

Internal Frontiers

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The Internal Frontier of the Nation-State

ON 19 February 1948, the Pietermaritzburg-based journal *Inkundla ya Bantu* (The people's forum) published a lengthy piece of news analysis entitled "Bambulaleleni Ugandhi?" or "Why did they kill Gandhi?" At one level, the article offered a disarmingly simple answer: the culprit in question was the Indian people as a whole. India murdered Gandhi because he represented the ideal of Hindu-Muslim equality within a single nation. (The author's failure to name Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, reinforced this attribution of collective responsibility.) According to the article, Gandhi had argued that the Hindu and Muslim "tribes" (*uqobo*, segments or parts of a totality) should unite in the struggle for independence, but Muslims began to agitate for a separate country when they realized that the Hindu majority would come to power, reducing them to "slaves." Asserting their right to rule, a younger generation of Hindus began to attack Muslims and, after Gandhi attempted to reconcile the two sides, murdered their former leader as a traitor to their national aspirations. The author apportioned blame equally: Gandhi's vision had been undermined by the secessionist politics of an anxious minority and the violent retaliation of a majority in ascendance. Consequently, the country—as both a people and a political project—stood under judgment before the court of global opinion. However, if the article initially summoned its readership to identify with this international tribunal, it then shifted perspectives and projected Africans into the position of the defendant. Directly addressing its readership, it admonished Africans to draw from the lessons of division and violence: "The wages of stabbing each other is death. It is a way of running away from the truth." At this point, the article presented Partition and Gandhi's death as foreshadowing Africa's own

future, or at least one possible scenario. The world should not, it argued, condemn Indians: “given the opportunity, they can build a great nation.” With these words, the author defended not only the viability of Gandhi’s vision of plural nationhood, but the very possibility of national sovereignty beyond the West and its norms.¹

This piece was one of hundreds, if not thousands, of items about India that appeared in newspapers written by and for black South Africans in the 1940s. And this profusion of coverage, centered on the changes sweeping the British Empire and their implications for South Africa, was only one moment in a much longer conversation that began in the late nineteenth century and continues to the present. From Gandhi’s first political campaign in Johannesburg in the 1890s to today’s BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) group of emerging economies, India has served as an essential reference point for South African politics and black political thinkers. If Gandhi’s twenty-one years in South Africa are the most well-known episode in this history, they form only one strand of a larger and considerably more complex story. Other major figures of the Indian independence struggle traveled to South Africa, including Indian National Congress president Gopal Krishna Gokhale (who toured the country in 1912), the iconic poetess and nationalist politician Sarojini Naidu in 1924, and a young Indira Nehru during the 1940s. South African journalists, writers, and students journeyed in the other direction; for example, the African National Congress (ANC) leader S. S. Thema (Gandhi advised him that the ANC should abandon Western pretensions and go “about with only a tiny clout around your loins”²), the future president of the ANC Albert Luthuli, and Fort Hare professor D. D. T. Jabavu, who published a book on his experiences in isiXhosa titled *In India and East Africa*.³ Journeys by intellectuals and anticolonial militants occurred against the backdrop of the legacy of indentured Indian labor in the South African province of Natal, political and administrative linkages between the colonies, and the mass circulation of newspapers, books, spices, religious icons, films, and other culture-bearing commodities.⁴ Most significantly, the two countries were bound by the communities of Indian descent that built lives and homes across South Africa.

These connections provided a reference and resource for the anti-apartheid struggle. In November 1980, the acting president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, accepted the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International

Understanding on behalf of Nelson Mandela, then imprisoned on Robben Island. Speaking in New Delhi, Tambo praised “the striking role of India in the development of the struggle for national and social liberation in South Africa,” including labor actions carried out by indentured workers in nineteenth-century Natal, India’s case against South Africa’s racial policies at the first meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1946, and Nehru’s statement of solidarity with Africa—Asia’s “sister continent”—at the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference held outside of Bandung, Indonesia.⁵ If Tambo’s remarks conflated the diaspora, the Indian anticolonial struggle, and the postcolonial state by attributing them a single historical agency, they also made India integral to a narrative of South African history based on anticolonial nationalism. Paying tribute to this relationship, Mandela adapted the title of his 1994 biography *Long Walk to Freedom* from an essay by Nehru that he first read as a student in the 1940s. When Mandela met E. S. Reddy (the chair of the UN Committee against Apartheid and an Indian citizen) shortly after his release from prison, he was still able to recite long passages of Nehru’s writings from memory.⁶ Tambo’s remarks and Mandela’s allusion both produced a twinning effect: they configured South African and Indian histories as simultaneously distinct and inseparable. They also, both historically and symbolically, incorporated this twinning into the ANC’s understanding of nation.

Internal Frontiers tells the story of this relationship. It argues that it played a fundamental role in shaping the intellectual trajectory of the ANC and the South African antiapartheid struggle during the crucial conjuncture of the 1940s and ’50s. At the moment of Indian independence and the emergence of the Third World, African intellectuals confronted the question of the also-colonized other. Simultaneously oppressed and privileged by the framework of white domination, the Indian diaspora posed a fundamental challenge to the political practice and philosophy of African nationalism. If African nationalism excluded Indians from the antiapartheid struggle and its conception of political community, it risked defining ‘nation’ in racial terms and therefore recapitulating colonialism and apartheid’s dehumanizing categories. However, the inclusion of the diaspora threatened to fragment the territorial unity of the nation or, perhaps more seriously, displace the centrality of the African political subject by subordinating the struggle for national liberation to another politics (for example, the

universalizing discourses of Cold War liberalism or Marxism). What conceptualization of nation could incorporate, but *not* assimilate, a diasporic group that was tied to Africans through colonial oppression, but divided by culture and language, state-sanctioned privileges, and a history of misunderstanding and resentments? Responding to this dilemma, a group of intellectuals, centered in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban, attempted to rethink the idea of nation by privileging a relationship negotiated across difference. What would the practice of African nationalism look like if, rather than presupposing the end points of sovereignty and homogeneity, it began with an open-ended relationship with the also-colonized other?

AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND UNCANNY INDIA

Internal Frontiers examines the intellectual history of the South African liberation struggle from the founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944 to the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre through three distinct (and sometimes converging) lenses. First, it explores the ways that Indian anticolonial nationalism and the events surrounding Indian independence, including the partition of India and Pakistan, helped shape the political thinking of African intellectuals, especially their imagination of sovereignty. If the Indian National Congress and the Quit India Movement of the 1940s provided a new generation of African intellectuals with an important reference point for conceptualizing their own struggle, Partition illuminated the dangers inherent to the assertion of self-rule, including the schismatic and oppressive potentials of majoritarian nationalism. The considerable influence of India, however, was both mediated through and complicated by the sizable population of Indians in South Africa. This is the second lens employed by this book. It follows the debate that emerged among African intellectuals (including, it should be underlined, South African Indians) in the mid-1940s over the role of Indians within the liberation struggle and, ultimately, their place within South Africa. Initially posed in terms of the relationship between the ANC and Indian political organizations, this discussion evolved into a wide-ranging reconsideration of the struggle's ideological foundations and framed the ANC's ambitious attempt to rethink the concept of nation in the 1950s. Though these two discussions—one over India as a model and the other over Indians as a group—sometimes ran in parallel, at other times they intersected

in complex ways, raising questions about both the internal and external boundaries of the nationalist political project. At crucial points, they were also interrupted and reconfigured by interventions from “below.” The third lens of this book focuses on vernacular discourses of race, including a powerful current of anti-Indian populism among many Africans, which consolidated in Durban as migration reconfigured urban space from the 1930s. While new racial dynamics generated a sense of African-Indian antagonism on an unprecedented scale, they also coexisted with the intimacies and anonymous solidarities of urban life. Multiple relationships, in ways that were both highly visible and unremarkable in their ordinariness, crosshatched the hardening divide. In confronting this fractured and contentious landscape, African intellectuals navigated and later theorized the existence of a profound division between the colonized that, as they knew well from their own life experiences, failed to exhaust the complexities of identity in Natal.

