immediately understood’.³⁰ Some of the outcomes influenced these two communities: Africans were upset that agricultural land was made available to Indians while there were land shortages in the reserves that the colonial

²⁷ Ramdhani, 1986 p10

²⁸ “List of Laws on Land Dispossession and Segregation | South African History Online,” Sahistory.org.za, 2011, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/list-laws-land-dispossession-and-segregation>.

²⁹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920, ACLS Humanities EBook* (University of California Press, 2007), <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/rb68xc55p>. Chapter 5.

³⁰ Vahed 2021, p77

authorities had set aside for African occupation; Indian labour undercut Africans' refusal to work the land and employers placed Africans in positions of authority over Indians.³¹

The use of outsourcing was strategic as the British knew that if black and indian people were divided and each had seen the other as a threat and competitor, there would be a lower chance of collective resistance. When Natives Land Act of 1913 was enforced, South Africa had by then already been moving towards spatial segregation through a history of land dispossession of natives from the onset of colonial rule.³²

The creation of tribalism

During apartheid, racial categories were instated to erase ethnicity through collective identity, however, when it came to black people there were further divisions made on ethnicity by the colonial government before apartheid—tying land to tribe. The national units of the black African populations are the 11 so-called “tribes” known today.

Black people were made to be a fragmented collection of minorities, fractured into many ethnic identities. A theory that Mamdani terms ‘decentralised despotism’ describes how colonialism extended its reach into native lands: customary law, the law regarding ethnicity, applied to Africans in the homelands, yet civil law applied to whites in the urban area.³³ Traditional leaders were given power over tribes. By controlling the authorised leaders who answered to them, colonial power infiltrated rural areas through traditional law. This meant that the colonial authority could then control sizable indigenous populations thanks to the decentralisation of power. Metcalfe confirms this: 'during the same year (1860) the colonial government created a system of indirect rule to control Africans who were outside the market economy. Chiefly authority was affirmed, and white settlement prohibited.'³⁴

³¹ Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai, “Stuck in the Middle? Indians in South Africa’s Fading Rainbow,” *South Asian Diaspora* 9, no. 2 (April 2017): 147–162, doi:[10.1080/19438192.2017.1319098](https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2017.1319098). p19

³² “Timeline of Land Dispossession and Restitution in South Africa 1995-2013 | South African History Online,” www.sahistory.org.za, n.d., <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/timeline-land-dispossession-and-restitution-south-africa-1995-2013>.

³³ Mahmood Mamdani. *Citizen and Subject : Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). Chapter 4.

³⁴ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920, ACLS Humanities EBook* (University of California Press, 2007), <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/rb68xc55p>. Chapter 5.

Appointed chieftains organised tribes in accordance with ethnic identity under decentralised dictatorship, which meant that Africans would not be subject to the rules of "white" South Africa. When there were no existing chiefs, colonial authorities made them, as well as leaders who agreed with them and served their interests. Legislation was "announced, not debated." Ethnicity regarding tribe subsequently developed into a dimension of colonialism since it supported tribal traditions. Mamdani explains that the bifurcated structure created an economic link in line with the supposedly 'civil society' in the city to tribal lands through migrant labour. Traditional leaders were transformed into legislators, tax collectors, attorneys, and other decentralised power brokers. Ethnic identity was filled into a neat box like race, and homelands bordered each other. Interestingly, indian and coloured ethnic identities were homogenised and obliterated by broad identification categories later under apartheid.

Mamdani has been criticised for oversimplifying. I would give the above discussion points by Mamdani some consideration by looking at colonisation in the larger context of resource competition that led to hostilities through tribalism, bordering homelands that needed to be secured from penetration of the "other", and factionalism among black people.

The enforcement of tribalism meant a reinforcement of colonialism, and at times the celebration of nationalist tribal identity. Africans were assigned to a 'national' home in the Bantustans, even though they may not ever have lived there, and often had to travel far to get to the urban areas to seek work. The migratory or compound system was instated as migrant labour was needed. This relegated Africans to overcrowded living conditions in the urban areas. It also saw the spawning of the 'squatter system', where natives would create make-shift houses on the outskirts of the 'developed' areas to enable them to work in white SA, as well as reserves outside of the city called 'townships'. Homelands became a place of 'citizenship', and most of SA was reserved for white South Africans. There was an inversion of the settler/native narrative, because they were made to be foreigners on their own land.³⁵

The dilemma for apartheid, Mamdani says, was where the urban and rural crossed: a significant number of black people were in the urban areas for 'migrant labour' (even though they

³⁵ Tshepo Madlingozi, 2015. *Neo-apartheid Constitutionalism and the perpetuation of African de-worlding*. 2015. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnSsF5SQrdY&t=1088s> Madlingozi argues this through Mamdani

were natives on the land), and so there were laws instituted (like the Group Areas Act, which I will soon explain) to control black people who worked in the compounds in the urban. Apartheid became a useful tool for the government to continue exploitative labour whilst keeping wealth out of the hands of Africans.

Migrant labour

Soon, the cornerstone of SA's economy would come to be mining and manufacturing through resource extraction labour was imported for this purpose. The Natives Land Act (1913) did the job of creating 'migrant' labour, as Africans moved from the rural areas to the city. The 1913 act meant that Africans were relegated to 'native reserves' (also known as Bantustans) and were barred from buying or hiring land outside of their areas, comprising of 13% of land in SA. The Bantustans were scattered into non-contiguous, bordered areas. The land was overused, the soil eroded. Since natives were not allowed to own more than the 13% that they were relegated to, and the population was naturally expanding over time, which meant that there would be a shortage of labour.³⁶ They became economically dependent on white SA, as 80% of those in black labour reserves sought employment in the urban. The reserves were also crowded so that natives had to seek work outside of these areas.

