Chapter 4:
Miscegenation, Feminine Virtue, and the Boundaries of Domestic Space

A wealthy merchant in East Africa answered his door one evening to find two young Africans. Upon enquiring the purpose of their visit, it turned out that one of them had come to ask for the hand of the merchant's daughter in marriage. With due decorum, and considered coolness, the merchant called the visitors into the living room, offered them a drink, and called in his daughter. The proposition was put to her. Respectfully she replied that she had nothing against it if the gentlemen would take care of her and if she were to have her parents' permission. The merchant then told the young men that, in accordance with tradition, it would only be correct for them to bring their parents to formally approach him. That night, after the guests had left, the family packed its belongings and fled the country for India. .[1]

—Apocryphal story frequently told by South African Indians during the apartheid years.

You came to their country when they were ruling themselves and you took away all their rights in their country of origin, you took away their cattle from them and their lands and placed on them the burden of passes together with harsh laws that cause them to fill goals without any cause, and they are persecuted by your laws that bring about sin…

—Letter by Jeremiah Sithole, a Zulu prophet, to the Native Affairs Department, 1951.

"She wants to be modernised," said Patrick. "It's true! It's no good! So they get divorced like flies, like FLIES, man. And then you have to get another Sheila, and she's worse. Man, they're all the same nowadays, true's God!"[2]

—Quoted in Anthony Sampson, *DRUM*, 1957

On the first evening of the 1949 Durban Riots, a crowd of African men gathered outside the Grey Street Women's Hostel, demanding the delivery of women who associated with Indians.[3] This tragic moment—which has been overlooked by historians of the pogrom—reveals a great deal about the centrality of gender and sex to the racial dynamics of mid-century Natal. At the government commission enquiry into the riots, Senator Brookes observed that miscegenation was the second most common accusation raised by Africans in the period before the riots.[4] Numerous articles and

[1] Moodley, "The Ambiguity of Survival Politics," 445.
[2] Anthony Sampson, *DRUM: The Newspaper That Won the Heart of Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 75.
[3] "Evidence on the Causes of the Race Riots," January 1949, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/33/11), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
[4] See Kirk, "The 1949 Durban Riots: A Community in Conflict," 114. When scholars have addressed these claims, they have briefly focused on the problem of their empirical accuracy and bracketed the problem of interracial sex from the other causes of the riots. As a result, they have failed to raise the question of gender and Durban's racial dynamics. For example, Kirk mainly focuses on the factual reliability of the testimony regarding miscegenation (which—agreeing with the commission's report—he states was exaggerated). Eddie Webster also briefly discusses these accusations, arguing that their

letters following the riots in *Ilanga Lase Natal* accused "certain Indian men" of seducing or preying on African girls.[5]

Sexual violence against Indian women also played a central role in the events of January 1949. In her autobiography, Dr. Goonam recalls: "I treated girls of 14 and 15 who had been raped in Clairwood, Jacobs and Merebank."[6] *Indian Opinion* bitterly emphasized the occurrence of rape: "The murders committed, the ravages on our women and girls, the burning of our homes and business premises, makes us to wonder if there is human feeling in some human breasts."[7] Another Indian newspaper, *Pravasi*, reiterated these accusations four times in as many pages, attributing these acts to the "Bantu people" as a whole: "the Bantu people …have committed the most heinous crimes of murder, rape, loot and arson, which have shocked the whole civilized world."[8] In later testimony, some participants in the riots boasted of targeting women rather than the possessions of Indian men.[9] It seems likely that these rapes were acts of revenge against humiliations both real and perceived, including the alleged seduction of African women. In turn, assaults against Indian women and girls further cemented the colonial stereotype of the violent, savage, and (now) sexually-threatening Zulu.

In this chapter, I explore some of the complex intersections between race, the constitution of public and private spaces, and gender in mid-century Durban. As the urbanization of Africans and Indians accelerated during the inter-war period, debates intensified within both groups over the meaning of nation, tradition, and the status of women. Many Africans and Indians understood the proper boundaries between the races—boundaries that were in continuous dispute during the 1940s and 50s—in terms of the relationship between gender and social space. In this context, questions such as public interactions between African women and Indian men, African domestic workers in Indian households, and miscegenation assumed a fraught and sometimes explosive significance.

---

importance lies in the subjective impression by witnesses that "Indian men were taking advantage of their 'privileged position.'" See Webster, "The 1949 'Riots'—A Case Study in Race and Class," 35.

[5]See for example "The Riots," letter by Fredrick Dube, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 29 January 1949.

[6]Goonam, *Coolie Doctor*, 138.

[7]"The Racial Disturbances," *Indian Opinion*, 21 January 1949.

[8]B.D. Sayyyasi, "Durban Massacre—First Fruit of Apartheid," *Pravasi*, 2 (April 1949).

[9]Tembinkosi Phewa recalls: "We ran up to Pelwane's place at the top. There were some other Indians living there as well. Pelwane was inside his shop shitting himself. The cops arrived in navy blue coats. We sat on their truck and Pelwane came out. He said we could take everything—just leave me alone. Ja, but you see we just laughed and said we just want his women—the police—they could take the blankets and things!" Edwards, "Mkhumbane," 51.

African Nationalism, Gender, and Urbanization

Since the late nineteenth century, the Durban government's attempts to establish and control a dependable supply of migrant labor centered on preventing the movement of African women to the city and arresting the formation of a permanent, urban working class. David Hemson explains: "The influx of African women, although posed in terms of prostitution, venereal disease, and public morality, threatened the drive to force all African workers into barracks by posing the alternative of working class households in the towns."[10] The increasing urbanization of Africans and Indians following the First World War—and especially the development of racially mixed working class neighborhoods of African, poor whites, and Indians—produced a growing panic among missionaries and the local ruling class over the looming "degeneration" of the detribalized African and the dangers of miscegenation.[11] Expulsions of African women from Durban occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1935 the Durban council passed a resolution banning African women from entering the city without written permission. Town councilors called for the organized medical examination of African women. In the late 1930s, a representative on the African advisory board warned of growing anger among Africans over harassment of women.[12] In addition to ubiquitous threat of police harassment, deportation to the reserves, and political repression, African residents of Durban confronted another aspect of state power: an intrusive biomedical surveillance that not only displaced and "humiliated" Zulu patriarchal authority, but transformed the African woman's body into an object of symbolic and political struggle.[13]

If the state's effort to arrest the formation of a modern, urbanized African population relied heavily on the policing of African women, two other agencies served to politicize the control of women's sexuality: the influence of the mission-educated petite bourgeoisie and the authority of

[10]David Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban," (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 125.
[11] Ibid., 163.
[12]P.R. Maylam, "Aspects of African Urbanization in the Durban Area before 1940," in *Natal in the Union, 1931-1961*: *A Collection of Papers Presented at a Workshop at the University of Natal October 20-30, 1980* (Pietermaritzburg: Department of Historical and Political Studies, 1981), 11.
[13]The centrality of public health to the elaboration of segregation in South Africa has been discussed by Maynard W. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony," *The Journal of African History*18, no. 3 (1977), 387-410. For the nineteenth century background of this system in earlier imperial legislation regulating venereal disease, see Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empi*re (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Natal's "traditional" leaders, the Zulu chiefs.[14] As Shula Marks has shown, the social dislocations caused by the Mineral Revolution and the intensification of migrant labor precipitated the political realignment of these forces in the late 1920s. A formidable bloc developed between the Natal Christian elite, the Zulu royal house, and elements within the government based on ethnic nationalism and a neo-traditional cult of the monarchy.[15] "It was," Marks argues "in the position of African women that the forces of conservatism found a natural focus."[16] On the part of the Natal state and the chiefs, the continuing subordination of women in the reserves played a critical economic function. The labor of African women subsidized the system of low-paid migrant labor; their near complete legal disenfranchisement—and the need for young men to pay *lobolo* to marry—enabled chiefs to assert control over migrant workers and their earnings.[17] The Christian middle class had been deeply worried over the disruption of authority within the African family, premarital pregnancy, and the spread of venereal disease since at least the first decade of the twentieth century.[18] Such concerns reached new heights in the 1930s, and many African intellectuals believed that a modernized Zulu culture, grounded in respect for male elders and the disciple of the home, could counteract these scourges.[19] For the next two decades and beyond, the status of women was at the heart of debates over Zulu tradition and modernization. *Lobolo*, female initiation rites, social etiquette for women, and witchcraft continued to provoke vigorous exchanges in *Inkundla* and *Ilanga* during the 1940s and early 50s, especially in the African language pages.[20]

By the mid 1940s, several additional factors had combined to accentuate the political importance of the "African woman." Not only had migration to the major cities accelerated during the war, but women began to enter new spheres of employment, including factory work and

---

[14]For a discussion of missionaries and the introduction of Victorian ideas of domesticity and female sexuality in South Africa, see Cherryl Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), especially chapters 3,5, and 8.
[15]Shula Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu ethnic Consciousness," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroi Vail (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 217.
[16]Ibid., 225. Also see the Shula Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1987).
[17]For the colonial manipulation of *lobolo* to control labor migration, see Jeff Guy, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of Zulu Society," in *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930*, ed. Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (London: Longman, 1982), 187.
[18]See Deborah Gaitskell, "'Wailing for purity': Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters, 1912-1940," in *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa*, 341.
[19]Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity," 225-230.
[20]Ukpanah, "Yearning to be free," 167.

professions that potentially afforded some measure of financial independence.[21] African women also started to displace men in the role of domestic servants or "kitchen boys."[22] The response to these developments among African intellectuals was decidedly complex. Given the strangulating impact of the color bar legislation on the employment prospects of most African men, African newspapers and politicians saluted the growing number of women in distinctly modern professions like nursing, factory work, and teaching: "Today African women are winning major battles by themselves as nurses and factory operatives—many of these receiving better wages than men."[23] In numerous articles in *Ilanga* during the late 1940s and 50s, H.I.E. Dhlomo extolled the virtues of cultural transformation and scientific progress, imprecating those who would intern the contemporary African within the mockery of unchanging "tradition." "Tribalism," he prophesized "is doomed."[24] A frequent target of his critique was the legal and social status of African women: they were considered perpetual minors under Natal's Native Code. In the midst of the growing disillusionment of the late 1940s, the success stories of nurses, teachers, and factory workers were one of the few evident signs of race progress. Profiles of attractive, smartly-dressed young nurses soon became a fixture of *Ilanga*, foreshadowing the celebration of the sleek, cosmopolitan—and frequently bikini clad—woman emblematic of 1950s magazines like *Drum*.[25]

This greater financial and personal independence also generated enormous fear concerning the loss of patriarchal control over African women. *Ilanga* published a regular satirical column by "Rolling Stone," which sometimes featured a nurse named Jane Maplank. A misogynist caricature directed at the "wrong kind" of African women in the professions, nurse Jane used her uniform to set up "dates" around town—scandalously blurring the distinction between profession and

---

[21]Consigned to the status of a perpetual minor under Natal's Native Code, African women did not have legal personhood under pass law legislation or the industrial codes, and therefore had greater freedom of movement and employment than African men. See "Weekly Review and Commentary," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 July 1949.