By exploring the interplay between these three lenses, *Internal Frontiers* argues that India and the Indian diaspora were decisive questions—and at certain moments *the* decisive question—during the crucial period when the ANC first emerged as a mass political organization and fully developed its conception of African nationalism. Since its foundation in 1912, the ANC (then called the South African Native National Congress) had countered the settler dystopia of a white South Africa with the demand for inclusive citizenship based on individual capacity (a qualified franchise and “equal rights for all civilized men”). By the mid-1940s, a series of factors—increased African militancy, the publication of the *Atlantic Charter*, and the closing of wartime prospects for reform—led a new generation of intellectuals, including figures as different as Dr. A. B. Xuma and Anton Lembede, to demand universal citizenship rights based on African nationalism. In the wide-ranging debate that emerged over the nature of this nationalism (it involved not only intellectuals within the ANC, but liberals, Communist Party members, and the heterodox Marxist Non-European Unity Movement), India provided a reference point for all sides. For South African observers as well as many others around the world, the decolonization of India and Pakistan announced the transition from empire to the sovereign nation-state as the foundation of the global system. When Xuma argued for transforming the ANC into a mass movement in the early 1940s, he invoked the Indian National Congress in

much the same way that Youth League members, including Mandela and Tambo, would list the actions of Gandhi and Nehru when arguing against Xuma's cautious approach at the end of the decade. While Lembede quoted Nehru in his celebration of nationalism as the spiritual expression of racial genius, his fellow ANC Youth League activist H. I. E. Dhlomo stressed India's importance in terms of the postwar system of nation-states and the human rights framework of the United Nations. Marxists of various stripes cited India as an example of a successful alliance between Communists and the forces of anticolonial nationalism as well as a betrayal of the revolution by political elites tied to the Indian bourgeoisie.

Across these competing appropriations, the figure of India served a common purpose: it authorized a claim of self-determination in the present. The ANC's earlier leadership had, with brief exceptions, envisioned the gradual incorporation of Africans into colonial society under the leadership of the black middle class. By and large, they accepted that democracy presupposed a common social existence ("Western civilization") based on property ownership, education, the nuclear family (including its heteronormative vision of gender relations), Christianity, and the rule of law.⁷ Intellectuals within the ANC did not, of course, reproduce this framework passively. At various points, they challenged one or more of the precepts of civilization and critiqued their underlying racial assumptions. They asserted Pan-African origins for the universal values that Europe claimed to exemplify.⁸ They struggled to build independent black institutions—the African press, schools like John Dube's Ohlange Institute, and the ANC itself—that would provide the basis for a self-consciously modern political life outside of white control.⁹ They championed the cause of African workers in order to extend the reach and criteria for participation in civil society.¹⁰ And, as Robert Vinson argues, many black South Africans looked to African Americans as both examples and allies in the "regeneration" of Africa: an alternative path to modernity that would bypass colonial trusteeship.¹¹

The Indian independence struggle, in contrast, did not symbolize a desired future. It instantiated democratic self-government in a diverse, polyglot, and religiously divided country whose leadership, moreover, asserted continuity with two ancient civilizations, Hinduism and Islam. A world historic event, it had philosophical as well as

political ramifications. Indian independence not only challenged the fact of foreign rule, it negated a common assumption of colonial ideology and important strands of liberal political theory: that a developed political economy, experience in modern institutions, and common loyalty to a shared identity—in other words, the normative attributes of ‘nation’ in liberal thought—were the necessary foundations of a sovereign and democratic state.¹² Transported and translated into South African intellectual life, India provided African intellectuals with a vehicle to begin to think (both empirically and theoretically) about possible foundations of nationhood beyond empire and settler civil society. This transformed temporality of politics—conveyed most powerfully by Lembede’s slogan “freedom in our lifetime”—created a new conceptual “problem space.”¹³ In claiming sovereignty on behalf of a subaltern and socially heterogeneous people, the 1940s generation of nationalists inaugurated a new intellectual horizon within which African thinkers would reimagine the grounds and meaning of nation.

THE INTERNAL FRONTIER OF THE NATION-STATE

If Indian independence suggested a new model for the thinking of nation, the Indian diaspora interrupted a central precept of this worldview: the envisioning of nation—to subvert Benedict Anderson’s famous phrase—in homogenous, empty space.¹⁴ The postwar map may have been composed of “liberated sovereignties,” emerging states that would ostensibly realize and guard the promise of universal human rights, but this map was far from empty.¹⁵ It was transversed by older geographies of empire, capitalism, and the oceanic worlds created by the movement of people, cultures, and ideas.¹⁶ These dense histories posed a fundamental problem for the new nationalisms. When anti-colonial intellectuals conceptualized the people as sovereign over a territory, they confronted the question of translating these alternate geographies into the imaginary of the nation-state. The “other than national” had to be rendered internal (and therefore governable by an entity with territorial jurisdiction) or foreign—a more ambiguous and exceptional status. The Indian diaspora resisted both determinations. A deterritorialized and geographically dispersed entity, diaspora served as an internal frontier of the imagined political community, a site where the principle of nationhood (however it was articulated) confronted other scales and forms of identity. Things “Indian” permeated the

sociopolitical landscape of Natal and, to a lesser degree, other parts of the country. They appeared both in everyday life and material culture (from the *atchar* sold by the local shopkeeper to the grand minarets of Grey Street's mosques) and in great events that shaped the course of South Africa's history (such as Gandhi's campaigns). India was ubiquitous, part of the very fabric of South Africa. The ambiguity of the term "Indian," which named both a distant country and a variety of familiar people and places, intensified this uncanny effect.

In his important book *Enlightenment in the Colony*, Aamir Mufti suggests that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century arguments regarding the place of Jews within Europe—the famous "Jewish question"—pre-figured the dilemma faced by ethnic minorities within the postcolonial nation-state.¹⁷ According to Mufti, the secular state, based on the categories of national identity and citizenship, produced the Jewish diaspora as doubly anomalous. On the one hand, the Jew functioned as a figure of premodern, religious particularity that disrupted the universalizing ideal of individual and secular citizenship. On the other hand, the diasporic and cosmopolitan character of Jewishness, which European nationalist intellectuals frequently associated with the elusive attributes of transnational capitalism, threatened the Romantic ideal of a solidly rooted and holistic national identity. Reading the place of the Muslim in contemporary India through these earlier debates, Mufti concludes that the contradictory imperatives of secular nationalism, rather than demography, produce the cultural-political status of the minority. If nationalism institutionalizes a territorial identity through the establishment and policing of external boundaries, the category of minority allows the nationalist project to replicate this structure of demarcation *within* its territorial body: the minority group is included inside the space of the nation in such a way as to protect both the putative universalism of citizenship and the underlying exclusivity of a singular (cultural, linguistic, or racial) national subject. This mode of incorporation renders the minority precarious and vulnerable. In the process of unifying a collective territorial subject, nationalism "makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled. More simply put, whenever a population is *minoritized*—a process inherent in the nationalization of peoples and cultural practices—it is also rendered potentially movable."¹⁸ Mufti's concept of *minoritization* usefully marks the distinction between "minority" as a political status produced by majoritarian

nationalism and actual groups of people, who can understand their relationship to and within nation in a multitude of ways.