By 1946, a quarter of the black population was living in the urban areas. By the year of 1950, two years after apartheid had officially been instated, natives were regulated and controlled through the Group Areas Act in the urban areas where they worked as the government did not want solidarity between the poor. According to Prakash Jain's study, most natives then lived outside of the homelands, working in farms, mines, homes, and factories to create white SA.

Complicating the law served to make it seem more logical—to institutionally legitimise suffering. African workers were not allowed to strike, received different jobs and wages to white workers, and the Bantustans were used as a dumping ground for discarded production waste. They were taxed far heavier than whites on earnings, and many were unemployed. Apartheid laws meant that different races could not interact, marriage between races was also banned, black

³⁶ Jain 1999, p58

people from the native areas ('migrants' in white SA) had to carry passes in order to work in these areas, not to be found in a white area after 9pm.

The migrant labourer system was a key feature of apartheid, 'migrant' defined as both those from the homelands who worked in the urban areas, as well as Africans from neighbouring countries.³⁷ Even though some migrants were natives, they were considered foreign through designation to specific locations in the white areas.

There were separate laws applying to black people in the homelands than urban SA. Seeing indians and African migrants be given resources and opportunities that there was a scarcity of could have been a factor that instigated resentment, coupled with decentralised power. It is clear from the onset of colonial rule that natives were made to be outsiders, the South Africa that they were building was made to exclude them. The purpose of the colonial land tax was introduced as a deceptive measure to create systems that natives did not use, and to move away from communal land ownership to an individualised system (land ownership was made to be relegated to one plot to the head of family, usually male, in native areas, surplus people were forced to seek work elsewhere thereby benefitting whites, and it prevented Africans from migrating into the areas). The fractioning of different tribes into bordered areas through decentralised despotism meant that the black population would come to be fragmented, and the chiefs who reported to colonial authorities would have to adopt the system and rules introduced by the colonisers, whilst staying in line with the 'tribe'. Whilst the assumption could be collective resistance because of homogeneity in the urban, the decentralisation of power meant that mistrust was fostered against the 'other' through binding of land to ethnic identity in homelands, of which different laws applied to black people in the urban areas.

³⁷ Jain, 1999. P64

‘For a nation to live, the tribe must die’.

The *Official Yearbook South Africa* (1987-88) states that:

SA has been a geographic destination rather than a national reality, coming into being not because of a natural affinity between people but by artificial lines drawn on the map by imperial administration in Britain.

*Apart from the white community, of both Dutch and British descent, these lines arbitrarily incorporated in South Africa a number of disparate black peoples, such as the Xhosa and Zulu, with their own clearly defined territories. And the result is that today South Africa has one of the most complex and diversified population mixes in the world, a rich mosaic of distinctive minorities without any common cultural rallying point’.*³⁸

The position from this book shows the apartheid agenda of dividing the population into separate minorities of people who existed in proximity to each other but had not been assimilated. Vally notes that there were interpretations of what constitutes an ethnic group, as coloured and indian groups were not subdivided into further categorisations until later, but Africans were.

In the case of indenture, outsourcing a labour force meant that there would be limited worker resistance. Both natives, and non-native Africans and indians were made to feel like foreigners in SA, even by each other today. Natives were made to view other Africans as competing workforces, instead of the colonial government as the enemy. Like indians, African migrants were put amongst displaced natives. By creating hierarchy amongst race and divisions amongst the indigenous population in tribe, and outsiders viewed as a threat; the resistance was divided.

Today the problems of the past are present in initiatives like Operation Dudula, an initiative to expel the country of foreigners. ‘Dudula’ means to ‘force out’ in isiZulu. Many have died in these xenophobic attacks. Operation Dudula was founded after the 2021 July Unrest operating with a strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. Whilst the settler-colonial government is no longer in power, the machinations of the system was retained.

Xenophobia surfaced because of the lack in socio-economic redress of the past. The anger of black Africans is misdirected to those who are as vulnerable as them, failing to see the traps set

³⁸ Vally 2001, p59

up by colonialism. In a country where the underprivileged working class has been consigned to the peripheries of society, foreigners are cited as the cause of the many patterns of exclusion.

With 10% of the population owning over 80% of the wealth, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world.³⁹ The supporters of Operation Dudula see those who pose a threat to their job security as a risk because they believe that "foreigners" are stealing their wealth.

The numbers of migrant labourers being employed dropped significantly by training and employing more natives.⁴⁰ In 1964, migrants constituted 61.4 % of the labour force, and by 1978 it dropped to 37.2 %. To illustrate the figures of migrants in SA by 1976: 381, 277 were from Lesotho, 111,257 from Mozambique, 43 159 from Botswana, 32 716 from Rhodesia, 20 750 Swazi and 12 761 Malawian.⁴¹ Apartheid not only provided subsidised rural labour force but also kept the wages low as migrant labour system created the reserve army of labour to be brought into operation.⁴²

Samora Machel once said, 'for a nation to live, the tribe must die'. This statement can be taken beyond national boundaries if we consider how people from African countries are often stereotyped and targeted. Both xenophobia and tribalism are based on prejudice against 'other' Black people and reduces each of them to belonging to a distinct country. The infiltration of the 'other' is seen to corrupt the land of the tribe, or in this case South Africans, where difference is unwelcome.