[22]Nuttall suggests that the gender imbalance in the townships and shanty towns disappeared between 1946 and 1951 and "Among African women during the same period, manufacturing employment remained minimal, at no more than a few hundred; but tertiary employment, mostly in domestic service, rocketed by 50% to 18,000." See Timothy Andrew Nuttall, "Class, Race and Nation: African Politics in Durban, 1929-1949" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1991), 260. In 1946, the Durban City council announced that it would construct a new hostel and flats for African women, citing the acute housing crisis caused by the large number of women were entering domestic service and the nursing/teaching professions. See "Homes for African Women," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 10 August 1946.

[23]"Woman," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 25 May 1946.

[24] "Weekly Review and Commentary," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 4 March 1950.

[25]This remained true into the 1960s: "African nurses, in particular, set an example of style and elegance." See Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie*, 113.

prostitution—and could be bought (*lobolo*) for a single car ride. "Rolling Stone" (in fact, *Ilanga* editor R.R.R. Dhlomo) directly associated these attitudes with miscegenation: "she is a progressive nurse with modern outlook she does not see why she shouldn't love to be inside the car of anybody even if he is not an African."[26] While the new African woman may have embodied modernity and racial advancement, she also revealed the dangers to male authority posed by urbanization, novel forms of mobility, and the perversion of Zulu institutions (in this case, the transposition of bride price with purchasing sex).[27] Urban anonymity allowed a significant number of women to break free from the authority of the rural family.[28] Moreover, most African women in Durban were not relatively well-paid professionals. They often lived in fetid hostels or cohabitated with boyfriends, and many women survived through brewing traditional beer or prostitution. Drawing on Victorian conceptions of propriety and eugenics, articles in the Zulu press directly linked socio-economic progress and the question of female promiscuity.[29]

The panic over the sexual foundations of African nationhood was closely related to a second question: the crisis of the African family. An increasing body of social scientific research, much of it organized and funded by the South African Institute of Race Relations, catalogued the social impact of migrant labor, pass laws, and slum existence on the new urban households. Columns in *Ilanga* regularly praised the efforts of the SAIRR and often reiterated its claims, particularly in denouncing influx controls and pass laws: "One of the strongest things that can be said against them [the pass laws] is that they have helped to break African family life. And since the family is the fundamental

---

[26]"Rolling Stone on Nurse Jane Maplank," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 24 February 1945; "Rolling Stone on Nurse Jane Maplank," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 2 June1945. Nurse Jane is ultimately sent home to her imaginary township after she announces that she is planning a trip to India on the advice of an Indian "friend."

[27]"Busy Bee" derisively reported that some people thought nurses "should not receive too high salaries when African men receive low wages" since it will interfere with marriage. See "Weekly Review and Commentary," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 16 February 1946.

[28]For an early account of a Zulu woman who fled the Royal household in the late 1920s and supported herself through working for a white family, see Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, *Zulu Woman: The Life Story of Christina Sibiya* (New York: Feminist Press, 1999), 166-171.

[29] "A progressive, self respecting community is the result of women. If you want to discover the social and economic position of the various races in this or any country, study the women. The women of the 'better' races or classes are less available, more 'stiff' more 'moral' than the 'cheaper,' more available women of the oppressed and submerged groups." See *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 25 May 1946. The association of promiscuity and miscegenation with "lower social orders" was common among liberal social scientists in South Africa. Such views also appeared in *Indian Opinion*. See "Liberals and Indians," *Indian Opinion*, 19 July 1946. For the general importance of eugenics to imperialism and domestic ideology, see Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 90 and Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rul*e (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 62-7.

unit of society, it would be superfluous to mention the evils and misery caused by a system that breaks down family life."[30] *Ilanga* argued that the absence of housing produced overcrowding and the complete abrogation of familial privacy; low wages necessitated that mothers work, leaving children subject to pernicious influences. In addition, *Ilanga* asserted that the prohibition of alcohol resulted in the transformation of private homes into public shebeens, while pass and liquor laws allowed police to enter the African's home with impunity.[31] The result of this abeyance could only be national degeneration. "Children see their parents nakedness," H.I.E. Dhlomo lamented, "There is no privacy between sexes. It is a slow process of debasement, torture, and death—both physical and spiritual." The next sentence proceeded to finger an accomplice to this process: "Meanwhile Indian and other landlords are reaping a huge and rich harvest fleecing the people who have no alternative."[32]

Durban's African leaders employed the same language in discussing the status and role of women that informed the rhetoric of anti-Indian racism: the discourse of economic self-help and race progress. If the African woman simultaneously provided an index and vehicle of such progress, the dominant position of Indian merchants and landlords—or, at least, so it seemed to many Africans—directly interfered with the African's national aspirations. The broader political ferment of the early 1940s resulted in efforts to revive the ANC Women's League on a Union-wide scale, although these developments only echoed in Natal somewhat later.[33] A small Durban branch of the ANC Women's League was active by 1947. Significantly, African politicians cited the prominence of Indian women in the1946-7 Passive Resistance Campaign to urge a greater role for African women. If anti-Indian demagoguery permeated the nationalist rhetoric of moral-sexual panic (we will see more examples below), the importance of women in South African Indian mobilizations provided the ANC with a critical mirror for self-examination. A 1946 *Ilanga* editorial concluded on the following note:

> Just one word to our womenfolk. Indian women who are regarded as 'stay-at-homes' and only interested in the kitchen and the nursery are to-day in the spearhead of the attack for

---

[30]"Weekly Review and Commentary," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 1947.
[31]See "The African Family," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 25 September 1948.
[32]"A Painless World?" *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 8 May 1948.
[33] For the revitalization of the ANC Women's League in the early 1940s, see Iris Berger, "An African American 'Mother of the Nation': Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September, 2001), 552-7; Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, "'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982," *Feminist Review* 12 (1982), 21-2.

> Indian freedom in this Country. In their remarkable faith in the righteousness of their Cause they are daily going to prison.[34]

Champion and the Natal executive expressed admiration for the prominence of Indian women in the campaign, while indicating concern that the African nationalist movement might fall behind the level of progress achieved by other "non-Europeans." A call for African women to attend the 1947 Provincial Conference likewise warned: "All races are fast moving forward in this country and yet the African is left behind. The Indian women have participated in the Passive Resistance struggle and are to be congratulated."[35] Indian women had ostensibly managed what Africans had not yet attempted. They transcended the constraints of tradition in pursuit of national liberation. This view also reflected the growing influence of American consumer culture—what Kristen Ross once labeled "fast cars and clean bodies"—on urban African ideas of femininity.[36] In the mid 1940s, *Ilanga* began publishing a family and children's supplement, and by 1947 a "Women's Corner" appeared which mixed domestic and fashion advice with nationalist platitude: "In the world of to-day, civilization is making great strides and it is our duty as mothers of the race to move forward with the rest."[37] Proliferating advertisements for skin cream, hair products, and beauty pageants articulated a self-consciously modern ideal of womanhood mediated by commodity consumption. Among some literate and Western-educated Africans, modern nationalism was impossible without a new femininity.[38]

Africanist Christianity and Subaltern Patriarchy

By the mid 1950s, the African press and nationalist movement had managed to create a sophisticated and wide-reaching public sphere despite the high level of political persecution, economic insecurity, and the white ownership of most African press (*Inkundla* was the most notable exception). Nevertheless, the discourse of literate nationalists was probably less influential in this period than the ideas of Natal's independent African churches, or Zionism. With the hypertrophy of

---

[34]"Intellectuals and Congress," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 2 November 1946.
[35]"A Clarion Call to African Women," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 18 October 1947; Cl. A. W. Geo. Champion, "Call to African Women," *Ilanga,* 20 April 1947. Invoking the prominence of Indian women in agitation against the "Ghetto Act," A.W.G. Champion saluted the leadership position held by Dr. Goonam and the impassioned speeches of a young Fatima Meer.
[36]Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (New York: October books, 1995).
[37] "Women's Corner," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 22 November 1947.
[38] In her study of the newspaper *Bantu World,* Lynn Thomas finds examples of this "modern girl" already in the inter-war period, including a developed discourse around the imitation of white and Indian women as well as anxieties over interracial sex. See Lynn M. Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability In 1930s South Africa," *The Journal of African History* 47 (2006), 461-490

Natal's shantytowns in the 1940s, the various Zionist churches spread rapidly, and their messianic gospel of conquest and future redemption contributed to the development of a new, plebeian Zulu nationalism.[39] The disruption of patriarchal authority and the proliferation of "sin" (venereal disease, premarital intercourse, and miscegenation) were significant motifs in the liturgy of these groups.[40] Their cosmology drew heavily on ancestor veneration, healing practices, and the traditions of the Zulu monarchy.[41] It also employed a melancholic narrative of collective loss, which generalized a vision of Zulu national redemption from the shattered moral economy of the individual homestead. Part of Zionism's power was that it promised the moral regeneration of the Zulu nation, while simultaneously upholding the form of patriarchal authority represented by polygamous marriage. If articles in *Ilanga* largely expressed the worldview of the literate elite, Zionist preachers voiced similar anxieties regarding gender and the crisis of the African family in a plebeian idiom. They were, however, far more skeptical of the redemptive promises of Western civilization.

On 26 August 1933, Isaiah Shembe (the founder of the Zionist Church and the most influential of the Africanist Christian leaders) delivered his first sermon at Rosboom, a small town near Pietermaritzburg in Natal. Shembe began the Rosboom advice by warning the house of Senzangakhona (the Zulu nation) not to worship its enemies: the people from the ends of the earth that had annihilated their livestock and left them without maize. After castigating his audience with quotations from scripture, Shembe then proceeded to declare that the black man's name had become a term of derision in his own land. Rather than returning home "to milk the cattle of his father" after his education, the son of the black man went to another nation and labored for men who were not his father and women who were not his mother.[42] But the most searing humiliation

---

[39]Edwards, "Mkhumbane," 9.