In developing the concept of internal frontier, this book follows Mufti's insistence that the relationship between nation and diaspora is not predetermined by demography, but is the product of an ongoing process that generates *both* the majority and minority as interlacing political identities. In its modern form, the phenomenon of diaspora resides at the intersection of the global distribution of certain ethnic or cultural identities—such as Jew or Indian—and an international system based on the territorialization of identity in the form of the nation-state. (It is notable that comparisons between Indians and Jews were a fixture of both popular discourse and the postwar iconography of Indian political struggles in South Africa.) As many scholars have observed, this territorialization is always, necessarily incomplete.¹⁹ Political projects of assimilation or ethnic cleansing might asymptotically approach the classic ideal of European nationalism (“one people, one territory”), but the complexity of existing populations and the transnational movement of migrants render its ultimate realization impossible.²⁰ Because homogeneity remains elusive, diaspora functions as a shifting boundary—an interior limit to the project of majoritarian democracy—that destabilizes territorial nationalism and forces the continuous elaboration of a bounded national subject. This dialectic of interruption and reassertion changes, however subtly, the dominant identity over time. As Paul Gilroy argues, the effects of diaspora on a cultural landscape make it impossible to theorize without developing a new perspective on national culture as a whole.²¹ At the same time, *Internal Frontiers* extends—and to a degree departs from—Mufti's argument by raising the possibility of subverting the majoritarian logic of nationalism. Because Mufti accepts that the trajectory of postcolonial politics necessarily recapitulates the Romantic ideal of peoplehood, his critique assumes a tragic structure. In his account, diaspora only ever becomes territorialized through the legal-judicial category of minority. Is it possible to invert this movement and rethink the nature of national community through its essential permeability? What would it mean to leave the internal frontier open?

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALISM

Both a neighbor and an outsider, unmistakably South African and cosmopolitan, “the Indian” displaced the problem space of postwar

African nationalism from within. If the liberation struggle necessitated a unified people, then what was the place of the also-colonized other in the nationalist project? What type of unity could allow for an irreducible plurality of cultural and political subjects? In his enormously influential *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that imperialism and Third World nationalism, by equating modernity with a highly ideological construction of the “West,” universalized a particular subject of history, the sovereign subject of the nation-state.²² Echoing the Indian psychologist Ashis Nandy (and through him Frantz Fanon), this argument suggests that anticolonial struggles emulated the subjectivities, political forms, and normative conceptions of their ostensible enemy, the European colonizer.²³ Along similar lines, Mahmood Mamdani claims that African nationalism limited its goals to the deracialization of civil society and therefore left the distinction between the citizen and native (embodied in the institutions of indirect rule) intact.²⁴ In contrast, *Internal Frontiers* argues that an important group of African intellectuals explicitly questioned the foundation of nation in settler civil society and, in the aftermaths of Partition and the 1949 Durban Riots, sought to reconceptualize the subject of anticolonial nationalism by privileging the question of difference. Articulated most fully in the writings of a group of Natal intellectuals centered on ANC president Albert Luthuli, this position upheld the central agency of Africans in their own liberation—and the broadly African character of postapartheid national culture—while rejecting a racial or majoritarian basis for a future political community. Drawing on precolonial practices of social inclusion and a Christian critique of materialism, these thinkers argued that a common set of values would provide the foundation for the liberation struggle and a historically dynamic nation-building project. Their conception was self-consciously idealist in a philosophical sense. The most powerful force binding the nation was the idea of the nation itself. Unlike the categories of race or civilization, idealism could incorporate the also-colonized other without postulating the existence of a national majority or threatening assimilation: it provided a basis of unity that did not presuppose homogeneity within the realm of the social.

The idealist critique of philosophical and economic materialism represented a major strand within twentieth-century thought.²⁵ As Michael Adas argues, the profound crisis generated by the First World

War challenged a central precept of colonial ideology: that the technoscientific strength of Europe embodied its civilizational superiority over the colonized world.²⁶ In the wake of the horrors of industrialized warfare, an increasing number of European and colonized intellectuals rejected the identification of moral progress with material power. According to Adas, the resulting debate over the future of European civilization, and its putative basis in secular progress, was the first truly global intellectual conversation.²⁷ Eventually, this exchange would encompass thinkers as diverse as the philosopher Henri Bergson, the Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain, the Muslim-Indian thinker Mohammed Iqbal, and the theorists of negritude, Paulette Nardal, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Senghor. Pankaj Mishra explains: “Often drawing upon philosophical and spiritual traditions in Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism they developed a refined suspicion of the ‘brave new world’ of science and reason, insisting on the non-rational, non-utilitarian aspects of human existence.”²⁸ While many proponents of idealism opposed foreign rule, they nevertheless understood the crime of colonialism in philosophical rather than political terms. They believed that the West’s overreliance on technology and its one-sided emphasis on an abstract form of rationality denied the very things that give human life value: the moral and spiritual dimensions of being. This critique displaced European nationalism’s fixation on primordial or substantive attributes—a homogenous culture or a unified political economy, a racial identity or a shared territory—and instead emphasized the collective project of building new societies founded on shared ideals and an expanded vision of humanity. To quote the philosopher Achille Mbembe, the struggle against colonialism created the space in which to articulate a “*volunté active de communauté*,” an active will to share in community.²⁹

AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY AND ETHICAL NATIONALISM

In recent scholarship, Afro-Asian solidarity—symbolized most powerfully by the 1955 Bandung Conference—has elicited two conflicting interpretations. Among one group of scholars, the “Bandung moment” represented the most powerful expression of the anticolonial will-to-community, the highpoint of the revolutionary movement to build

societies free of empire and racism. Recovering the radical aspirations of Bandung (often against the actual policies pursued by postcolonial elites), Vijay Prashad argues that the Third World was not a place, but a political project that sought to reimagine the international order against the bipolar system of the Cold War. Although this project ultimately collapsed through a combination of external sabotage and its own internal contradictions (including structures of class and neotraditional patriarchy), it nevertheless pointed to unrealized trajectories of liberation and new forms of political subjectivity.³⁰ By shifting the focus from high diplomacy to grassroots activism and imaginations of Afro-Asianism, other scholars underscore the internationalist character of anticolonial politics. Not only did nationalist movements incorporate diasporic communities and transnational practices of solidarity, they reimagined self-determination and liberation by envisioning decolonization as a global revolutionary process.³¹ In a significant body of writings, the novelist Amitov Ghosh connects the expansive ethos of Afro-Asian solidarity with deeper histories of cosmopolitanism, exchange, and travel throughout the Indian Ocean. With their limited resources, Ghosh argues, resistance movements strove to articulate a universalism based on older conversations between entangled and intimately connected worlds: “Those of us who grew up in that period will recall how powerfully we were animated by an emotion that is rarely named: this is xenophilia, the love of the other, the affinity for strangers.”³² Employing a strategy of “nostalgic futurism,” Ghosh and others read the unrealized visions of Bandung as an archive and resource for creating a postnationalist politics in the era of neoliberal empire.³³

In contrast, historians of southern and eastern Africa generally express skepticism regarding the reach of Afro-Asianism while raising questions about the ways that anticolonial nationalism presupposed a majoritarian political subject that racialized postcolonial citizenship.³⁴ In a trenchant discussion of mid-century Tanzania, James Brennan argues that the country’s Indian community functioned as the primary other for the development of a dominant, racialized African nationalism. However inclusive its official rhetoric, the Tanganyika African Union (TANU) embraced and reinforced popular discourses of racial purity—grounded in patrilineal modes of reckoning descent—by defining nation in terms of Swahili civilization and common (African) economic suffering.³⁵ Though individuals of South Asian descent

participated in anticolonial struggles such as Kenya's Mau Mau uprising, such solidarity coexisted with—and in certain ways drew its strength in opposition to—a forbidding backdrop of colonial segregation, ideas of Indian racial and civilizational superiority, and equally racialized African resentments.³⁶ In her wide-ranging *Africa in the Indian Imagination*, Antoinette Burton describes the ways in which heroic narratives of Afro-Asianism inscribe “brown” over “black” while lionizing the masculine subject of anticolonial nationalism.³⁷ These accounts resonate with an important critique of solidarity—as both concept and practice—that warns about the ways that progressive alliances serve to disavow white (and other kinds of) privilege while disciplining more radical black political aspirations in the name of unity and respectability.³⁸