The contemporary nationalist goal of "South African exceptionalism" has made it possible for Black people to compete with one other for employment and resources, drawing attention away from the fact that the real outsiders were the settlers imposing this system. Colonialism fosters an environment of rivalry and scarcity, and apartheid exploited this strategy to incite dread among the different races.

As Fanon has said, while the settler/police rule the native, they will turn to tribalism as an outlet for their rage, and at the smallest sign of hostility from another native, they reach for a

³⁹ "South Africa Most Unequal Country in the World: Report," www.aljazeera.com, March 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/10/south-africa-most-unequal-country-in-the-world-report#:~:text=South%20Africa%20is%20the%20most>.

⁴⁰ Jain 1999 p64

⁴¹ Jain 64

⁴² Jain 89

knife.⁴³ The precariousness of additional racial categorisations (indian, coloured, and black) and the division of the Black population into various group areas through numerous legislative acts were tools used by the regime to stratify resistance throughout apartheid.

The separation of the population meant that ethnicity and later, race would be tied to land, and each would see another differently. This is reflected in the strong tribalistic attitudes in SA even today. This set of power relations is deliberate and not accidental in the operation of colonialism as a hierarchical system of oppression, by creating a set of interactions that appeared as if they were remote or innate, yet they are constructed by regime.

The situation of race under apartheid rule

The difference between indentured and passenger indians has an impact on the "collective psyche" of the population.⁴⁴ A prescriptive title like "South African indian experience" is challenging to apply because of its resistance to homogeneity. Despite its deceptively simplistic structure, apartheid created an intricate situation: Indians were inserted on a land controlled by a powerful European minority owning most of the resources, land and capital, settled amongst dispossessed Africans.⁴⁵ Simultaneously the indian presence in SA opens the question of what it means to be Indian African in a land divided into a polarised, enforced binary of indigenous African against settler African,⁴⁶ a condition which many African migrants are in today.

The situation of indians in South Africa is sometimes rendered as a precarious one due to their racialisation as an 'outsiders' or 'aliens' though they undeniably transformed when they crossed the waters to South Africa. They reflect the postcolonial condition of being alienated from a homeland and seeking belonging in a new land. Many suffered disorientation as a result of trying to adapt to a new way of life and environment.

Indentured indians leaving India meant that they braved the 'kala pani'. This is known as the taboo of the 'black waters', and once one crosses it, they lose their caste.⁴⁷ One labourer

⁴³Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1961). Chapter 1: Concerning violence

⁴⁴ Pallavi Rastogi, *Afrindian Fictions: Diaspora, Race, and National Desire in South Africa*. (S.L.: Ohio State Univ Pr, 2020).

p8

⁴⁵ Rastogi

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Vally, kala pani: caste and colour in SA

reportedly said that he left his caste behind on the ship.⁴⁸ Being alienated from a homeland which was slowly departing from the imaginary, their civilisation became hazy and dissolved. In the case of SA, these labourers soon moved from a caste system into Apartheid's lair.

Apartheid means 'apart-ness' in Afrikaans and was created to keep Africans subjugated to settlers in a system of labour exploitation and to extract resources from the land. The former years of British colonisation set the groundwork for apartheid's racial capitalism. Apartheid also meant that under Afrikaner minority rule, groups of people were forced into a neat racial identity box that dissolved a history of migration between indenture, passenger, and trader Indians. This erased differences across class and caste by the state and the way they are seen, even if elements of caste-consciousness may have been retained by the group.

Apartheid not only dispossessed many of their lands, but of their identities too, by imposing one onto a people with supposedly similar characteristics. Racial categories were created for the government to control the population (through the Population Registration Act of 1950), and to prevent infiltration of 'foreign elements' into the white group. This categorisation system worked on labelling people randomly according to physical traits, then language and religion. Classification was carried out without the consent of those who were being categorised. The categories were an expression of the creator's *subjectivity*, revealing a 'unilateral system of those who create it.'⁴⁹

Indians had initially been put into the 'coloured' only much later into another group labelled as 'Indian'. Rehana Vally points out that categorisation was based on race for black and white people, miscegenation for coloured, and in the criteria of 'any race other than white or black' labelled Chinese, Indian and Malay people. This was the rather arbitrary nature of categorisation, where identities underwent mass simplification and reduction to erase ethnicities, as these people were not the same. As aforementioned, the opposite was done with black Africans: a segregation of the black population along 'tribal' and 'ethnic' lines. Imposing a race onto a people instead of them creating social relations by themselves affected the way in which people saw one another. Vally mentions one of the main characteristics of a 'social group' as 'members of the group establishing close and exclusive social relations (identifying who does and who does not belong to

⁴⁸ Bahadur and Dhupela-Mesthrie

⁴⁹ Vally 2001

this group)'. The conditions were thus created for social groups to associate exclusively with each other. Tribalism operates on the same agenda, as does xenophobia; the status of settler whites is not as largely considered as 'outsider'. Their belonging is not negotiable. Whites are removed from the interactions that involve Africans and indians, or Africans and migrants.

The Group Areas Act of 1950 (GAA) was created to give the National Party (the apartheid government) power to control non-whites. Numerous black, coloured, and indian people were forcibly removed from their lands, which were now only for white people, being relocated to areas outside of the cities. Europeans held 87% of the land, and non-white populations were relegated to 13% being cordoned off into 'group areas' when they were in white SA.