[40]The work of Zulu anthropologist Absolom Vilakazi stressed the critical importance of Shembe's condemnation of premarital sex and his embrace of polygamy, a practice rejected by European missionaries. Notably, Vilikazi's work was first written in the 1940s and reflects the concerns of the Zulu intelligentsia regarding sexuality and the transformation of gender relations. See Absolom Vilkazi with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers), 24-5, 32-5. For the importance of Shembe's teaching on adultery see Gerald O. West, "Reassessing Shembe 'Remembering the Bible': Isaiah Shembe's Instructions on Adultery," *Neotestamentica*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2006), 157-184.

[41]For a classic discussion of these issues, based on the now widely-criticized model of syncretism, see Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 338-42.

[42]Shembe saw the performance of domestic duties for a foreign family (in other words, a family of no kinship relation) as a form of slavery: "Our daughters are slaves of the Boers. / The daughters of the Boers pass water within their houses, / and our daughters remove all the filth." See "The Prayer to Confess their Sins on Behalf of His Nation," in *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha of EkuphaKameni:*

that Shembe invoked was the inability of Zulus to protect their daughters from seduction—a visceral image of the nation prostrate, biologically disrupted:

> And so the word of Jehovah, who does not lie, was fulfilled: that you will bear sons and daughters but they will bring you no joy because you will be oppressed (Deuteronomy 28 v 41). Today, your young girl is made pregnant by an Indian and then flung aside like snot because she is a prisoner's girl. Today, your young girl is made pregnant by a white and then flung aside like snot because she's a prisoner's girl.[43]

Shembe described foreign domination in terms of a collective loss of control over the labor of young men, female sexuality, and ultimately the entire process of social reproduction. Incorporating the promise of messianic redemption into his narrative, Shembe understood this crisis of moral economy in terms of a profound disruption of the Zulu's relationship with God.[44] The Rosboom advice concluded with a parable-like story of an educated son who left home to become a minister in the European church, giving his parents' savings to foreign schools and women, and thus leaving his father destitute and his mother without clothing, naked. The son's actions synthesized the spiritual, economic, and sexual betrayal of the Zulu nation: worshiping Christ in the conqueror's church (breaking the Zulu nation's pact with Jehovah), giving labor and money to the European economy (sabotaging the collective accumulation of wealth), and pursuing an affair with a foreign

---

Selected Writings of the Zulu Prophets Isaiah Shembe and Londa Shembe, ed. Irving Hexham (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 46

[43]"The First Words of Advice of Shembe at Rosboom" in Isaiah Shembe, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, ed. and trans. Liz Gunner (Durban: UKZN press, 2004), 111.

[44]Although historians and anthropologists often conceive of moral economy in terms of a set of traditional rights and obligations, it is critical to remember that in many pre-industrial societies these rights and obligations are understood to derive from the natural order of the cosmos. The set of obligation between ruler and ruled—although often differently understood between the two—cannot be understood in isolation from the proper relationship between this world and the other, the living and the ancestors, the village and the bush, elders and youth, men and women. As Eric Wolf writes regarding agricultural societies based on tributary relations:

> Typically they show a hierarchical representation of the cosmos, in which the dominant supernatural order, working through the major holders of power, encompasses and subjects humanity. At the same time, the ideological model displaces the real relation between power-wielding surplus takers and dominated producers onto the imagined relation between superior deity and inferior subject…This displacement also embodies a contradiction. If public power falters and justice is not done, the ideological ties linking subject and supernatural are also called into question. The rulers lose legitimacy; the mandate of Heaven may pass to alternate contenders, or people may begin to assert claims of their segmental morality against the official apparatus of mediation."

See Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 83.

woman (dishonoring his mother's sacrifices by failing to return home and lift her from poverty and pre-Christian barbarism).

Eighteen years after the Rosboom advice, a Zionist prophet named Jeremiah Sithole—who at the time lived in the Durban location of Baumannville–wrote a letter addressed to the manager of the Native Administration Department.[45] Although it did not discuss miscegenation, Sithole's letter (which seems to have been dictated to a professional notary) followed Shembe in emphasizing both colonialism's sexual dimensions and the perturbation of Zulu gender norms. The tract began by announcing that God had sent him to this earth in order to wipe away the tears of Senzagakona's children, for the sufferings of the Zulu people had come before the eyes of God. "Did you create these people whom you are troubling," he demanded "or are they God's creation?" Sithole caustically enumerated the agonies inflected by the conquering nation: the dispossession of rights, land, and cattle; the imposition of passes and causeless imprisonment; the creation of persecutory laws that bring about "sin." In Sithole's language, foreign domination, urbanization, and the daily humiliations of Apartheid ("you cause them to go to the pass offices to be in the hot sun suffering") fused into a state of moral degradation that simultaneously crippled the Zulu and exposed the satanic nature of the colonizer. The European had illegitimately disrupted both Zulu patriarchal authority and divine sovereignty, violently inserting himself into their place.

In this context, Sithole invoked the European woman's body–or rather its concealment—in order to exemplify the perversity of the new order.[46] Although Western-styled clothing initially symbolized moral probity and the evangelical rational for conquest, Sithole proclaimed that the actual conduct of the Europeans had denuded their women under the divine gaze:

> In the land of their origin you have caused them [the Zulu] to suffer through hard and bad tasks and you refuse them licenses to do work that would improve them because you are a bad nation that came under religion into this country when your woman folk were wearing long cloths, to-day they go about naked in the eyes of God—you are a bad nation that is jealous and with hardened hearts, and God—God has sent me to ask where you have placed Dinizulu and Cetshwayo—bring them back to-day or…you will be sorry for some time.

The visual force of these words was intended to strip bare the European, replicating the moment of self-awareness in the Garden of Eden and humiliating the colonizer. But this image also invoked the

---

[45]"Letter from Jeremiah Sithole to the Manager, Native Affairs Department, Durban," 10 August 1951, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/64), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

[46] For an early 20th century remark on the symbolic power of clothing, see the Stuart Archives: "J.K. remarked that Indians are not naturally very clever, for, see, they come here from their own country badly clad." *Stuart Archive*, vol. 1, 264.

function of clothing and sexual inaccessibility in distinguishing civilization from savagery. Sithole had leveled a familiar, but nonetheless powerful, accusation: the crimes of the foreign occupier have transformed the putative civilizer into the savage, the damned. By appealing to the divine's transcendental vision, Sithole succeeded in inverting the relationship between the appearance of the colonial order and its underlying reality. If the European woman served to embody rectitude in the midst of native sinfulness, the judgment of heaven had determined that the jealously and cruelty of the foreigners (their refusal to allow the nation to improve itself) had driven the Zulu people to their current depraved state. This image was one of several symbolic reversals that culminated in the demand for the return of the vanquished Zulu kings. Sithole concluded the letter by swearing that he would overthrow the Europeans with soldiers from heaven, employing water and fire against guns, unless the government set his people free: "I who is the truth, the Faithful of God, I have now come to Durban, a city of sins. I was born amongst you but you cannot see me during 1951, I live on the space above. I am not seen. I rise with the sun and set with the sun—look at the sun with telescopes." The figure of the sun embodied the cyclic inevitability of restoration, while revealing the intrinsic limitation of the colonizer's vision and strength: the impotence of European technology when confronting the raw power of the cosmos's natural order.

Neighborhood, Family, Caste

By the early 1950s, two thirds of Natal's Indian population lived in urban or peri-urban areas.[47] In contrast to African migrants, Indians moved to the city not as individuals, but as families: a substantial minority succeeded in purchasing land and building a local community infrastructure of temples and mosques, community centers, movie theatres, and homes.[48] Areas in the heart of Durban (such as Grey Street) generally contained a dense mixture of people from different religious, linguistic, and class backgrounds. But the vast majority of Indians—over 80 percent—lived in outlying regions where neighborhoods formed around ethno-linguistic communities: Telugu speakers in Puntans Hill and Stella Hill; Hindi speakers in Newlands; and Tamil speakers in Springfield and along the South Coast.[49] Hilda Kuper and Fatima Meer have provided rich descriptions of these areas. In the average Indian suburb, the better houses—sometimes owned by quite wealthy individuals—lined the few good roads; behind them, rows of wood-and-iron shacks

[47] Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, xii.
[48] See Chapter 1 and Bill Freund, "Indian Women and the Changing Character of the Working Class Indian Household in Natal 186—1990," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991).
[49] Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 26.

lacked kitchens or bathrooms and relied on communal taps.[50] Most households were large, averaging seven people, and two or three families often rented the same piece of land. As a result, strong communities developed around extended families or groups of neighbors informally incorporated into an enlarged kinship group.[51] As Hilda Kuper wrote in the late 1950s:

> A house in an Indian area is never an isolated dwelling; it is integrated; it is integrated into the street, neighbourhood and community. Kinsmen often live near each other, affairs of neighbours arouse the gossip that controls the moral standards of the whole area; temples and schools are subscribed by local donations and become local and public meeting places; shops give credit to the families in the area; the local community develops an in-group awareness expressed in a number of local associations.[52]

Although some evidence suggests the joint families were a minority by the mid 1950s, the ideal of the extended family (*Kutum* in Gujurati and Urdu; *Kudumbom* in Tamil) continued to inform aspects of social life ranging from business decisions to marriage negotiations.[53] A tiny elite of Western-educated Indians had begun to rebel against such norms by the early 1950s; most Indians, of all classes and religions, continued to live in a world tightly circumscribed by collective family life. Gender roles were absolutely central in the organization of these communities. As Bill Freund observes, many Indian men actively participated in two worlds: a public universe of gambling, sport, horse racing, bars, and—sometimes—Coloured girlfriends *and* a self-consciously traditional universe of temples (or mosques), cultural associations, language schools, and family life.[54] With the exception of a small number of professionals, the social activities of Indian women largely remained confined within the extended family: collectively raising children, performing rituals, preparing food, and adding their energies to family economic activities like shop keeping, market gardening, or craft

---

[50] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 87.