Rather than celebrating or critiquing the project of Afro-Asian unity, *Internal Frontiers* describes how an important group of intellectuals attempted to overcome the limitations of solidarity by reconceiving the nation in ethical terms. Because nationalism was a narrative of the African people's participation within (a particular conception of) history, later historiographical debates were anticipated within the anti-apartheid movement as disputes over basic principles. A breakthrough occurred in the process of organizing the 1952 Defiance Campaign against unjust laws. Following this first mobilization of Africans and Indians together in nonviolent civil disobedience, Luthuli and other ANC leaders linked the possibility of Black-Indian solidarity to a reformulation of the African nation-building project. The foundation of this compact was Indian recognition of the ANC's leadership. If Indians (and later others) endorsed the African liberation struggle through personal risk and genuine material sacrifice, the ANC would welcome these communities *as distinct communities* within a broad project of African nationalism. This act of welcoming, which was deeply resonant with the importance of hospitality in precolonial African cultures, represented the inclusive moment of the ANC's idea of an “inclusive African nationalism.”

Unlike liberal conceptions of solidarity or multiracialism, this alliance did not presuppose the equivalency of its members.³⁹ Rather, reciprocity was both asymmetrical and particularized: African acceptance of the other's claim to indigeneity presupposed Indians' prior recognition of the country's fundamentally African character. In two important

senses, this reimagining of solidarity articulated the nation as an ethical relationship between distinct yet entangled communities.⁴⁰ In the first instance, this relationship was ethical because the form of reciprocity it demanded was based on the individuality of each group rather than the general obligations of citizenship. Indeed, every demarcation of *ethnic* boundaries requires the negotiation or disavowal of an *ethical* disposition toward others.⁴¹ More profoundly, this relationship was ethical because it incorporated an open-ended negotiation with the other within the historical process of creating a South African identity. This openness was possible because the ultimate basis of inclusive nationalism was a shared commitment to transcendent ideals.

This understanding had significant repercussions for the meaning of liberation. As philosopher Gillian Rose warns in a different context, recognition entails the discovery of “the self-relation of the other as the challenge of one’s own self-relation.”⁴² If national identity is inseparable from the other’s ideas and practices of community, freedom can no longer be expressed in terms of asserting independence, but instead requires a deepening of entanglement.⁴³ Consequently, self-determination becomes a set of relationships that required continual elaboration both within and beyond the borders of the national state: it possessed an external and internal dimension.⁴⁴ This form of belonging also created vulnerability and, therefore, the possibility of particularly brutal and wounding forms of violence.⁴⁵ Of the many problems that this vision posed, one stands out. Could this understanding of nation expand to include the white settler population, which was committed to defending its apartheid—the Afrikaans word for “separation”—by force? In the context of the protracted fight against white supremacy, this question became entangled within a second debate: Was it possible to achieve democracy without civil war?

THE NATAL CRUCIBLE

Located on the southwestern rim of the Indian Ocean, the province of Natal was a world composed of multiple worlds. Not only did each of these social universes, in turn, contain other milieus (nested inside one another much like a series of fitted Russian dolls), the worlds abutted and overlapped, creating a complex pattern that changed forms depending on the viewer’s perspective. In the first instance, it was conquest and settler society that bound these realities together. Beginning

in the late 1830s, Afrikaner and then English incursion established a white presence in the region that slowly expanded over the course of the next two decades. As anthropologist Patrick Wolfe argues, colonial invasion was “a structure not an event”: the violence of settlement continues to exist as an ongoing process embodied and reproduced by the institutions of colonial civil society.⁴⁶ In the case of Natal, these institutions developed through the gradual incorporation of the region into broader international networks: the administrative structures and political institutions that linked the colony to the British Empire (Natal was later the most English of South Africa’s four provinces); the port that opened Natal to the currents of the Indian Ocean and the global capitalist economy; and the schools and mission stations that made Christianity a central presence, including (by the end of the nineteenth century) African American missionaries who would form a vital connection to the Black Atlantic.⁴⁷

While such forces drew the colony together, they failed to destroy and fully assimilate the region’s preexisting societies, most importantly the powerful Zulu Kingdom, which defended its independence until 1879. Even as significant numbers of Africans came to live on mission stations or in reserves (Natal was also a pioneer of indirect rule), converted to Christianity, and entered into the colony’s economy as migrant workers, the continued existence of an autonomous Zulu way of life—symbolized by the monarchy and the royal house—contributed to a profound consciousness of belonging and indigenesness across an increasingly differentiated African population.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the continual violence of conquest may have integrated settlers and Africans into a range of hierarchal formations, but the settler state was not yet strong enough to restructure social relations according to a single, overarching racial order. A binary discourse of race burnished the increasing heterogeneity of both white and African society. Among Natal’s Africans, new social categories proliferated and combined: urban and rural, Christian and traditional, aspirant middle class and migrant worker—each generating different versions of a common Zulu identity.⁴⁹

Into this chaotic and inchoate universe, the SS *Truro* (sailing from the southern Indian port of Madras) brought 342 workers of South Asian origin on 16 November 1860.⁵⁰ The ship’s list tells its own story of distinct and interwoven worlds. The passengers included

men, women, and children whose “castes” were identified variously as Christian, Muslim, Rajput, Gentoo, Pariah, Malabar, Myset, and unknown. Ten days later, a second ship (whose voyage started over a thousand miles north in Calcutta) arrived bearing a cargo of people from an equally diffuse range of backgrounds. Because most Africans still retained access to land (and therefore a measure of independence from the colonial economy), Natal’s coastal planters turned to the indenture system—developed in the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery in 1834—to support the colony’s struggling sugar industry. By the time that the colony terminated the system in 1911, 152,184 indentured workers had come to Natal. In their powerful account, Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed capture the motivations that drove people into contracted servitude: fathers chasing means to support families in the midst of imperialism’s economic ravages; “untouchables” hoping to escape caste oppression; young men thirsting for adventure or elusive fortune; widows and single women escaping forms of patriarchal constraint; and unfortunates simply defrauded by recruiters.⁵¹ After the conclusion of their contracts, a significant number remained in Natal despite the hardships of poverty and colonial racism. Others signed new contracts after returning to India or traveled back to South Africa on their own tickets.

These migrants largely originated in two different regions of the subcontinent (the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking south and the Bhojpuri-speaking plane of the Ganges River), spoke at least seven distinct Indian languages, and carried (willingly or not) numerous religious, village, familial, and occupational identities.⁵² Nonetheless, the momentous act of boarding a ship together began a long process of discarding, reconfiguring, and expanding notions of self and community that would eventually produce a common sense of Indianness across persistent ethnic, class, and religious divides. As Desai and Vahed underscore, Indian immigrants to Natal resisted the colonial labor system, in part, by struggling to create new homes: the construction of a shared India through places of worship, festivals, new family traditions, plays, songs, and dress.⁵³ The relationship with an Indian past was not automatic, but complex, selective, and contested. The formation of the Colonial Born Indian Association in 1911 reflected the growing sense, at least among a literate stratum of former indentured workers, of common political interests among a population that planned to stay. At

the same time, the establishment of regional, language, and religious associations—which became the central focus of community outside the family—and the influence of Hindu missionaries encouraged an inward-looking social life that assumed some caste-like elements and further insulated Indians from interaction with Africans.⁵⁴