The act meant that races were relegated to various allocated areas where people of the same race resided. All racial groups were grid-locked into separate development: gated into insular communities compartmentalised across racial lines. The purpose of this division was to prevent mass resistance of all oppressed people. Each race group being isolated from the other, and communication across races were prevented as was cross-cultural assimilation to 'preclude any access by others into the spheres of white power'.⁵⁰ As I previously outlined, the settlers had laid the foundations for apartheid, through the dispossession of African people from their land.

Apartheid's racial classification system meant the reduction of complex identities into a supposedly homogenous entity. Apartheid intentionally orchestrated easier access to opportunities in each racial category. Indian and coloured people occupy the binary between black and white, and through institutional laws being favourable toward them in this deliberate system had come to embody both positions of oppressed and oppressor.

The situation of Indian South Africans during the Group Areas Act

During the GAA, merchant traders were widely displaced. The upper-class traders saw more economic mobility than black Africans. The lower class on indians were amongst the poorest, though there were also many who had become urbanised. Many Indians moved from shacks without running water and electricity, to brick houses with these services that they expanded and

⁵⁰ Vally 2001, p69

improved over the decades.⁵¹ However, both classes were positioned as a competing labour force against Africans. Wealthy and working class Indians had each different interactions with black people. Some of the wealthier classes would be classed as 'petty bourgeoisie' over the working class.

The whites saw the upper class Indians as competition to Europeans (meaning; a threat to white capital, life and security) and thought they would be a bad influence on black people in accessing a better life. Twenty years after free Indians arrived, the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce proposed that traders be obliged to register, pay a housing tax, and be in selected areas for trade. White people were worried about Indian competition in agriculture and wanted them to produce a pass. Concerns were expressed as early as the 1880s towards the mercantile class.⁵² Indian traders were said to hold a monopoly over the industry, and racist attitudes developed towards them predating apartheid.⁵³ Many trader licenses were revoked as the government saw them as competition.⁵⁴ Indians could only operate in selected areas as a result of the forced removals of the GAA which meant that labour and capital were mostly circulating in these areas. Also note, permits were required if they were to trade in other provinces, making it unlikely then for them to interact with other so-called 'tribes', except to the areas they were relegated to and in the urban areas and perhaps trading in townships. According to Jain, this move transformed the petty bourgeoisie class of Indians into the bourgeoisie, and the GAA meant they were restricted from becoming the grand bourgeoisie because of the limits imposed on trade. The Europeans urged the government that Indians should be 'isolated within their own locations quite separated from the white population'. The Indian merchants claimed themselves to be of a 'respectable class', pointing out the difference between themselves and the 'coolies, Chinese and others'.

White ruling classes instituted laws to prevent Indians from exploiting mineral wealth, immigrating to or emigrating from SA, and owning land outside of assigned locations. In the inter-war period, the Indian bourgeoisie and working class were separated. The trajectory of the indentured meant that during the years 1910- 1920, labourers changed to ordinary wage from serfdom. The descendants of this group were amongst the first to make it into new spheres of employment.⁵⁵ Trading remained the stronghold of the passenger Indians who generally did very

⁵¹ Vahed and Desai, 2017 p152

⁵² Dhupela-mesthrie, 15

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Jain p77

⁵⁵ Jain p35

well during the first world war. They were labelled an 'Asiatic menace' by whites and were relegated to trade in restricted areas.

Wealthy Indian trading classes were faced with difficulty because of the GAA, and the revoking of licenses under this act caused implications for them, though they were turned into the bourgeoisie in competition with white capital. Africans led a harassed existence squeezed by the authorities on the one hand, and competition with Indian traders on the other— Indian traders and landlords would lease land to Africans who would sub-lease it to others building shacks and paying rent.⁵⁶

Indian traders were subject to racism by the white population but also received prejudicial remarks from Africans, as they were the competing workforce. These two groups at times bordered each other due to separate development. Indians were seen as the 'middleman authority': the middleman is defined as one who serves as a buffer between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, the employee and employer, the landlord and the renter.⁵⁷ Due to apartheid's laws, there were an amount of the middle class who were allowed to access university education at top institutions, locally and abroad.⁵⁸

There are contradictions in Jain's study that reveal that class and race are not always in synchronicity. For instance, Jain notes that in 1963, two thirds of the working class Indians in Durban were said to be below the poverty line. According to this study, many Indians and coloureds rapidly urbanised by the 1980's constituting the 'proletariat and bourgeoisie': 77% of coloureds and 91% of Indians with a small amount still making up the poor class.⁵⁹ There was some upward mobility for some ex-indentured⁶⁰; as the mobility for indenture descendants or working class Indians increased by 10%.⁶¹ However, it also states that in the 80's coloureds and Africans made up the lower class (73.6% and 92.8% respectively), with a small amount of Indians constituting the poor, not more than 10% in 1993.⁶² It does reveal that there may have been those who have seen upward mobility, but there also were those who did not who are grouped with the

⁵⁶ Jain, 49.

⁵⁷ Vahed and Desai 2017.