[51] H.R. Burrows, "Indian Life and Labour in Natal," *Race Relations* 10, no. 1 (1943), 18; Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 66-7; Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 102.

[52] Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, xv.

[53] Surveys conducted in the early and mid 1940s found that 22 and 38 percent of households interviewed were joint families. See *The Durban Housing Survey*, 293. The evidence suggests a secular decline in joint families from 1927, which accelerated following the relocations imposed by the Group areas Act. See Gavin Maasdorp and Nesen Pillay, *Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation: The Case of Indian South Africans* (Durban: Department of Economics, University of Natal, 1977), 85. For the continuing importance of the ideal of the joint family, see Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 66; Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 97-102.

[54] Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 37. See also P. D. Hey, *The Rise of the Natal Indian Elite* (Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness, 1961), 17.

production.[55] When women participated in cultural or recreational activities outside the home (for example, attending cinema), they often did so accompanied by a male relative or a significant part of the household.[56] Reflecting the outlook of her informants, Kuper argues that women—through "their enforced attachment to the home, their constant influence over the children, and their adherence to traditional rituals"—bound separate households together within the extended family and thereby preserved the *Kudumbom* as the basis for urban Indian life.[57]

Within and between these communities, ideas of caste possessed significant, if highly uneven, force. In her comprehensive work on the history of caste in South Asia, Susan Bayly writes that "caste was and is, to a considerable extent, what people think of it, and how they act on these perceptions."[58] In most usages, the Portuguese-derived term "caste" stands in for one of two words: *varna* (the four ritual categories of Hinduism) or *jati* (an endogamous, occupationally-specialized group claiming common descent). Both phenomena evince considerable local and regional variation; the relationship between the two has also changed significantly over time. Although innumerous representations of India convey the image of an unchanging and ancient caste system, Bayly and others argue that a pan-Indian system of caste relations organized around Brahaminical values and embracing the majority of the sub-continent's population is relatively modern, particularly in south India.[59] In describing the operations of colonial "power-knowledge," Nicholas Dirks emphasizes the

---

[55] This was not necessarily *purdah*, which entails both seclusion and the removal from labor outside the home. Rather, as Freund suggests, the notion of home itself underwent ideological expansion to accommodate labor and activities beyond the physical boundaries of the household. Freund, "Indian Women," 421. Gender norms and expectations of women differed between Indian ethnolinguistic groups. Tamil women, for example, did not draw their saris over their faces and had a tradition of greater freedom (Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 120). In many cases, the isolation of Indian women reflected a lack of acculturation. In arguing for the foundation of schools for Indian women, one reformer noted the linguistic isolation suffered by many Indian women who did not speak English: "They were almost an alien community, yet at the same time genuine South Africans, born in this country." See "School for Indian girls," *Indian Opinion*, 25 July 1935. However, it is also important to note that *purdah* was practiced by certain Indian groups at least into the 1950s and, especially among Muslims in rural areas, until later. For the case of Vohra Muslims, see Molnira Banu, "Muslim Women in South Africa," *The Great Ramadan*, no date [mid 1950s?] (KCM 17060) Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

[56] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 115.

[57] Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 139.

[58] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society, and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

[59] Bayly, *Caste, Society, and Politics in India*, 187-90; see also, Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2001) ; C.J. Fuller, "Introduction: Caste Today," in *Caste Today*, C.J. Fuller (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-7; David Washbrook, "Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History c1720-1860," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988), 81-2.

importance of the colonial bureaucracy, legal system, and education in systemizing and enforcing a unified idea and system of caste across India.[60] Extending this general critique, Radhika Desai enumerates the largely post-colonial process through which caste hierarchies once based on agrarian relations of exploitation become integral to a national-popular culture reproduced through political parties, civil society, and modern class relations.[61] Rather than postulate a single definition of "caste," these analyses suggest that it is necessary to examine the reconfiguration of the intertwined concepts and practices of caste hierarchy in different political and economic circumstances. And, as Bayly emphasizes, we cannot separate this process of reconfiguration from the ways that "caste" is imposed, redefined, and deployed by different groupings in the course of struggles over political power, economic resources, and social prestige.[62]

Most of the literature on caste in South Africa postulates a unified system in India that then underwent a dual process of disintegration and selective retention.[63] As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have argued regarding Afro-Caribbean culture, this approach both homogenizes the societies of origin and misrecognizes the process of creative reinvention necessitated by radically differing

---

[60] See also G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44-6.

[61] Radhika Desai, "The Cast(e) of Anti-Secularism," in *Will Secular India Survive?* ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi, 2004), 192-5.

[62] Bayly, *Caste, Society, and Politics in India*, 7. Compare this approach with Stuart Hall's injunction regarding race: "One must start, then, from the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions—as a set of economic, political, and ideological practices, *of a distinctive kind*, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation" [emphasis added]. See "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 338.

[63] See H. Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 18-43; B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe, "Caste in a Natal Hindu Community," *African Studies* 20 (1961), 217–225; Rajend Mesthrie, *Language in Indenture: A Sociolinguistic History of Bhojpuri-Hindi in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1991), 8; and Rehana Ebr.-Vally, *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001). This approach has several problems in the South African context. First, it fails to address the regional differences in caste understandings in India. Second, it assumes that all Indian migrants equally understood and accepted the Brahminical construction of caste hierarchy. For example, in many contexts within India, the identification with *varna* (rather than *jati*) was itself characteristic of a self-consciously high caste status. See Agehananda Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa: Jahind and Uhuru* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Company, 1972), 28. Third, this approach fails to historicize caste in terms of changes occurring within India both before and, especially, after the experience of migration. It rests on a version of modernization theory that assumes modern urban life simply disrupts or attenuates—rather than reconfigures and transforms—caste relations (Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 20). Fourth, this approach conflates the experiences and attitudes of indentured and passenger Indians. As a generalization, passenger Indians maintained a higher degree of caste orthodoxy related to their continuing ties to India. However, this assertion of distinctiveness by the cultural and economic elites may have had some influence more broadly through institutions like temples and language associations.

material circumstances.[64] It also overstates the general autonomy of caste from its articulation with related forms of class and gender dominance: these social relationships—and their evolutions—must be understood in relation to each other.[65] For a number of reasons, the experiences of plantation labor and urban community life forced (or, perhaps, enabled) a significant transformation of the different caste ideas and practices brought to South Africa.[66] Many ideas and practices were just abandoned. But this distillation and reconfiguration also facilitated their synthesis with other discourses and forms of organizing community.

Among the relatively small populations of Gujarati Hindus, Hindi-speaking Brahmans, and Telugu Naidu, families continued to adhere to caste endogamy, some prohibitions on commensality, and ritual exclusiveness until at least the 1960s.[67] In the case of Gujarati Hindus (who came to South Africa as passengers), their class position as merchants and continued ongoing ties with their communities in India—including through marriage—facilitated a considerable degree of continuity in practice.[68] A significant number of Telugu indentured laborers migrated from the same castes and districts of Andhra, allowing them to recreate aspects of their former community structures after they had fulfilled their contracts.[69] The majority of South African Hindus, however, incorporated

---

[64]Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Approach* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

[65] Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran argue: "Gender within caste society is thus defined and structured in such a manner that the 'manhood' of the caste is defined both by the degree of control over women and the degree of passivity of the women of the caste. Buy the same argument, demonstrating control by humiliating women of another caste is a common way of reducing the 'manhood' of those castes." See "Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence," in *Gender & Caste*, ed. Anupama Rao (New Delhli: Kali for Women, 2003), 254. For the articulation of caste and gender hierarchy in the control of marriage, see Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 220.

[66] Historians generally point to a number of factors leading to the attenuation of rigid caste orthodoxy: the impossibility of maintaining interdictions against commensality in transit; a high male to female ratio leading to the break down of caste endogamy; daily and intimate physical proximity on plantations; the inability to maintain hereditary occupational specialization both on plantations and following indenture; the conscious adoption of new caste identities in transit; and the removal of caste ideas and practices from their former social contexts. Notably, a related process seems to have taken place in South Africa and the Caribbean during the period of indentured labor: the emergence of a broader notion of caste predicated on a high-low caste distinction. For a summary of debate over caste in Trinidad, see Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 38-41.

[67] Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 30-2.

[68]Gujarati Muslim passengers also maintained sub-group endogamy (between Surti and Vohra) and a range of social prohibitions centered on Shari 'a. The case of passenger Indians closely parallels the stricter maintenance of caste endogamy among Indians in East Africa. See Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa*, 23-94; H.S. Morris, *The Indians in Uganda: Caste and Sect in a Plural Society* (Hertfordshire: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968), 60-2.

[69]Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 32.

particular elements of caste into a more diffuse idea of Indian tradition. By the 1950s, restrictions on commensality and diet, basic caste terminology, and many aspects of the pollution barrier had largely disappeared except among some conservative members of the older generation. But a general awareness of caste status and its accompanying prohibitions remained wide-spread, particularly among Indian elites, and the petite bourgeoisie often attributed lower caste status to working class professions.[70] The available evidence suggests that distinct communities consolidated around religious and language-based institutions: a form of linguistic endogamy heavily conditioned by class or general social status, and further modified by the differentiation between families who continued to employ some caste criteria in arranging marriages (and who generally identified themselves as high caste) and those who did not.[71] The principal mechanism for reproducing these communities was the control over marriage: women assumed the material and symbolic responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the community.

Progress, Tradition, and the "Indian Woman"

With the crucial exception of the imprisonment of female Passive Resisters, the question of the Indian woman rarely entered into the politics of the Natal Indian Congress during the 1940s and 50s.[72] Indian nationalist discussions of gender and the family—which were heavily influenced by the SAIRR, liberal social science, and developments on the Indian subcontinent—generally abstracted "Indian culture" from the South African political context. This reification enacted a characteristic gesture of secular nationalism: literate, nationalist Indians and white liberals debated social practices like marriage, education of girls, and *purdah* within an idealized schema of progress and modernization, while ultimately locating the problem of culture in the private spheres of community,

[70] Ibid., 36.

[71] Both B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe and Kuper both describe the persistence of endogamy within *varnas*. However, it appears that they simply assign *varna* status to their non-elite informants. B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe report: "The vast majority of local Hindus have no clear idea of the meaning of the four *varnas*, much less of their component castes or subcastes," 217. Kuper likewise states that only 23 percent of Durban high school students could provide a "traditional caste name" in one survey (*Indian People in Natal*, 39). The idea of *varna* endogamy probably reflects the perception of self-consciously high caste Indians. Notably, Kuper adopts Gujurati terms throughout her analysis despite the fact that most Durban Indians came from Tamil-speaking families.