Following the indentured population, a second group of South Asian migrants, sometimes traveling through Mauritius or East Africa, began to arrive during the 1870s. Generally described as “passengers” (since they paid their own fares) and identified with the male figure of the Gujarati merchant, this group—as Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie shows—was considerably more diverse in gender, origin, and occupation.⁵⁵ Involved in almost every aspect of Natal’s economy (from agriculture to blacksmithing), many passengers retained close ties to India, returning home to visit or marry, and they soon began to establish institutions in South Africa on the basis of religion, language, and (more rarely) caste. In the late nineteenth century, this group stressed its distinction from “coolies” (a derogatory term for unskilled labor that was also used as a slur against Indians) on religious or racial grounds. In an effort to differentiate their legal status from the formerly indentured, for example, some Indian Muslims asserted an “Arab” identity. As newer migrants followed opportunities across South Africa, they established communities in the Transvaal and the Western Cape (with Indian populations of 9,979 and 10,242 in 1909, respectively) of significantly different ethno-religious compositions and demographic weight than in Natal.⁵⁶ This layer created a new hierarchy among South African Indians, which overlapped partially with the division between Muslims and Hindus/Christians, while interspersing Indians within the sociopolitical landscape of the country as a whole. Because many passengers made their living through activities such as running stores or working in service professions, they frequently resided in urban centers catering to shoppers of all races or in the neighborhoods where their customers lived. Driven by the backlash among whites over perceived economic competition, the provinces attempted to restrict Indians to specific locations starting the 1880s or, in the case of the Orange Free State, banned Indian residents altogether. Nevertheless, Indians became the group most likely to live near or among other racial groups. The 1950 Group Areas Act, the apartheid legislation that established segregated residential and business zones in cities, resulted in the

displacement of Indians at a higher rate than any other section of the population.⁵⁷

GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

No figure looms larger in the history of Indians in South Africa than Mohandas Gandhi. As a substantial literature attests,⁵⁸ Gandhi's South African years were the most important period of his adult intellectual formation. The man who arrived as a prim, suit-wearing lawyer—a quirky Anglophile who believed in the promises of liberal empire—would eventually leave after he had renounced the materialistic philosophy of Western civilization and devised a series of new ideas that he would employ to historic effect in India. Born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat, Gandhi qualified as a lawyer in England where he became interested in vegetarianism and theosophy. In 1893 he traveled to the Transvaal in order to translate in a legal dispute between two Gujarati businessmen. Gandhi then remained in South Africa for the better part of the next twenty-one years. In 1894 he plunged into local politics by organizing opposition to a bill introduced by the Natal legislature that would have disenfranchised Indians on the basis of race. Initially, Gandhi's political agitation centered on the defense of Indian rights as British imperial subjects. He adopted the legalistic methods of elite nationalist politics. However, his experience living in South Africa (he was a firsthand witness to the industrial revolution emanating from Johannesburg) slowly propelled him toward different forms of spiritual and communal experimentation. In 1903, he established the journal *Indian Opinion*, which—as Isabel Hofmeyr argues—served as a space for nurturing different modes of community and subjectivity through “slow” practices of reading. Slowness, for Gandhi, functioned as an ethical counter to the acceleration of modern capitalist society.⁵⁹ In 1904, he established the first of a series of famous retreats or ashrams, the Phoenix Settlement outside of Durban, where he practiced collective forms of work, prayer, and service with family and followers. After the tabling of the Asiatic Registration Act in 1906, Gandhi again assumed leadership of the opposition, but this time he departed from his earlier legalistic methods by refusing to comply with the measure. The resulting struggle, which ebbed and flowed until Gandhi's departure in 1914, witnessed definitive moments in his biography and South African history: Gandhi's first imprisonment, the public burning of the

hated registration cards, the entrance of women into the struggle in opposition to the Supreme Court's invalidation of Indian marriages, the famous march from New Castle to the Transvaal in defiance of provincial travel bans, and the 1913 strikes of Natal's coal and cane workers.⁶⁰

The great philosophical breakthrough of Gandhi's South African years was the development of satyagraha. Adapted from a suggestion sent in by a reader of *Indian Opinion*, this term was used by Gandhi to differentiate the strategy of his campaign from the more circumscribed (and English-language) concept of passive resistance.⁶¹ Satyagraha combines the Sanskrit words for "truth" and "endurance." Gandhi also glossed the concept as "truth force." (Martin Luther King Jr. would later speak of "soul force."⁶²) In contrast to passive resistance, satyagraha is less a specific political tactic than a set of guiding principles that define the success of struggle: persistence in the face of suffering, absolute nonviolence, and the transformation—rather than the coercion—of the oppressor. Requiring inner discipline and intense spiritual preparation, satyagraha could assume varying forms in practice, including refusal to submit to unjust laws, fasting, economic boycotts, mass political mobilization, and creating alternative communities and institutions. The unifying thread of these different actions was the active subordination of self to the pursuit of justice and divine truth. Sidestepping the assumed community of deliberative reason, satyagraha insists on the recognition of common humanity by placing the suffering and vulnerable life of the satyagrahi in the hands of his or her opponent. Whether the object of protest accepts this responsibility or (generally) not, the opponent becomes a custodian of the other's wellbeing. Consequently, there exists an enormous potential for violence in satyagraha, but it is a violence shouldered by the satyagrahi in the service of a higher purpose. Most radically, satyagraha entails a conception of struggle as the deepening of the ethical relationship between the two contending parties.⁶³ These ideas—especially Gandhi's emphasis on sacrifice, his critique of materialism, and the idea of struggle as spiritual conversion—would later interact and combine with the Christian traditions that nourished the intellectual life of the ANC.

Gandhi's South African career remains engulfed in controversy. These debates center on two related questions. First, during his time in South Africa, Gandhi remained loyal to Britain and repeatedly defined his political goals in terms of the achievement of equal rights for

South African Indians. To prove Indian fidelity, he mobilized a volunteer ambulance core to care for British soldiers during the 1899–1902 war between the Crown and the Afrikaner republics. When a section of the Zulu people rebelled against a colonial poll tax in 1906 under the leadership of Chief Bambatha kaMancinza, Gandhi once again offered his services by mobilizing an ambulance contingent. (In this case, he found himself caring for Africans who had been left to die after British troops butchered villages. He described these events as “No war but a man hunt.”⁶⁴) Given his later status as the most globally recognized icon of anticolonialism, his early career invites accusations of hypocrisy. Desai and Vahed subtitle their searching exploration of these years “Stretcher-Bearer of Empire.”⁶⁵

Second, not only do Gandhi’s South African writings describe Africans in racialized and pejorative terms (especially by utilizing the epithet *kaffir*), they also stress the danger of Indians sinking to the levels of “Natives.” Describing his first stint in prison, Gandhi writes: “We were then marched off to prison intended for Kaffirs. . . . We could understand not being classed with the whites, but to be placed at the same level of the Natives seemed too much to be put up with. It is indubitably right that the Indians should have separate cells. Kaffirs are as a rule uncivilized—the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals.”⁶⁶ Statements like this were not simply expressions of common prejudice. Because Gandhi rejected an alliance with Africans, his struggle to obtain rights for Indians as British subjects endorsed the colonial racial order: the “uncivilized” Native served as a common boundary that aligned Indianness with empire.⁶⁷ It is also true that Gandhi moderated and, after he returned to India and embraced a more radical anticolonial position, eventually discarded these views. At moments in his South African writings, he praised individual Africans, most notably his neighbor John Dube, and imagined a far distant future when a new nation would arise from blacks, Indians, and whites.⁶⁸ By the end of his life, he lent his considerable authority to a younger faction in South African Indian politics that sought a strategic rapprochement with the ANC. Nor were such racial views unique to Gandhi or his Indian peers. As Franco Barchiesi demonstrates, the early leaders of the ANC expressed similar sentiments about the “ruck of the native,” reflecting their embrace of liberal empire and a politics of inclusion within settler civil society.⁶⁹ Be that as it may, Gandhi’s

outlook helped to cement a conservative tradition in diasporic politics and a rhetoric of Indian civilizational superiority that long survived his departure.