⁵⁸ Vahed and Desai,

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p123

⁶⁰ Dhupela-Mesthrie: p14

⁶¹ Jain 1999, p

⁶² Jain, p105

bourgeoisie. This also does not necessarily mean they were not given more privileges than black people institutionally; it simply suggests that the structure is not encompassing. Be the statistics as it may, both poor and upper-class Indians have a collective paradigm due to a shared history of racialisation, even if indentured and passenger Indians articulate this differently.⁶³

Hence there were different interactions between upper class Indians and lower class Indians, who had all become a part of the unit 'Indian' under apartheid rule. The acts instituted had tied race to labour: the natives were divided, and indentured Indians were the reserve labour force, the outsiders and competitors. The trader classes had become a menace to both the settlers and black people. The homogenising of this group into one unit allowed the National Party to use them as a buffer race between black and white, giving them more privileges than black people but less than white, so that everyone who was non-white would see the 'other' as the enemy instead of the government. The infiltration of colonialism through the apartheid hierarchy meant that everyone under the system was obligated to participate in racialised capitalism. Parties from both groups, upper and lower, regardless of their respective positionalities had formed part of the resistance campaign against apartheid. Largely, it had to do with the oppressive law under apartheid rule, but the system had formed the way in which the border majority were in or out of community with black people. As they had constituted the middle structure meant that there were those who pushed for a non-racial society and economic restitution, but there are also those who harbor anti-Blackness. This exists both in the upper and working class Indian communities. The spatial politics of the Group Areas Act had formed personal relations, and many of these areas have not been properly integrated in post-apartheid SA, except for those who have seen upward mobility and move to more 'affluent' areas. The areas assigned to each race under the act remains intact with those who have long established their houses there, though races are not ostracised for intermingling.

The racialisation of capital during apartheid

Through the varied values that colonisers ascribed to human life and labour, racial capitalism was made possible as the labour of Black people were used to create a reality for whites. Whiteness is

⁶³ Rastogi p20

reliant on the racial capitalist system to legitimise itself through race. By doing this, undervalued populations are eliminated or kept subjugated to ensure a labour supply while the white population is secured. During apartheid, the jobs and types of education as well as state expenditure on education varied depending on race. The types of jobs available to black people, access to education (called the Bantu education system) as well as how much was spent on educating black versus the other populations was highly disproportionate. Whose bodies were made to matter is prevalent in the apartheid hierarchy. This system determined who belonged and who did not. The black working class were placed at the bottom of the pyramid, and whiteness at the top, with the other races forming the middle structure. Whites earned disproportionately to Africans. In the 1970s, for instance, they made up only 18% of the labour force taking 64% of the income. Africans were 70% of the labour force, yet they took only 26 % of income.⁶⁴ This system suggested that unless racism and capitalism were confronted together, post-apartheid SA would remain unequal.⁶⁵ Under this system Black Africans belonged, but only in a way that enabled them to utilise their labour, and not have them seen in white SA, relegated to their native homelands.

Vally's study⁶⁶ shows that many wanted to reclassify themselves as white or from black to coloured. This meant they would gain better access to living conditions as being closer to whiteness meant they would have a better life. In 1986, there was a 38% failure rate in upward requests for coloured, and 42% for black people.⁶⁷ The apartheid state was hesitant in granting these. Aspiration to whiteness and better living conditions at times meant a denial of blackness in some aspects of the population.

Forced labour systems are central to how race structures and the accumulation of capital were formed. Andy Clarno suggests in *Neoliberal Apartheid* that in Guyana the Creole indentured population displaced natives.⁶⁸ The labourers, according to Clarno, have a belonging to the land that is grounded in labour, simultaneously being oppressive to natives (they displaced natives on their land, though if the labourers were brought there as a tool of colonisation, against their wishes

⁶⁴ Jain 1999 p61

⁶⁵ Andy Clarno, 2017. *Neoliberal apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1.

⁶⁶ Vally, p45

⁶⁷ Vally 46

⁶⁸ Andy Clarno, 2017. Chapter 1.

or other motivating factors, it is debatable as whether this is the same displacement that settlers occupy). Whilst the apartheid state in SA created divisions based on race, Indian and coloured people had easier access to a better life and accessing human rights. This created fragmentation within the Black community. For instance, black people were not allowed to participate in the tricameral parliament. To give an idea of apartheid's ranking system, the average income of whites in the 1970s were 12 times black people, 6 times coloured people, and 4 times that of Asians. Steve Biko said in *I write what I like* that 'there can be no viable unity amongst blacks because they hold each other in contempt. Coloureds despise Africans because they (the former) by their proximity to Africans, may lose their assimilation into the white world'.

This describes racialised capitalism by the apartheid system. Assimilation into white society became the only reality that many knew, where whiteness was synonymous with being 'civil' and not backward, which is what the system saw black people to be. Biko goes on to say,

*'Africans despise the Coloureds and the Indians for a variety of reasons' and Indians 'not only despise Africans but in many instances exploit the African in shop and job situations.'*⁶⁹

The tensions caused by apartheid and maintained after segregation circumscribes the SA Indian identity.⁷⁰ Biko also mentions that a concern that the resistance faces is that there will be some so conditioned by the system that they become part of the system. He says

*'witness the new swing amongst leaders of the Indian community in Durban. (I admit I say this with a pain in my heart.) Ever since word was let lose that the Indian council will at some near future will be elected, several intelligent people are thinking of reviving the Indian Congress and letting it form opposition within the movement.'*⁷¹

A history of the past in the present: riots

Since the ills of the past orchestrated by colonialism had not seen redress along social lines, unresolved issues retained during colonialism and the subsequent years of apartheid has been

⁶⁹ Steve Biko and Stubbs. *I write what I like*. Edinburgh: Heinemann, 1987 p40

⁷⁰ Rastogi Pallavi, 2020. *Afrindian Fictions* Ohio State University Press. p8

⁷¹ Biko, p40

cyclically and inevitably presenting itself. Episodes of history where tensions were heightened between these two groups were the 1949 riots, the 1985 Inanda riots, and the more recent 2021 July Unrests.