[72] This relative absence is in contrast to the 1913 Passive Resistance Campaign, when the Searle decision illegalizing Indian marriages as inherently polygamous played in a major role in mobilizing Indian support around "defense of the honor of Indian women." See Radhika Mongia, "Gender and the Historiography of Gandhian *Satyagraha* in South Africa," *Gender & History* 18, no. 1 (2006). Strikingly, Dr. Goonam's statement to the court during her second trial for Passive Resistance did not mention women, although her presence was itself tremendously significant. See "Resisters' Statements to Court," *Indian Opinion*, 5 July 1946.

temple (or mosque), and home.[73] As a result, the distinctive practices of Indian social groups were displaced from the political sphere and then subsumed under the unifying rubric of race and "Indian tradition." In many respects, this conception of Indian unity had its origins in the alliances among different ethnolinguistic and religious factions brokered by Gandhi in the early 20th century.[74] By the mid 1940s, both moderate and conservative Indian leaders generally employed a social scientific idiom of progress alongside an overarching conception of a single Indian tradition. Their statements generally approached the future of "the Indian" in terms of an irreducible dualism: either the preservation of Indian culture or assimilation to Western social norms.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, relatively little had changed in the situation of most Indian women. The first girls' high school only opened in 1936; fewer than 7,000 Indian women held formal employment in 1951 (7.3 percent of the Indian workforce); in 1956, girls constituted 15.6 percent of Standard 9 and 10 pupils.[75] Although some degree of education had become a marriage criterion among the elite, the small number of women doctors, lawyers, and teachers continued to face significant disapprobation from the broader community.[76] Nevertheless, many observers focused on these limited developments and suggested that they reflected a process of Westernization. The education of girls and the adoption of Western dress by younger Indian women drew special attention. Writing in the *Race Relations* journal, S. Coopan and B.A. Naidoo argued: "In urban areas the Indian is subject to the dual influence of urban conditions of living and of a Western pattern of culture. This may be observed in the changing dress habits of working and adolescent girls. Western frocks have found favour amongst them, and response to variations in

---

[73]In part, this outlook reflected the political course adopted by the Indian politicians following the 1927 Cape Town agreement between the Indian and Union governments. While promoting voluntary repatriation of South African Indians, the Union government pledged to help raise the remaining Indian population to "help conform to Western standards of life…" See Bridgal Pachai, *The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question, 1860-1971* (Cape Town: C. Struik (pty) ltd., 1971), 119. In subsequent years, Indian politicians frequently invoked this promise in appealing for expanded rights for the Indian population. As a result, they often strenuously objected to accusations made by white politicians and news papers that Indians had failed to assimilate (the alleged practice of polygamy, for example, often appeared in European anti-Indian propaganda). For example, in 1951 the conservative Natal Indian Organization wrote in a petition: "In matrimony there is no question of any differentiation between a passenger Indian and an Indian immigrant. Both intermarry very freely. There is no such thing as a caste system present in South Africa." The petition further objected that the very mention of polygamy in the legislation was repugnant to South African Indians. See "Memorandum on Indian Marriages" submitted by the Natal Indian Organization to the Protector of Indian Immigrants, Stanger Street, Durban, 17 January 1951, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

[74]See Maureen Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience* (Johannesburg: Raven, 1985).

[75] Freund, "Indian Women," 422-3.

[76] Hey, *The Indian Elite*, 22-3.

fashion has become sensitive."[77] Significantly, these celebrations of Indian progress directly assimilated the social dynamics of Natal to similar processes ostensibly underway in India itself. In a 1955 dissertation on the education of Indian women in Natal, Birbal Rambiritch treated social change in both locations as a single phenomenon:

> The women in India are then being uplifted gradually. Humane thoughts are filling the minds of the politicians and statesmen, magistrates and lawyers. Progress is found everywhere, in schools, colleges and universities… In Natal, too, the emancipation of Indian women is gradually gaining ground. The chief factors that are contributing to this development are the raising of the economical and educational status of the family.[78]

This construct of the Indian woman—which appeared in newspaper articles, scholarly journals, and speeches to the Rotary Club and the SAIRR—performed three functions. First, it unified the various segments of the diaspora into a single historical agent by abstracting an idea of "Indian culture" from different individuating practices: the decisive question became the collective dynamic of cultural reform. The very notion of a generic Indian woman negated the continuing salience of religious, ethno-linguistic, and caste differences as well as the persistence of endogamy within all three categories.[79] Second, it generalized a linear trajectory based on the experiences of a small section of the Hindu petite bourgeoisie. Indian women from working class families primarily lived within contexts shaped by family; however, their activities could include assisting in stores, hawking produce, working in market gardens, and shopping, i.e. labor outside of the space of the home. Although a widely-shared ideal of the Indian wife stressed delicacy and seclusion, only the elite actually practiced *purdah*: most women's experiences defied both poles of the expected transition from a normative "traditional" to a singular "modern." [80] Third, this construct removed the issue of cultural identity from the context of South Africa. At one level, this gesture undercut a form of racial

---

[77] S. Coopan and B.A. Naidoo, "Indian Adjustments to Urbanization," *Race Relations Journal* 22, no. 1 (1955), 15.

[78]Birbal Rambiritch, "An Investigation into Some Aspects of the Education of Indian Girls in Natal" (master's thesis, University of Natal, 1955), 52-53.

[79]Studies appearing in the 1960s began to disaggregate issues like marriage, female education, and employment outside the home on the basis of language and religious group, showing that significant distinctions persisted. See Hilda Kuper, *Indian People of Natal*; G.G. Maasdorp, *A Natal Indian Community: A Socio-economic Study in the Tongaat-Verlun Area* (University of Natal Department of Economics, 1968).

[80]Freund, "Indian Women," 418. Freund argues that the Natal Indian family (particularly before the 1950s) effectively utilized the labor of Indian women and children (as market gardeners, petty traders and in craft production) as part of its overall accumulation strategy. Rather than a product of religious or cultural injunction, the extended family and its control over women's labor had a powerful economic logic poorly captured by the standard idea of "domestic labor."

essentialism (the equation of India with a set of cultural traits) by emphasizing a shared project of modernization throughout the colonial and postcolonial world. It also ensured that a "Western" modernity was the sole axis of comparison. Notably, African women appeared in these discussions rarely, if ever.

By the 1940s, deep misgivings about the impact of "Westernization" began to appear. Drawing on the anthropological model of "cultural contact" and the ideas of colonial ethno-psychiatry, the first Indian social scientists warned that the new generation of urbanized youth faced a crisis of identity: "the younger generation, educated in English only, and absorbing the superficial characteristics of western civilization, in the absence of more intimate contacts with European culture…are in danger of being deprived of moral and spiritual purpose in life."[81] Religious and social organizations voiced these fears more forthrightly. In 1944, an Indian Youth Cultural Conference organized by the journalist P.S. Joshi declared: "This conference calls upon Indians of Greater India in general and of South Africa in particular to respect, to follow, and to maintain Indian culture in place of the indiscriminate imitation of the Western one."[82] Emphasizing the essential unity of India and its several diasporas, both the conference greetings and subsequent motions strongly endorsed national unity across caste, provincial, and "communal" (i.e., religious) lines, and repeatedly referred to Indian culture in an all embracing singular. The motions called on Indian educational institutions to impart "Indian culture, community, and mother tongue," and urged "the Indian people to use their mother tongue at all times and on all occasions—except where it is inevitably necessary—in order to maintain the dignity of Indian nationhood." [83]

What did the globalizing term "Indian culture" signify in these two conflicting rhetorics? In an influential critique of Indian secular nationalism, a number of South Asian and leftist scholars have argued that "the period when an anti-colonial national identity was being forged was also the period when the Indian national polity was being communalized, and the congress-led National Movement cannot escape most of the responsibility for this."[84] According to this argument, Gandhi

---

[81]M. Sirkari Naidoo, "As an Indian sees Natal," in Maurice Webb and M. Sirkari Naidoo, *The Indian-Citizen or Subject?* (Johannesburg: South Africa Institute of Race Relations, 1947), 29.

[82]This conference received greetings from Hindu organizations throughout South Africa and India, as well as the Yosuf Dadoo for TIC, South African government, and African Youth League.

[83] "Resolutions Passed by the South African Indian Youth Culture Conference Held at Gandhi Hall, Johannesburg on the 9TH April, 1944," Ballinger Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

[84]Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity, and Secularism* (London: Verso, 1997), 31. Also see Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Verso, 2000).

and the Indian National Congress relied heavily on religious leaders and cultural organizations for mass mobilization, conciliated caste and religious divisions, and—in the final analysis—constructed a "national" movement on the basis of vertically organized and mutually exclusive communitarian blocs. Despite its secular and universalizing ideology, the Indian National Congress further politicized religious identity and created the structural conditions for the identification of the nation and Indian culture with the Hindu majority.[85] In South Africa, a similar construction of the Indian nation—also underpinned by a bloc between several religious and ethnic communities—largely served a different function. Although the idea of Indian culture lacked unifying content, it reinforced a distinctive Indian identity by constructing a common origin in an (ultimately imaginary) historical past. National progress and the maintenance of cultural integrity demanded a politics grounded in racial difference. The Indian Youth Cultural Conference discussed above sharply denounced the "mixed marriages taking place in this country, and in order to protect the purity of the Indian race, entreats our countrymen to take pride in their own culture and marry within our religious communities." The education of girls, communal harmony, and cultural education would serve these ends. As Sir Maharaj Singh, former Agent General for India in South Africa, stated in his greetings to this same gathering: "The Indian race in South Africa should be kept pure and unsullied. For this purpose an ardent love for India, her wisdom, her language and her ideals must be maintained."

The Problem of Miscegenation

African-Indian miscegenation could never be just another question. For many Africans, miscegenation represented the usurpation of sexual access to African women by a race whose relative achievements not only illuminated the continuing misery of Africans, but supposedly came at their immediate expense. The idea of Indian men seducing African women exemplified the nation's powerlessness, humiliation, and collective loss of patriarchal right. Sometimes Zulu intellectuals also alleged that a certain kind of African women—modern, professional, and outside proper channels of familial control—sought out these attentions, in the process compromising their own people. In the majority of circumstances, Indian nationalists (and most white liberals) denied that miscegenation between Africans and Indians occurred on any significant scale.[86] Such an act

[85]Ayesha Jalal, "Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia," in *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development,* ed. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 78.