Following Gandhi's return to India in 1914, the Natal Indian Congress persisted as a small organization, composed mostly of passengers and their descendants, and dedicated to advocacy regarding issues that affected the Indian middle class. When a younger generation won control of the Indian Congress in the early 1940s, these activists seized on Gandhi's time in South Africa—which since had been invested with the prestige of the Indian independence struggle—as a legacy to be appropriated and reinvented.⁷⁰ Known as the “Radicals,” this group consisted of South African-born professionals and working-class militants, many of whom were drawn into politics by the Communist Party. It eventually included the dashing Communist and proudly Muslim physician Yusuf Dadoo, the avowed Gandhian “Monty” Naicker, the trade union stalwart and socialist H. A. Naidoo, the courageous medical student Zainab Asvat, and the intellectual firebrand Fatima Meer, among many others. Some of these activists possessed childhood memories of Gandhi's campaigns or grew up listening to their parents' stories about the Mahatma. Nevertheless, they appropriated and reworked his legacy for a politics inspired by Nehru, the Indian independence struggle, and (in some cases) the party. Under Nehru's influence and the pressure of events, this group drew the far-reaching conclusion that the struggle of South African Indians could only succeed as part of a broad alliance led by the ANC. This stance required surmounting the fears, racial prejudices, and structural insecurity of their immediate families and broader communities. Especially after the 1949 Durban Riots, they faced significant opposition from other organizations as well as many working-class and poorer Indians.⁷¹ Although they are not the focus of this book, the Radicals appear frequently in its pages. They played an irreplaceable part in the developments that it charts.

POSTCOLONIAL INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

As a history of ideas and intellectuals, *Internal Frontiers* contributes to the broader project of decolonizing and globalizing political theory. Its main goal is to explore new modes of thought that emerged from the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. In this respect, this book is part of a growing literature of postcolonial intellectual history that

has begun to elaborate the implications of Third World nationalism and decolonization—central experiences of the twentieth century by any account—for our understandings of foundational philosophical concepts such as sovereignty, nation, citizenship, ethics, civil society, and alterity. Drawing on the pioneering efforts of Edward Said and Sylvia Wynter (among others), this scholarship insists that the long, many-faceted battle to assert the dignity and equality of the “darker nations”—the majority of the human race—could not fail to transform our understanding of the political in far-reaching ways.⁷² At the same time, *Internal Frontiers* adopts a different approach from some recent studies of intellectuals such as Gandhi, Fanon, and B. R. Ambedkar. Grounded in a close reading of texts, these accounts reconstruct the normative arguments of anticolonial figures to demonstrate that they were not only political actors, but important thinkers in their own right. As Hamid Dabashi argues in a key programmatic statement, a powerful set of discourses continues to deny the existence of meaningful philosophical production beyond the West. The “non-European” remains the perpetual object of historical, biographical, or ethnographic analysis—never the universal subject of a truly revolutionary mode of thought.⁷³ While postcolonial intellectual history challenges this positioning in significant fashions, it frequently replicates the mode of “high theory” that remains dominant within the Euro-American university. By reducing intellectual production to a written corpus, the historian can distill a series of arguments that mimic the form of Western political philosophy: disembodied, textually based, and universalizing. At its worse, intellectual history adopts a practice of cultural brokering. After rendering the anticolonial intellectual a “theorist,” the historian then validates the figure’s standing (and by implication his or her own) through a critical dialogue with pillars of the Western canon, whether John Locke or Michel Foucault.⁷⁴

Individual thinkers populate this book. Nevertheless, *Internal Frontiers* returns to the grounds of their thinking: their families and others that they loved; their circles of collaborators; the branches and committees of their political organizations; the cities where they lived, traveled, and worked; the structures of race, class, and gender that generated the social field of their everyday experiences; and the institutional and ideological frameworks of white supremacy that they fought. The purpose of this reconstruction is not the saturation of thought with biographical

or empirical context. Far more than is often realized, intellectuals such as Lembede and Luthuli drew on Western political theory to articulate universalizing claims even as they critiqued the form of abstract reason that characterized secular politics. Rather, this attentiveness to personal and social terrains reflects the fact that the work of thinking always remains open to and interwoven with its outside.⁷⁵ At another level, this approach attends to the specific character of philosophical practice that developed within the antiapartheid struggle of the 1950s. The intellectual and aesthetic labors of African thinkers—and a central argument of this book is that these modes are indissociably linked—were instruments for sustaining a resistance movement and building a new form of national community. This living community, rather than a master text or a new articulation of universalism, was the true medium of African nationalist thought.⁷⁶

The most important space for the elaboration of this project was the commercial African press of the 1950s. These publications, written in English and African languages, play a central part in this book. They are both significant protagonists and the stage on which much of the drama takes place.⁷⁷ As Ntongela Masilela observes: “The real intellectual history of South Africa is predominantly traceable through newspapers.”⁷⁸ Although the ANC lacked a national paper during this period, three major African publications—*Bantu World*, *Ilanga lase Natal*, and *Inkundla ya Bantu*—were edited by influential members of the ANC. Two of these editors were members of the Natal ANC Youth League: Ngubane ran *Inkundla* and H. I. E. Dhlomo oversaw *Ilanga* with his brother Ralph.⁷⁹ If editorial lines generally followed their personal convictions, these individuals were proud professional newsmen and opened their pages to articles about (and by) the major factions in black politics. The press not only provided a forum for intellectual debates, it allowed grassroots followers of the ANC, Unity Movement, the Communist Party, and Indian Congress to evaluate and publically respond to the policies of their own and other organizations. This openness also reflected a particular understanding of the newspaper’s function. In the absence of institutions controlled by black South Africans, newspapers served as something like makeshift governments: they stood in for missing schools, national representative institutions, even health departments.⁸⁰ As this book argues, the ANC became increasingly media conscious during the 1952 Defiance

Campaign and its depiction by the black press—especially the legendary lifestyle magazine *Drum*—contributed to the development of a new aesthetic of political struggle that celebrated the cosmopolitanism of urban South Africa, especially Johannesburg. Once intellectuals such as H. I. E. Dhlomo and Luthuli became aware of local reworkings of this aesthetic, they drew a significant conclusion: a shared symbolism could help unite an otherwise heterogeneous people if it created space for different groups to write *themselves* into an unfolding national narrative.

AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND NONRACIALISM

Internal Frontiers reconstructs the debates over two questions—the place of the Indian diaspora in South Africa and the postwar reconfiguration of African nationalism—and describes when their intersection became central to the development of the ANC. This book is therefore neither a linear narrative of the liberation struggle nor a comprehensive treatment of the diverse (and very different) contributions of Indian South Africans. Occasionally, canonical people and events are passed over lightly. “Minor” figures sometimes take center stage. Through telling the story of how the “Indian question” became central to the organizational structure of antiapartheid politics and the broader culture of resistance, *Internal Frontiers* argues that the problem of the also-colonized other drove the ANC’s formulation of an inclusive, *African* nationalism. This understanding of nation, articulated by Luthuli on his election to the ANC presidency in 1952, became a major intellectual current within the organization and, perhaps as importantly, reinforced the emergence of a political culture organized around a powerful symbolic politics, which I call “symbolic constitutionalism.” Based on participation “from below” and affective communities nurtured in struggle, this culture generated a new aesthetic of nationhood: the struggle itself provided the image of a multiracial African nation that affirmed the claims of each group to belonging. In direct opposition to apartheid’s discourse of “separateness” and its fantasy of coherent racial subjects, this imagery located heterogeneity, entanglement, and an asymmetrical form of reciprocity at the center of a shared identity. Luthuli and his co-thinkers, the Natal Group, developed their interpretation of African nationalism through their defense of the African-Indian alliance of the early 1950s and the experience

of solidarity during the 1952 Defiance Campaign. They subsequently generalized from the relationship with the also-colonized other to an ethics of nationhood that presupposed recognition and negotiation across multiple forms of difference. In other words, they attempted to leave the internal frontier open by enfolding alterity within the conceptualization of the nation form.