The riots of 1949 between black and indian people were sparked between a shopkeeper and a native. These riots left 142 dead and 1087 injured.⁷²

Youlendree Appasamy provides:

“the riots were a violently xenophobic response to anti-Black racism amongst some in the Indian community. As Black newspapers like Ilanga and Inkundla pointed out at the time, many Black people were frustrated by the racism they experienced from Indian property and business owners. At the same time, the level of violence and its indiscriminate targeting of all Indians—especially those who lived in poor communities and did not necessarily have the power or authority to exploit Black people in the way that upper class Indians did—reflected broader ideas about all Asian communities being alien in Africa and encroaching on highly contested urban spaces. Furthermore, there was widespread resentment amongst Africans about the fact that Indians occupied a more advantageous position in the newly formalized racial hierarchy.”⁷³

There are multiple truths in this, and her article tying all these riots together reveal the layered nature of oppression between marginalised groups, as well as the idea that both poor and upper-class indians had different points of interaction with natives that were characterised by apartheid. Niren Tolsi, in an article titled *Kwa-Zulu Natal Races Back to 1949* writes on the 2021 riots: ‘indeed, a mode of making claims in the name of race is being actively used to erase the question of class.’⁷⁴

The 1985 riots occurred a few years short of the fall of apartheid. It started when activist Victoria Mxenge was murdered by the government (this was carried out under apartheid; however, the pattern of assassinating activists who are fighting injustice is characteristic of rule under the African National Congress, now synonymous with the neoliberal order). In these riots 42 indian-owned shops and businesses were burned down, as many houses and 3 surgeries operated by indians had been destroyed by fire. Phoenix, the settlement founded by Gandhi and run by an ‘indian trust’ had been destroyed. There was nearly 1 million rand raised to recreate it, however,

⁷² Vahed and Desai, 2017

⁷³ Youlendree Appasamy, “You Came Here on a Fucking Boat,” [africasacountry.com](https://africasacountry.com/2021/11/you-came-here-on-a-fucking-boat), 2021, <https://africasacountry.com/2021/11/you-came-here-on-a-fucking-boat>.

⁷⁴ Tolsi 2021

it was not used at the time as there was the question of ‘black squatters who had encroached the settlement’. They had been forcibly removed under the GAA from the native reserves and the money was not used as they ‘would not move out.’⁷⁵

The riots provided an opportunity to the oppressed African masses to protest the degrading socio-economic and political conditions generated by apartheid and its equally oppressive predecessor state. According to Nutall, ‘the riots which began with attacks on indian commercial targets, escalated into a wider challenge against white authority. Large number of Africans sensed a moment of opportunity to resist the state with population force, not directly but through communal assault on a vulnerable, racially defined target.’⁷⁶

Anger towards the state was directed at a minority of people. Appasamy explains that the logics of xenophobia— ‘profiling Indians as stealing land, jobs and opportunities from indigenous populations, Indian shopkeepers as symbolic of privilege, easily expendable and expelled—work with the tribalism espoused by Inkatha (an apartheid-state funded Zulu nationalist group) at the time’.⁷⁷

The apartheid state viewed the riots mainly as a race relations problem between Africans and indians, justifying its policies of racial segregation. There was a similar pattern in the recent 2021 July unrest, which occurred when ex-president Jacob Zuma was ousted. The root of the problem was the continuation of apartheid’s ills in accessing economic equality. These communities had turned on each other and it had revealed that the tensions between these two races were far from resolved. A question that Vahed and Desai asks is how the impact of the 1949 riots have lived on in the consciousness of indian South Africans, and how has this narrative been passed on to generations? How has this, at the beginning of apartheid, coupled with the separate development scheme created a situation of seeing the other as a threat?⁷⁸

It was noted that there were a high number of indians who voted for the National Party during the transition to a democracy.⁷⁹ There is a similar pattern with many indians voting for the Democratic Alliance today, an anti-poor political party that works to guarantee white suburbia.

⁷⁵ Jain, 116

⁷⁶ Jain, 50

⁷⁷ Appasamy 2021

⁷⁸ Vahed and Desai 2017

⁷⁹ Jain, ? ; Vahed and Desai, p

They confront restrictions as Indians, while their class position creates the everyday difficulties of survival, causing them to vote for conservative opposition parties.⁸⁰

There were tensions caused by the 1949 riots, and in Durban the Inkatha leaders threatened the Indian shopkeepers that they would boycott their shops. Vahed and Desai foreground that in 1947, 2 years before the 1949 riots, anti-apartheid activists Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Dr Monty Naicker from the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congress respectively signed a joint pact with the president general of the African National Congress, Dr A B Xuma termed the “Doctor’s Pact”, meant to form alliances with African and Indian people. This was rejected by Natal on the grounds that it did not reflect the feelings of the black African population in Natal.⁸¹ After apartheid the Black middle class had started to emerge, capitalism was more freely practiced by the middle class in the transition through Black Economic Empowerment.⁸² In the post-apartheid era, ‘Affirmative Action’ was put in place so that all races who were not white could gain equal opportunities into the workforce. It is an area of disagreement amongst Indians; “a common refrain of Indians is that ‘for years apartheid discriminated against us as we were too black, now we are not black enough to gain from affirmative action.’”⁸³