[86] Notably, the South African Institute of Race Relations openly opposed miscegenation: "The South Africa Institute of Race Relations, in common with the overwhelming majority of all people in South Africa, is against miscegenation." See "Mixed Marriages," *Inkundla Ya Bantu,* 4 June 1949. A few

would have vitiated the core institutions of Indian diasporic identity. Obviously, not all Africans or Indian held such views. But they were extremely wide-spread.

Statements by Indians and Africans from the 1940s sharply diverge regarding the occurrence of miscegenation. With very few exceptions, Indian political leaders and social scientists stridently denied that sexual relationships between Indians and other racial groups occurred with any frequency. In a pamphlet assembled for the SAIRR, M. Sirkari Naidoo (a researcher at the University of Natal) wrote: "Pride of race and culture has, in large measure, preserved the purity of the [Indian] race and prevented misegenantion with the other two races."[87] The leader of the Natal Indian Congress, Dr. Monty Naicker, employed almost identical language in order to deny that legal equality would lead to marriages between Indian men and European women: "Those who have lived amongst Indians will bear testimony to the fact it [miscegenation] is a false alarm; in fact, their civilization has instinctively instilled into them the ideals to preserve intact the purity of their race." Naicker then proceeded to cite statistics demonstrating that marriages between whites and other non-Europeans vastly outnumbered those between Indians and Europeans.[88] The submission of the conservative Natal Indian Organisation to Durban Riots Commission played the same chords:

> The Indian people deny most emphatically that promiscuity between Indian males and African females is common. There might be a few cases here and there and this is understandable in a multi-racial country. If this occurrence were as common as it is made out to be, the attention of the Indian people would have been drawn to it long ago. This is an allegation we submit has no substance. Indians have been in South Africa for nearly 90 years, and it is to their credit that they have not created a community of Indian-African origin by promiscuous relations. On the contrary, extremely conscious of their race pride, they have maintained the purity of their race.[89]

Indian witnesses before the Riots Commission conceded that a small amount miscegenation took place, but insisted that some amount of interracial sex occurred between all racial groups. See *Commission of Enquiry into Riots*, 14.

[87]Naidoo, "As an Indian sees Natal," 29. This judgment also represented the conventional wisdom of white liberalism: "Marriage taboos are still strong enough to prevent miscegenation on a wide scale. The sanction of the Mixed Marriages Act is not a strong as the traditional taboos." See Dr. S. Coopan and A.D. Lazarus, "The Indian as an Integral Part of South African society," in *The Indian as a South African* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956), 67. For an early pronunciation of these ideas, see Mabel Palmer, *The History of the Indians in Natal* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 27).

[88] Dr. G.M. Naicker, *A Historical Synopsis of the Indian Question in South Africa* (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1993), 29.

[89]"Statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organisation to the Chairman and Members of the Judicial Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Durban Riots, 1949," Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

Significantly, the repeated invocation of race pride and Indian cultural values was not, at least in the first instance, meant to demarcate Indians from Africans. Rather, the disavowal of miscegenation served to indict the sexual mores of the white population and the supposed superior culture of South Africa's "Western Civilization"—a particularly charged term given its pivotal role in Jan Smuts' defense of South Africa's Indian policy at the United Nations in 1946. Few South African readers would have missed the implication that the very presence of a Coloured population betrayed white society's true level of civilization, or that the values of "Indian culture" had prevented sexual unions across racial lines without resorting to the statutes brandished by the South African state.

The declarations of African men convey an entirely different reality. The accusation that Indian men seduced, mixed-with, or dated African women was ubiquitous during the 1940s and early 1950s. It appeared in African newspapers, religious sermons, testimony in front of government commissions, short stories, and right-wing African propaganda produced with the support of the apartheid state. This claim often took a particular form: the denunciation of unequal control over women and unequal access to social space more broadly. A letter to *Ilanga* from the mid-1950s typified this duality: "What's funny is that you will never find Indian girls at the Y.M.C.A. They only come when the function is strictly theirs. I hate this business of Indians mixing with us in our concerts. Now they take advantage and go so far as to date African girls."[90] Following the 1949 pogrom, a full-page editorial of *Ilanga Lase Natal* explicated this lack of reciprocity at greater length:

> The moral attitude of some Indian men towards African women is shocking to say the least. (It would be unfair and inflammatory to refer to Katherine Mayo's "Mother Indian" although one cannot help recalling its contents.) They associate with African women openly! This incenses the most humble and even some of the most advanced **"I-know-it-is-the-system-and-not-the-Indian-as-such" Africans.** [91]

[90] "We are the Tools of the Indians," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 27 August 1955.

[91] "How Long, O Lord!" *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 22 January 1949. Emphasis in the original. This reference to Katherine Mayo's notorious *Mother India* is particularly telling. A classic work of imperialist feminism written in 1927, *Mother India* imprecated the putative hyper-sexuality of Indian men and invoked the status of women within an eternal and unchanging Hindu tradition in order to argue against self-rule. While he denounced the sexual attitudes of Indian men, Dhlomo elsewhere recognized that Africans themselves practice a form of "Zulu purdah" and that the apartheid state not only invoked African backwardness to justify white supremacy, but also utilized a reified and repressive form of African tradition that legally infantilizes African women. Hence, his—rather hypocritical—statement that it would be inflammatory to refer to *Mother India*. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Introduction," in Katherine Mayo, *Selections from Mother India,* ed. Mrinalini Sinha (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

Even in their most vulgar and explicitly racist form, accusations of miscegenation almost never alleged rape.[92] Rather, these rumors depicted Indian men taking advantage of superior wealth and status and—implicitly—the vulnerability of recently "de-tribalized" African women. Their focus was often on particular urban spaces. In addition to the dances mentioned above, stories of miscegenation often took place in or around cinemas, hospitals, urban streets, stores, and (especially) buses. Interrupting a diatribe against the behavior of Coloureds at Indian-owned cinemas, "Rolling Stone" sardonically alleged: "we even have Indians who really want to be near African women—as near as makes no difference—if you get our meaning."[93] One African witness at the Riots Commission opined that Indians sought bus licenses as "just another avenue which they explored to get a hold of our womenfolk."[94] Rumors circulated that certain Indians traded goods for "services" behind the closed doors of their shops, and people gossiped about relationships between African nurses and Indian doctors.[95] Not only did each of these sites create the possibility for a promiscuous mingling of the races and sexes, they also represented the institutionalization of Indian social privilege based on both economic and legal advantage. Even the Durban streets—the quintessential locus of movement, intermixing, and social collectivity—necessitated that African men, unlike both Indian men and African women in this period, carried passes.

In some cases, this representation of Indian male sexuality embodied a profound ambivalence regarding the impact of urban modernity on Zulu culture. In psychoanalytic terms, the Indian became a "mirror" on to which African intellectuals could project internal conflicts within Zulu society, thus locating the social disruptions produced by urbanization outside the process of modernization and nation building. In 1948, *Ilanga* carried an article entitled "Stopping the Bus," a paean to the modernizing powers of new public spaces. In almost breathless ecstasy, H.I.E. Dhlomo hailed the fact that buses mixed all classes of people, upsetting the regimental etiquette of both missionary schools and rural Zulu society.[96] Buses, Dhlomo eulogized, provided a theater where Africans could develop a new psychology: the collective outlook of an urban, democratic society.

---

[92] An African witness before the commission of enquiry reported that "his sister-in-law as robbed and ravished by an Indian bus-driver and his friends." See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban,* 13.

[93]"Rolling Stone on Coloureds," *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 9 March 1946.

[94]Quoted in Kirk, "The 1949 Durban Riots," 83.

[95]Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie,* 221 and 306.

[96]A parallel set of concerns emerged around railway trains in late 19th century Bengal, particularly regarding the erosion of social boundaries between women and strange men and different castes. See Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001), 81.

However, Dhlomo also warned about certain dangers associated with the dramatic transformations the bus introduced:

> In parts of this country buses are ethical questions. An Indian bus is introduced into a self-contained, quiet rural or mission with high standards of morality. In no time, pop goes the self-sufficiency, quietness and morality and ethical codes of the place. An enterprising African ousts out the Indian, and morality like the coy and slow-moving maiden she is, returns slowly and diffidently through the back doors—but the village returns not to quietness and self-sufficiency. The habits and outlook of the people are changed forever.[97]

Dhlomo proceeded to celebrate the life of the bus, the dramas of the waiting stop, the raucous conversations between men and women who could sit together and talk freely. The expulsion of the Indian resolved the peril threatened by the disruption of rural self-sufficiency—a peril clearly tied to the Indian's economic role and symbolized by the (implied) violation of maidenhood. Later in the same essay, Dhlomo praised the sexual conquests of African men, drawing a subtle parallel between the Zulu's awakening to modern forms of consciousness (such as democracy, theater, and nationhood) and the loss of virginal innocence. "A wolfish man sits next to a beautiful but obviously uninitiated woman—a newcomer in town," he narrated, "In no time, in no whispers, he is making love to her….Give me drunkards, bootleggers, pads, murderers and other bad characters! Of such is the kingdom of literature!" Comparing the "dashing" traveler to Don Juan and Romeo, Dhlomo endowed his brazen act of backseat seduction with mythic significance—a foundational act in the literature of modern African nationhood. But when the Indian appears again, he posed a sexual threat. An African woman exclaims: "Hang this Indian who pesters me about where I am going and tries to be familiar."

How often did African-Indian liaisons take place? The pervasiveness of African accusations certainly suggests that interracial sex had a much greater impact on Durban's race politics than indicated by the virtual silence surrounding the question.[98] Nevertheless, evidence concerning the actual frequency is necessarily anecdotal. In small town Natal, African/Indian marriages did take place. Sometimes African women converted in order to be married under Indian religious law. These unions took place often enough that one could be reported in *Indian Opinion* in 1935 without any

---

[97] X. [H.I.E. Dhlomo], "Stopping the Bus," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 10 January 1948.