Most accounts of the antiapartheid struggle during the 1950s focus on one of two developments. The first involves Mandela and the Communist Party. After recognizing the strategic importance of African nationalism, party members within the ANC and Indian Congress played a major role in championing non-European cooperation as well as the alliance between the ANC and left-wing whites organized in the Congress of Democrats.⁸¹ Perhaps the only organization in South Africa where whites and blacks could meet on equal terms, the party attracted a key group of younger African nationalists, including Walter Sisulu and Mandela, and helped break this group from an exclusionary Africanist ideology. During this same period, the party codified an understanding of the national democratic revolution that projected the overthrow of white supremacy by the African majority leading other oppressed groups and progressive whites. This position understood South Africa as composed of one nation, the African majority, and several national minority groups.⁸²

The second event was the emergence of the Africanist opposition within the ANC and its split in 1958 to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).⁸³ Originating as a loose-knit opposition to collaboration with Indians and Communists, the Africanists became a major force in black politics and (in some areas) channeled popular disillusionment with the ANC. The leadership of the PAC, especially the brilliant Robert Mangiliso Sobukwe, believed that the revolutionary struggle of the African oppressed could create a nonracial, Pan-African identity by abolishing the system of white supremacy and replacing it with a democratic government founded on equal rights for individual citizens. This program, however, required mobilizing the explosive anger of the PAC's grassroots supporters—a rage which often expressed itself as explicitly anti-Indian and antiwhite—in the service of a revolution that would somehow transform their collective racial consciousness.⁸⁴

These stories intersect *Internal Frontiers's* narrative at several turns. However, they concern people and events that were centered in the

Transvaal and, when juxtaposed, frame this period in terms of the opposition between the Communist Party's "nonracialism" and the PAC's Africanism. In contrast, this book moves back and forth between Johannesburg and Durban and includes a wider cast of characters. Its focus is a group of African intellectuals in Natal who simultaneously remained outside of the Communist Party and opposed the strategy of the Africanists. Originating in Durban student circles during the early 1940s, this group included Lembede (the Philosopher), H. I. E. Dhlomo (the Poet), Jordan Ngubane (the News Man and Publicist), and M. B. Yengwa (the Organizer). Known among themselves as *ibandla* (the historical term for the council of the Zulu king's advisors), they were instrumental in the election of Luthuli (the Liberation Theologian) to the Natal ANC presidency in 1951.⁸⁵ At some point in their careers, the writings or statements of each of these individuals reflected anti-Indian resentments and stereotypes. They also struggled against this form of racialism: in their communities, inside the ANC, and personally. In arguing for the centrality of the Natal Group to the intellectual evolution of the ANC, *Internal Frontiers* suggests that the most significant debates of this period occurred *within* the ANC between different interpretations of African nationalism.

The reassertion that the ANC was first and foremost an African nationalist organization represents a departure from another current of scholarship: the narration of the antiapartheid struggle in terms of the development of nonracialism.⁸⁶ A major focus of postapartheid debates over South African identity, nonracialism is an unstable and much contested term. Dependent on the protean concept of "race," it has been claimed for multiple agendas, including the liberal project of race-neutral laws and institutions, a radical vision of transcending race through nation building, and the Marxist program of working-class solidarity.⁸⁷ An important tradition describes the ANC's ideological evolution in terms of the development and then gradual extension of nonracialism, first through its collaboration with white organizations (most importantly the Communist Party) and later through its admission of non-African members at the 1969 Morogoro conference. In another context, I argue that this narrative is anachronistic.⁸⁸ In the early 1960s, some ANC leaders, including Luthuli and Mandela, adopted the phrase "non-racial democracy" to express their support for the constitutional principles of equal protection and individual (rather

than group) rights. However, it was only later—especially during the Mass Democratic Movement of the 1980s—that the idea of nonracialism became virtually synonymous with the ANC’s vision of nation.⁸⁹ At the time of its banning in April 1960, the ANC possessed several competing philosophies of nationalism: the Natal Group’s ethical vision of a multiracial African nation, the Transvaal Leadership’s majoritarian nationalism based on an African-led struggle for power, the liberalism of an older generation of intellectuals such as Z. K. Mathews, the Federation of South African Women’s appeal to shared women’s experiences, as well as more racist forms of Africanism. The postapartheid focus on the origins of nonracialism, however it is defined, not only compresses this series of complex (and largely unresolved) discussions into an evolutionary narrative, it obscures the central question debated by the ANC during the 1940s and ’50s: What understanding of the *African* political subject could escape the racial logic of a classic, majoritarian nationalism?

BOOK STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This book is divided into three sections composed of two chapters each. The first section explores the ramifications of the Second World War and Indian independence on African politics at local and international levels. Accelerated by wartime industrialization, the large-scale migration of Africans to urban areas propelled growing political militancy and working-class resistance that contributed to the revitalization of organized African politics. While these developments encouraged the proliferation of popular nationalisms and millenarian aspirations throughout South Africa, Durban witnessed a distinctive pattern of urbanization: most Africans entered the city illegally and survived through an ad hoc infrastructure of housing, transport, and stores provided by (generally poor) Indians. Prejudice and local conflicts between Indians and Africans certainly preexisted these developments. However, this pattern of African migration—and the resulting organization of urban space—created the conditions for the generalization of local racial dynamics and the emergence of populist resentment against the alleged domination of “Indian over African.” In contrast to other South African cities, where African-Indian conflict generally remained confined to specific neighborhoods, anti-Indian populism developed into a powerful force on a city-wide and provincial scale. Chapter 1 explores the

consolidation of this binary “African-Indian” racial discourse and the methodological problems of writing about race in contexts where a variety of social relationships either traverse or simply ignore the racial scripts that dominate popular imagination.

Coinciding with these developments, the foundation of the United Nations and Indian independence created a global context for the reimagining of South Africa after the end of empire. Chapter 2 describes how intellectuals within the ANC, represented by Xuma and Lembede, began to reorient African nationalism within the newly emerging international order. These efforts were informed, directly and indirectly, by a new generation of South African Indian activists, the Radicals, who seized control of the Indian Congress in the mid-1940s. In 1946, the Radicals launched a mass campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience. Invoking the Indian independence struggle (they carried the flag of the Indian National Congress on demonstrations), the Radicals sought to utilize India’s growing influence in world affairs to pressure the South African government. At the campaign’s height—which saw tens of thousands join protests and vigilante retaliation by racist whites—India brought a case against the Smuts government in the United Nation’s general assembly, internationalizing the debate over South Africa’s racial policies. Simultaneously, the Radicals pursued an alliance with African political organizations, especially the ANC and black trade unions. Their entry into the political field transformed the ANC’s relationship with the Indian Congress—and the ANC’s position on the status of Indians in South Africa—into a matter of national and international political significance. The election of the Nationalist Party in 1948, which slandered Indians as “alien” and considered their expulsion, further underscored the urgency of a common front.