For victims of hardship, it is at least some consolation to account for their misfortune by attributing this to nefarious schemes of villains rather than a result of distant, complex, and rarely understandable forces.⁸⁴ The poor Indian may look at BEE not being favorable toward them, whilst it may be economic inequality that they would find majority of the working-class black population also face. There has been places where the struggles of these two merged, such as the case of Shamita Naidoo who is a former chairperson of the shack-dweller’s movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo (people of the shacks in Zulu). She was elected by a black majority for those in

⁸⁰ Vahed and Desai

⁸¹ Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai, 2017

⁸² Because the racial categorisation scheme was a precarious one that pretended at times to be wide encompassing, it is necessary to clarify that Indian and coloured people were given more access in some regards, however there are people in the lower class of these races.. They constitute the ghettos of the GAA assigned to them under apartheid for whom mobility has not guaranteed their security. This does not negate the fact that Indians and coloureds as a group had been given more privilege as a group to ensure that Black people were divided.

⁸³ Dhupelia-Mesthrie, p28.

⁸⁴ Vahed and Desai, stuck in the middle

Motala Heights, a predominantly black settlement of which poor indian people living in shacks also reside.⁸⁵

This ground-up movement (which is not a political party) has brilliantly written on the riots that took place between africans and indians:

*The situation in Durban is very serious. The politicians and the people around them are actively trying to divide people and to turn people against each other so that they can continue with their looting. As usual they are trying to divide the poor... we are worried this could escalate into an ethnic war. Like national borders the borders of the old 'bantustans' were imposed by colonialism... Indian people are also being called terrible names, threatened and told that they must go back to India. This is ridiculous and outrageous. How can a person who has never been to India be told that they must go back to India?*⁸⁶

Post-colonial Indians in the post-apartheid era

As years had passed, a lot of those who were disconnected from their ancestors simply did not find out what their ancestral villages were. There were complicating factors that may have loosened the ties with India. Vally suggests that the loss of caste is one such factor. Anyways, this new location meant that they had, over time, constructed a being with the space. Some of these grey areas of negotiation lay within internalising whiteness and modernity on the one hand and identifying with blackness on the other.⁸⁷ This does not erase the need to establish a self that affirms who they are as African indians. Anti-apartheid activist Jay Naidoo remarks that all those who were not white were lumped as black for the struggle. Him fighting to be part of the political process, as well as that identity did not allow him to understand his indian background.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Motala Heights indian shacks archive by Shamita Naidoo:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/100075429@N07/albums/72157635062051507/>

⁸⁶ Abahlali, "An Urgent Call to Build Solidarity in Action | Abahlali BaseMjondolo," July 2021,

<https://abahlali.org/node/17327/>.

⁸⁷ rastogi, end of chapter 2. (Dhupela-Mesthrie notes that the poorer classes found it easier to identify with the black working class, however, this is not as clear cut, as we have seen in our history that there are those from merchant classes who were part of resistance campaigns alongside blacks, and there are those from lower indentured classes that can hold racist attitudes towards africans.)

⁸⁸ Dhupela-Mesthrie, p27

Fatima Meer rejects the idea of identifying as a diasporic Indian, as it ‘undermines this communities fight for recognition in South Africa, privileging the Indian aspect’.⁸⁹ I do not have the answers about what needs to be done, as I think that these are questions that would need to be decided in community. However, I can be suggestive about the world I would like to see. If the concept of ‘Ubuntu’ meaning ‘I am because we are’ has been used deceptively by power, true Ubuntu could mean that we would not hide from our past and hold each other accountable. In order to do this, we would need to redefine what it means to exist in the world to be without the current order, and devise a way to make the relation between black and indian anew. Perhaps this means open and meaningful dialogue with one another, one that foregrounds how these systems shaped us, to embrace a remaking of it: a re-worlding of the world.

Re-worlding non-linear time in the African-Indian Ocean

The concept of ‘worlding’ defined by Gayatri Spivak simplifies that the realities of those in subaltern countries have been shaped by colonisation. To make the world from the perspective of the subaltern, the prospects and nostalgia precolonial reality is far-fetched, as roots and ‘origin’ have already been altered. In any case, ‘close attention to its real pattern of ebbs and flows shows that time is not reversable.’⁹⁰

Achille Mbembe offers that linear time is a current that has a future progressing from a past, it is irreversible. It operates on a conventional scale of time, where the western world is replicated. We would need to abandon conventionality and embrace uncertainty in non-linearity— even chaos, which is a possible outcome of entangled time. However, it is not the only outcome. As Mbembe explains, the post colony is comprised of intersecting temporalities that implicate each other. Pasts, presents and futures are interlocked with others and retain their depths. They are altered, carried, modified, sustained. Mbembe terms ‘emerging time’ as one that is synonymous with multiplicity and ‘indigenous durations.’ It has disturbances, fluctuations, oscillations, much like the tides of an ocean.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Rastogi, p1

⁹⁰ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony: Time on the move.*

⁹¹ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Johannesburg: University Of Wits Press, 2015).