[98] The Riots Commission's conclusions on this score were reasonable: "Complaints were continually being made to Native Commissionaires, and resolutions by Native bodies recording this grievance were passed long before the riots….We are satisfied that the allegation is in substance true, but that Native witnesses have exaggerated the incidence of the evil," *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban*, 14.

additional comment.[99] A survey of 63 Indian households in the peri-urban settlement of Edendale reported one mixed couple in 1947-8, a Hindu man married to a Christian African woman.[100] Marriages between Indian men and Coloured women were significantly more common, a fact *Ilanga* once cited to demonstrate that Indians had chosen to assimilate into Western culture and the framework of white supremacy: "Some [Indians] use the official languages as their home language, others intermarry with Coloureds. Thus it is difficult to know where they owe their allegiance and where they stand politically."[101] Sex poses an even more intractable question.[102] Muslim Indian men growing up in Durban during the 1950s and 60s often had their first sexual experiences with African or Coloured domestic servants ("Zim" as it was called), either in weekend trips to small town Natal or sometimes in servant quarters and bucket toilets.[103] Rape and sexual abuse of African working in Indian homes must have occurred. But with the exception of an unpublished autobiography of Jordan Ngubane, I have not yet found any sources that openly discuss this question.[104] The averment of miscegenation did not generally take the form of naming specific instances, but circulated as rumor. These accusations were anonymous, embedded in the experiences of everyday life, and centered on powerful symbols resonant within the codes of several competing discourses (the changing moral economy of the country side, petit bourgeois African nationalism, Africanist Christianity).[105] Perhaps most importantly, this rumor condensed an intricate web of social conflicts,

---

[99]See "Registration of Indian Marriages," *Indian Opinion*, 30 August 1935.
[100]University of Natal, *Experiment at Edendale*, 36.
[101] "United Front or Separate Ways?" *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 March 1949
[102]Articles on Durban and urban prostitution published in *Drum* during the 1950s described a sex trade organized largely on racial lines. Indian and Coloured prostitution—in large part, aimed at visiting sea men—was organized into "houses" by pimps. Zulu "bad women," however, worked mainly out of Cato Manor, catering to African stevedores and industrial workers. It does not appear that prostitution represented a significant source of tension. See "Durban Exposed," *Drum*, July 1952.
[103]Interview with Omar Badsha, Pretoria, 25 April 2006; personal communication, Rehana Ebr.-Vally.
[104]Ngubane recounts the following (undoubtedly fictionalized) monologue from a woman rioter: "'I came into town,' she returned to me, 'because my uncle had been ejected from a Boer farm. I had no father and no mother; they had both died when I was young. I did not have a penny in my pocket. I roamed the streets of this city, hungry, cold, lonely and with no place I could hide my head. One of these Indians said he would give me a job; I could look after his children. He gave me food and showed me a small room at the back of his house. He walked into my room in the darkness of one night….'" Jordan Ngubane, Unpublished Autobiography, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
[105]An extensive literature now exists on rumor. In writing this chapter, I have drawn on Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1983); Steven Hahn, "'Extravagant Expectations' of Freedom: Rumour, Political Struggle, and the Christmas Insurrection Scare of 1865 in the American South," *Past and Present*, 157 (1997); and George Rude, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

economic relations, and political actors into a single, tangible object.[106] It created a materiality around which action could be organized.

This allegation against Indian men remained pervasive during the years following the pogrom. In the early 1950s, the "Indian peril" was a staple in the propaganda of the Bantu League, a pro-apartheid political organization, which temporarily gained a significant hearing in Durban.[107] In a social distance survey conducted a few years later in the Durban location of Baummannville, the vast majority of residents disapproved of interracial contact with Indians, although only eight percent openly complained about miscegenation. Significantly, while most people surveyed rejected interracial marriage, an inverse relationship emerged between education/socio-economic status and willingness to associate with other races: "Better educated respondents appear to be more intolerant than less educated; for instance, about one fifth of those educated to standard II or less favor intermarriage, while only one-tenth of those who have passed a higher standard do so."[108] In a 1952 speech reprinted in *Ilanga*, high school principle Rev. George Molefe declared that Africans unanimously condemned intermarriage. Paraphrasing Booker T. Washington, he urged: "In matters social we can be divided like the fingers of the hand."[109] *Ilanga* continued to print letters and articles that bitterly complained about the "growing practice" of seduction and the hypocrisy of Indian men throughout the 1950s.[110] Many of these articles berated the wholesale adoption of Western fashion by African women, expressing horror at the *Drum*-inspired culture of beauty pageants, cosmetics and "vices" that had spread among urban Africans in the 1950s. Conflating social independence with prostitution, one contributor alleged that uncritically adopting the gender norms of "more civilized" races led directly to interracial sex:

---

[106]Some Durban Africans were enormously conscious of the power of this rumor and utilized it for political ends. In March 1949, *Ilanga* printed a muck-racking article regarding a Sastri College dance, which both Indian and African students attended. After referring to the "oft repeated" charge that Indian men seduced African women, the author breathlessly narrated: "When, therefore, the news got round that educated Africans (and the women) would fraternise with Indians in garden parties and dances, there was a flare up in some places." The unknown correspondent cynically informed his audience that cool heads prevailed in this particular circumstance, and no trouble broke out. But the implied warning was clear enough. Social fraternization with Indians might well be seen as "the educated African …defying and blackmailing the race by getting African women to mingle with Indians in dances and social parties." See "University Celebrations and the Riots," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 March 1949.

[107]Edwards, "Mkhumbane, Our Home," 213.

[108] Institute for Social Research, *Baumannville: A Study of an Urban African Community*, Natal Regional Survey, report 6 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1959), 68-70.

[109] "Racial Inter-marriage," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 21 June 1952.

[110] "Indian Men and African Women," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 30 August 1955.

> They paint their lips, straiten their hair, and to complete the outfit most favorable for attracting races who are more civilized than we are, walk about the streets in the evening puffing cigarettes. At this stage they can then be able to respond to invitations to cocktail parties specifically arranged for them in the backyards of a Mr. Smith or most commonly a Naidoo.[111]

Not surprisingly, we soon find out that some of these women are nurses. Mocking the camouflage of lasciviousness under a sophisticate's veneer ("cocktail parties specifically arranged for them"), the author established the familiar connection between women, moral turpitude (note the cigarettes), and new forms of social mobility and interaction created by urban life. While his animosity is directed at those who slavishly mimic European aesthetics of beauty, the sexuality of the Indian male remains the foremost emblem of this debauched modernity. Such views seem to have remained strong among the African middle class despite sustained cooperation between the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress at a political level. In the early 1960s, half of the teachers whom anthropologist Leo Kuper interviewed rejected miscegenation, the majority citing the need to maintain of racial purity.[112]

Indian Domestic Space

African men, particularly educated intellectuals, also voiced bitterness regarding their exclusion from Indian social, cultural, and domestic spaces: "In their residential quarters, social and public institutions they do not want the African, but they gate crush African institutions and locations." [113] A regular target of these complaints was the sequestering of Indian women from social interactions with Africans. In a 1953 article, Dhlomo argued that no sane person could deny that sex relations represented one of the most explosive issues in Durban's complicated fabric of racial politics. He did not, however, proceed to discuss miscegenation. Instead, he focused on how Indian cultural norms shaped quotidian interactions between racial groups, particularly within social spaces associated with the outlook of progressive modernization and nationalist politics:

> Indian custom and tradition keep a jealous and 'regimental' eye on THEIR women folk. There is purdah and the keeping away of Indian women from public contacts. Even 'liberal' advanced, modern-minded Congress and Unity Movement Indians are not untainted. In the Defiance Campaign and University and other functions where Indians mingle with their

---

[111] "Ladies, Please Beware!" *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 24 September1955.
[112]Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie,* 181.
[113]"How Long, O Lord!" *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 22 January 1949. See also "Indians and Segregation," letter by C.R. G. Moya, *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 7 September 1946; "Rollin Stone on Segregation,' *Ilanga Lase Natal,* 1 March 1947.

> African and Coloured equals and have no excuse for it, it is often seen that their women are left behind while they frequently with startling forwardness approach other women. [114]

This emphasis on the hypocrisy of sexual attitudes—Indians guarding "THEIR" women from contact with Africans while flagrantly ignoring the patriarchal sensibilities of African men—was meant to illustrate an engrained sense of racial separateness and social superiority. But the actual protagonist of this passage is a personified and stereotyped "Indian custom and tradition" whose vigilant watch enforces a form of gender apartheid. Even supposedly liberal Indians, who in other respects interact with African and Coloured on equal terms, ostensibly could not erase this one polluting intersection of pre-modern custom and contemporary socio-economic privilege. As Shalini Puri notes in another context, this type of rhetoric in fact deploys the same ideal of the Indian woman as Indian cultural nationalism: the secluded, sexually modest bearer of Indian tradition.[115] In the course of daily social interactions, Dhlomo and others interpreted the general isolation of Indian women in terms of a particular cultural practice characteristic of the economic elite. "*Purdah*" became an essential marker of cultural distinctiveness and Indian racial exclusiveness.[116]

In *The Nation and its Fragment*s, Partha Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism assumed a dual structure in its confrontation with the colonial state. In order to struggle for power, the Indian nationalist movement of Bengal (which Chatterjee generalizes into a model not only for India, but Africa as well) emulated the economic, technological, and scientific practices of the colonizer, the attributes of Western material superiority that enabled conquest—including the language and very idea of the nation state. Concurrently, nationalist ideology invested the home and family with a special function: to preserve the inner 'spiritual' values of the nation, the cultural traditions that defined the separate identity of the colonized. As symbolic wife and mother to the nation, the Indian woman came to exemplify a reformed and rationalized tradition, and female conduct (in dress, eating habits, social demeanor, and religion) represented the honor and virtues of the nation itself. Chatterjee writes:

> The subjugated must learn the modern sciences and arts of the material world from the West in order to match the strengths and ultimately overthrow the colonizer. But in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence. No encroachments by the colonizer

---

[114]"Indo-African Race Relations," *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 17 January 1953.
[115] Shalini Puri, "Race, Rape, and Representation: Indo-Caribbean Women and Cultural Nationalism," *Cultural Critique* (Spring 1997), 127
[116]See also Maurice Webb, "The Indian in South Africa: Towards a Solution of Conflict," pamphlet reprinted from *Race Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1944), 9.

> must be allowed in the inner sanctum. In the world, imitation and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home they were tantamount to annihilation of one's identity.[117]

But the project of nation building also necessitated the development of new public and private spaces within colonial society—a process so violently contested precisely because it often created (or reproduced) forms of hierarchy and exclusion among the subjugated. Chatterjee's consistent rendering of "nationalism" in the singular and his exclusive focus on anti-colonial discourse obscures this problem. In the eyes of many Africans, institutions of diasporic endogamy–marriage, religion, domestic space, dress, even music and food—became signifiers of social hierarchy and racial exclusion. In mid-century Durban, the separation between public life and the "traditional" private sphere did not occur solely, or even primarily, in terms of the state. Whatever the explicit content of nationalist discourse, the domestic realm was in the first instance demarcated through the exclusion of the also-colonized other.

Ironically, the post-war period saw the increased employment of African women in Indian homes. According to Kogila Moodley, the shift from male to female domestics reflected a prevalent fear of African violence: Indians believed that women would be more "controllable" than men in the aftermath of the 1949 pogrom.[118] In some cases, African domestic workers stayed with the same family for decades and learned the Indian language of their employers.[119] But the majority faced harsh conditions: lower wages than in white households, constant and physically demanding work, and sometimes abuse.[120] The presence of Africans within Indian domestic space posed the problem of their symbolic exclusion (from the home itself despite their continual presence) and subordinate incorporation (in the form of labor). The mechanism for this dual process was frequently a series of prohibitions concerning food. Z.A. Ngcobo worked for an Indian family in Durban before the 1949 pogrom. In a 1980 interview, he described the bitter irony of intimate physical proximity without meaningful personal or social exchange. The issues of domestic space and dietary prohibitions dominated Ngcobo's recollections. While Africans necessarily bought from Indian storekeepers, they in turn faced exclusion from Indian residences: "They would tell you to stand over there, at a distance. Others would say 'You are a beast eater! How can you come in here?'" When regularly

---

[117]Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 121.
[118] Moodley, "The Ambiguities of Survival Politics," 450
[119]Interview with Vishnu Padayachee, Durban, 26 May 2006; Jay Naidoo, *Coolie Location* (London: SA Writers, 1990), 5.
[120]Interview with Mohammed Quata,17 April 2006, Johannesburg; Interview with Ismail Nagdee, 14 August 2008, Johannesburg.

employed working for an Indian family, he and his co-workers either slept each night in the vehicle outside his boss's house or in the basement. Ngcobo recalled meals with particular acrimony:

> Furthermore the eating utensil you are given to eat from when working for them is issued separately. It is kept over yonder below the house where it is taken when your food is dished up. It goes to emphasize the discrimination, the colour bar. You are served your food like a dog.[121]

The same elements recur in the testimony of both Indians and Africans. In many Indian homes, Africans were served with separate utensils. They were not allowed to eat at the family table or from the same plates as their employers (even when they, in fact, washed these very dishes). They did not use the same toilet.[122] The reasons offered for this treatment related to hygiene and diet: Africans were "dirty." They did not adhere to the Hindu prohibition against eating beef or follow *halal* in the case of Muslim households. These practices and rationalizations strongly resembled caste restrictions or—for example—the form of "untouchability" practiced by Hindus toward Muslims throughout large areas of South Asia.[123] But such prohibitions obviously did not entail a simple transposition of caste. Rather, the social grammar of caste hierarchy was reconfigured in order to institutionalize racial difference in the intimacy of the home. The organizing category of these new relationships was not purity or auspiciousness (religious values justifying caste restrictions), but the concept of Indian tradition integral to diasporic identity.

After the implementation of the Group Areas Act, Africans who worked in Indian areas did so illegally and were subject to frequent police raids. In these neighborhoods, stories of break-ins by Africans—and particularly former employees—were part of an everyday racial discourse concerning "African violence."[124] In interviews conducted in a Durban slum during the mid 1960s, Fatima Meer found that although they had almost no contact with Africans, Indian women nonetheless had developed strong impressions: "The house wife remembers the Riots. She remembers too one evening when she was accosted by two African men at the bus stop. The girl who works at the

---

[121]Interview with Z.A. Ngcobo by Rev. Simeon Zulu, 13 September 1980, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 361), Killie Campbell Africa Library, Durban.
[122]Interview with Phyllis Naidoo, Durban, 24 May 2006.
[123]For an example from West Bengal, see Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of Indian* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 31.
[124] See Moodley, "The Ambiguities of Survival Politics," 450. To this day, many African men and women express enormous anger over the treatment of African domestic servants by Indian families, particularly the treatment of their older relatives under apartheid. I have also heard some Indians who grew up during the 1970s articulate the view that crimes by Africans against Indians were a form of retribution over the mistreatment of African domestic servants.

factory offers an opinion. '*Crooked hair and crooked brain.*'"[125] Unfortunately, I have located only a small number of sources that express views held by African women working in Indian homes. In 1965, the Natal Native Affairs Commissioner issued an order banning the husbands and boyfriends of domestic workers from cohabitating in backyard servant quarters. In several Zulu language letters, domestic workers vehemently protested this edict. These letters complained that the intervention of the state into conjugal arrangements involved an illegitimate usurpation of patriarchal responsibility. At the same time, they made clear that the banning of husbands would increase the sexual access of employers to domestic servants. One letter threatened to ensnare white and Indian men with sorcery in order to undermine apartheid racial divisions:

> We received your notices, separating us from our husbands which is going to cause us to sleep with our bosses. When you wrote this notice did you realize what the outcome shall be? Since we are so many, do you think that we can all sleep with you and be satisfied? Europeans stay with their wives night and day. Do not force European customs on us.
>
> What are you aiming at? Is it not through this reason that we have Coloured children by Indian and European fathers? We are now going to sleep with them as they are also fond of sleeping with us. We are going to attract them by using love charms then you shall realize that by separating us from our husbands and wives you are causing interracial mating.
>
> That is a stiff question we have asked you, so come out with it. We are challenging you for sexual intercourse with all of us.[126]

Another letter (written by a man) questioned why the Native Commissioner should concern himself with someone else's visitors and likewise warned that the unwarranted intrusion into African relationships threatened the sexual boundary between races: "Allow us to sleep with your female folks and our female folks to sleep with European males."[127] These letters captured an extremely fraught sexual dynamic. The authors clearly believed that Indian and European men regularly sought sex with African women.[128] The rhetorical question about the reason that "we" have Coloured children conveyed the sentiment that this dilemma was both frequent and collectively shared. The presence of their husbands or boyfriends would have shielded women from such molestations. But

---

[125] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 116. A third woman who had been recently treated in a hospital by African doctors and nurses dissents: "But they very kind, they, too good."

[126] Letter to S. Borquin, 28 April 1965, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35/29), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

[127] Letter to S. Borquin, no date, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/32), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

[128] For a brief discussion of the sexual exploitation of African domestic servants by European men, see Jacklyn Cock, *Maids & Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid*, revised edition (London: The Women's Press: 79-81.

these letters also articulated a powerful sense of domestic and sexual right: the explicit rejection of European customs; the demand that the Native Commissioner personally fulfill the sexual role of all the displaced husbands; and the threat of undermining the racial boundaries of apartheid by actively reciprocating the existing attentions of European and Indian men.

These letters directly addressed a sexual and domestic hypocrisy that characterized many white and Indian families. Although the master-domestic servant relationship replicated the social hierarchy based on race, the presence of African women in Indian and white homes—and particularly their integration into the daily work of social reproduction—undercut the *ideal* of segregation espoused by government ideologues. Often separated from their own children, African domestic workers lived with the incongruity of performing the essential labor necessary to raise someone else's family. The sexual attentions of Indian and white men would have only intensified this contradiction. The above invocation of witchcraft was hardly an ideal threat. In response to a violation of her perceived domestic rights, the author promised to exploit this structural irony in order to attack the biological separation of races themselves.

Conclusion

Why focus on the questions of miscegenation and Indian domestic space at such length? What place do the intimacies, conflicts, and misrecognitions described in this chapter have in the history of African and Indian nationalist politics in Natal? In discussing these issues, I have sought to emphasize two aspects of Durban's racial dynamics that significantly complicate political narratives organized around the themes of either non-European unity or separate racial protagonists.

First, an analysis of gender helps to illuminate a paradox that appears in many sources from this period: the coexistence of day-to-day interactions between individuals of different races and the marked social distance of Indians and Africans as groups. Despite constant physical proximity and quotidian encounters in a variety of sites, the gendered organization of Indian communities resulted in the exclusion of most Africans from Indian social spaces, particularly homes. The social isolation of Indian women further contributed to African perceptions of "arrogance" and "hypocrisy," terms implying the deliberate assertion of distinctiveness by Indians as a whole. When Africans did work in Indian households, they experienced a variety of discriminatory and abusive treatments. At the same time, intimate relationships between Indian men and African women—whatever their circumstances and motivations—came to symbolize the "dual standard" of Indians and the collective humiliation of African men. Undoubtedly, some Africans and Indians rejected these attitudes. But the prevalence of these views significantly shaped the reactions of many Africans to even those

situations where Indian men interacted with Africans of both genders on a relatively equal basis: bus rides, political rallies, concerts and dances. In such circumstances, African men often interpreted the presumption of equality in terms of a (perceived) hierarchy expressed through the absence of Indian women. Indian men, in their eyes, claimed an unreciprocated prerogative in their very presence within gender-mixed spaces.

Second, this chapter has emphasized origins and forms of racial consciousness that did not simply reflect class relationships or the state's segregationist policies. In many accusations of miscegenation, African men associated Indian economic privilege with an irrepressible salaciousness. But this image also derived its power from several other sources: a crisis in the African family, the urban transformations of gender roles, exclusion from Indian households and institutions, and the nationalist discourses of cultural reform and race advancement. In other words, this trope enunciated a direct, "common sense" relationship between multiple dimensions of urban life that were otherwise structurally independent. Among Indian politicians and intellectuals, the denial of miscegenation reflected a politics of cultural nationalism ultimately grounded in the assertion of racial difference. Whether they advocated or rejected a process of "Westernization," Indian leaders generally conflated a degree of racial self-consciousness with cultural survival. Beyond the level of elite discourse, groups of Indian families constructed and reproduced ethnolinguistic communities through a combination on endogamy, religious institutions, and reconfigured elements of caste. In the context of the informal hierarchy that developed in Durban's shanty towns and mixed neighborhoods, the structure of these communities—particularly, the gendered nature of the Indian household–became one of the most powerful forms of demarcating race.