As they understood how frightening the power of the collective is, colonisers (and neo-colonialists) imposed control to prevent collective uprising. I propose the answer through which traumas of the past be worked through is through the shared space connecting and separating these two continents, a body of fluidity where water from one land laps up onto another's shores: the African-Indian Ocean. This Ocean can be looked at as a site that connects and separates African and Indian worlds; a civilisation outside of modernity that facilitates hybrid identity. It is a space that allows these temporalities to unfold simultaneously. I locate this conversation through Pallavi Rastogi's concept of 'between east and south' rather than 'south-south' as the term 'south-south' highlights the solidarity between the 'third world' yet removes the geographical location of the east.⁹²

Paul Gilroy alludes to this in *The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture Against Modernity*: "If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the "Indians" they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, hermeneutically sealed off from each other, then so be it."⁹³

The idea of a cohesive force fighting against one that wants to split the south by determining whose lives matter and whose are discarded is reflected in Gilroy's monologue on how battles are interconnected and implicate one another. Additionally, the inclusion of the Indian as the "postcolonial diasporic" forces us to reconsider the status of outsiders on common ground and what it would take for "outsiders" to belong as non-indigenes, as hybrid identities, to break boundaries, and embrace multi-culturalism. We can do this by looking outside the binary of black and white, a shared horizon in the creolisation of culture. Intersecting realities may borrow from each other, rather than aspiring to a timeline of modernity.

When indians left their land in India and traversed the kala pani, a voyage into an unknown was taken, becoming a space where discovery simultaneously existed alongside violence. Home was lost and found. It is where identities became fluid and adaptable, birthing something new. The seas are a site in the collision of these worlds. It is where there can possibly exist an 'Africanisation

⁹² Rastogi 2021 p36

⁹³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass. :Harvard University Press, 1993. p2

of SA indians and an Indianisation of SA'. This relationship could be looked at as a space that holds these different continuities unfolding alongside each other outside of modernity and linear time, where geographies intersect. Their relationship is a product of linear historical process; however, this does not mean it does not hold the possibility to be recreated. The waters are a transitory site holding histories, a time capsule outside of modern civilisation. I would argue that this can act as a catalyst for solidarity, a portal between this world and the next, as Arundhati Roy would say.⁹⁴ A “world-making” force: the practice of opening to other more hospitable worlds to come⁹⁵ of a solidarity that is strong, transnational and beyond borders, a multiculturalism in which shared cultures are celebrated, and the complexities embraced to truly reconcile. A poetics of relation that harbors not fixed stability, but embraces the unknown, in contact with everything possible for something beautiful to emerge.

Whispering secrets, waves retreat to collect water formations in the shape of continents that have long departed into fragments separating into countries. Cries spittle in the form of foam droplets. Unable to bear them any longer, it offers and throws them onto the shoreline in relief. Each time it draws back, it becomes heavy with untold stories, undiscovered histories. It retreats, and heaves, exhaustively sighing onto the coast, wailing, wallowing and waiting for a witness to share in the burden it bears. The waves leave a repository of traces in the sand, erasing where shoreline was, a history in constant remaking. One could think about the magnificent beauty that is possible, at odds with a deeply violent past.

Conclusion

In this paper I have given an account of the forces that shaped the relationship of African black and indian people in South Africa. I showed how the presence of indians in SA complicate nativity and belonging, being postcolonial ‘diasporic indians’ of South Africa in-between settlers on occupied land and indigenous people, who were dispossessed of their land. This was complicated by numerous divisive strategies employed by the colonial powers. It is also a situation that many migrants are in today.

⁹⁴ Arundhati Roy, “Arundhati Roy: ‘the Pandemic Is a Portal’ | Free to Read,” [www.ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca), April 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

⁹⁵ Peng cheah on the sarah jappie

Since power changed from black to white, the situation of indians have been overlooked. Indians hold the between-state of having roots in dual locations. Apartheid, colonialism and tensions between themselves and natives complicated this. One could interrogate how this introduction of indian as ‘alien’ made them deny aspects of their identity in order to assimilate into white civilisation, and how we are to exist outside of modernity and white civilisation. We could question what this truly ‘post’ colonial would look like. To look to indenture as an answer to whether our lives are better in SA than in India, Vahed highlights that there are academic studies noting advantages gained by indentured indians in the colonies: caste, superstition, famine and religion may have otherwise imposed on the lives of those who did not migrate. Gaiutra Bahadur in *Coolie Woman* foregrounds that in the case of Guyana, migration may have worked in the favour of women (with its limitations, of course, as indenture was not kind to women and their descendants, even if conditions may have bettered as the years went by). Racial capitalism showed that the closer one got to becoming white, the more 'civilised' they were. If modernity, progress, and so-called advancement were aspirant to a colonial mode of being prevailing over how we exist and how we experience the world, then we cannot evaluate these advantages without the structure of whiteness, modernity, progress, and so-called advancement that imposed themselves on us. Neither can indian South Africans exist in an insular microcosm. This is not suggestive to return to roots or ethnic absolutism, however, the question does provoke how we are to be in the world. One can look to the opposite of land, beyond a boundary or towards a horizon for a body of water that presents a uniting factor that married these two entities; an in-between space of other worlds: the African-Indian Ocean.

To conclude on a note by Édouard Glissant in case you may think my belief system appears too utopian:

‘lightning flashes are the shivers of one who desires or dreams of a totality that is impossible or yet to come; duration urges on those who attempt to live this totality, when dawn shows through the linked histories of peoples.’⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Édouard Glissant and Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor Univ. Of Michigan Press, 1997).



Image: Taken in Fordsburg, a township reserved for indians under apartheid until forced removals took place during the Group Areas Act. The area today acts as a cultural container consisting of people from India, Pakistan, and different African nations.

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Image: Taken by Cheriese Dilrajh in 2021