This series of rapid developments intersected a parallel set of discussions. In the early 1940s, the founding of the Cape Town-based Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) forced a debate over the relationship between the existing African, Indian, and Coloured political organizations. In response to the NEUM’s proposals for “unity,” Xuma (who was supported by the Communist Party) advocated a more limited conception of cooperation between racially defined parties. In turn, ANC Youth League intellectuals, particularly Lembede, rejected all but the most limited collaboration with Indians, arguing that “they” were “foreign exploiters” who sought to manipulate Africans for their

own ends. Acutely sensitive to popular resentments, the Natal ANC leadership echoed Lembede's position and argued that the strained relationship between the two groups rendered an alliance impracticable. The ensuing controversy raised fundamental questions about the nature of the struggle. Did the separate political parties imply that non-European groups were distinct nations and therefore possessed unique claims to group representation within a democratic state? What was the relationship between party structure and the political subject of the liberation struggle? Did national boundaries correspond with the "common sense" racial categories of South African society, or were the ideas of race and nation irreconcilable in principle? After 1948, the significance of these questions was underscored by the fact that the apartheid regime legitimated its segregationist ambitions on the basis of an ethno-nationalist appeal to white self-determination. The Afrikaner Nationalist rhetoric of "separation" saturated the discursive space of politics and provoked competing (and sometimes conflicting) rejoinders of South African unity. In this context, the Indian became the focal point for a reconsideration of the idea of nation. Were Indians foreigners, immigrants, or South Africans—and, if they were South African, what was the basis for their inclusion within this entity? In translating diaspora into the categories of the nation-state, these responses invoked different criteria of nationhood (racial, cultural, political, and legal-juridical) and generated competing visions of political community.

The second section focuses on two events that interrupted these debates and challenged the majoritarian basis of anticolonial nationalism: the Partition of India and Pakistan and the 1949 Durban Riots. Partition severely damaged the credibility of the Indian National Congress, especially Nehru, and prompted some African intellectuals to begin reflecting on the dangers of the claim to popular sovereignty based on majority rule. Situated across the newsprint page from the postwar refugee crisis in Europe, the creation of Israel, and the victory of the National Party, Partition was as much a global moment as a singular event: it revealed the dangers inherent to the demand for national self-determination within multiracial or multinational territories. Less than a year after Gandhi's murder in the midst of ongoing communal violence, Partition was followed by another rupture: the 1949 Durban Riots. Prompted by a clash between a shopkeeper and boy in Durban's

Grey Street area, a melee among Indian and African men escalated into two days of attacks directed against Indians and their property. Chapter 3 explores the ways that this violence polarized African public opinion and generated an unprecedented crisis in the ANC, leading to the downfalls of both Xuma and Natal president A. W. G. Champion. In the Riots' aftermath, a diverse group of intellectuals within the ANC—including Luthuli, Ngubane, and Youth League leader A. P. Mda—experienced a genuine crisis of conscience and began to rethink the relationship between African nationalism and a broader South African identity. Although they differed considerably in outlook, these thinkers rejected a racial definition of national community (Mda denounced what he called African “fascism”) and created a space for the conceptualization of the national subject as simultaneously singular and multiple. In the following decade, these arguments would inform a larger set of discussions about the constitutional structure of a postapartheid government, the character of a future national culture, and the relationship between the Union of South Africa and the African continent.

Chapter 4 uses the Riots to explore the role of gender and interracial sex in structuring Natal's African-Indian dynamics. As Philip Bonner observes, the dominant culture within the ANC understood the national as a masculine domain and located women within the terrain of local politics.⁹⁰ This national public was also constructed around the use of English, while provincial political life largely transpired in vernacular languages. (This fact allowed Indians and whites, who rarely spoke vernacular languages, to participate in national African politics without necessarily transforming their relationship to African cultural and social life.) As a result, gender, the vernacular, and the “local”—which sometimes occupied the same physical space as the “national”—each became associated with the disruptive effects of African-Indian racial dynamics on the ANC's construction of the nation. A frequent complaint raised by African men in Durban during this period (particularly in the isiZulu-language pages of black newspapers) was the “Indian peril”: purported sexual predation against African women. This allegation underscored the gendered character of urban space and the perceived absence of social reciprocity. According to this discourse, Indian men mixed freely with Africans in buses, movie theaters, and jazz concerts—where they “seduced” African women,

often urbanized professionals—while Indian women remained isolated within the temple, mosque, or home. Simultaneously, the Indian woman became the central icon of a cultural discourse that circulated between colonial sources, diasporic versions of Indian nationalism, liberal social science, and African stereotypes. These “citings/sitings” (to use Burton’s evocative coinage) of gender and race both underwrote and troubled the ideas of nation that are the focus of this book.⁹¹

The third section explores the transformation of the ANC following the 1949 Riots. Chapter 5 focuses on a pivotal event: the 1952 Defiance Campaign, the first mass mobilization of Indians and Africans together. Near the end of the campaign, ANC leaders called for the creation of a white organization (the Congress of Democrats) to work with the other two groups, generalizing the form of its partnership with the Indian Congress and laying the foundations for a new political formation, the Congress Alliance. Drawing on the earlier symbols, slogans, and iconography of the ANC, the Defiance Campaign generated—to invoke the philosopher Jacques Rancière—an aesthetic of struggle: a “redistribution of the sensible” that made visible new political possibilities and therefore facilitated the emergence of unanticipated identifications.⁹² The Congress Alliance provided the image of a single, united South Africa in which each “section” (alliance leaders generally avoided the terms “majority” and “minority”) possessed a claim to belonging. In other words, the principles of national unity and racial multiplicity were reconciled at the level of political symbolism. While this imagery developed organically, ANC leaders, especially Luthuli, soon began to reflect on this process and strategize the aesthetic dimensions of the antiapartheid struggle. On the basis of these experiences, Luthuli (now the president of the ANC) formulated a philosophy of African nationalism that rejected a materialist foundation of politics, especially the liberal claim that democracy presupposed social homogeneity based in a common civil society. Reworking earlier contributions by Lembede, Ngubane, and H. I. E. Dhlomo, Luthuli’s ideas developed in active collaboration with a group within the Natal ANC (including Ngubane and Dhlomo) and represented a distinct Natal synthesis of African nationalist thought.

Chapter 6 reconstructs the Natal synthesis and Luthuli’s struggles to defend it against other currents within the ANC, namely an insurrectionist African nationalism associated with the Transvaal-based

leadership and the Cold War anticommunism of Luthuli's erstwhile friend and collaborator, Ngubane. The Natal synthesis envisioned nation as a plural political subject that would emerge through the struggle for universal values. The result was a layered conception of nationalism. African nation building, embodied in the ANC, could exist side-by-side with the struggles of other peoples. Together, they could fold into a broader South African identity. Because African nationalism was already a pluralistic identity, incorporating multiple groups in the pursuit of a greater ideal, it could open itself to others without endangering its essential unity. In isiZulu, Luthuli expressed this idea in terms of a nation composed of many nations: "kulelizwe siyizizwe eziningi." At several points, he stated that it represented Africa's most significant contribution to human culture. Luthuli's ideas, and his promotion of symbolism as an instrument of articulating unity in heterogeneity, had a significant impact on the ANC's broader political culture, especially through the celebration of 26 June ("Freedom Day") and the campaign for the 1955 Congress of the People. By the mid-1950s, however, Luthuli found himself defending his philosophy on two fronts. On the one hand, he led a factional battle against proposals, embodied in the so-called Tambo constitution, to centralize the ANC and to adopt the Freedom Charter as the basis for cooperation with other groups. On the other hand, he conducted a public fight against Ngubane over the role of the Communist Party within the ANC. In both cases, the debate over the African political subject—and its relationship to the also-colonized other—became entangled with the global imaginary of the Cold War.

Internal Frontiers concludes with an epilogue that considers the long-term influence of Luthuli's ideas within the ANC. Despite its popularization through Luthuli's presidency, the Natal synthesis was only one of several competing formulations of African nationalism. At the same time, Luthuli either introduced or reworked ideas that would become more widely influential: the centrality of ideals to nation building, the importance of symbolic politics and popular participation in rituals of nation, and (most importantly) the constructive role of African nationalism in creating a broader South African identity. Although they rejected many of his philosophical assumptions, both the Pan-Africanism of Sobukwe and the Communist Party's concept of the "national democratic revolution" incorporated elements of

the Natal synthesis, especially the production of a common identity through the African liberation struggle. The ANC's launch of sabotage in 1961, and the Communist Party's growing influence within the ANC in exile, resulted in the eclipse of the Natal synthesis by a more traditional, majoritarian conception of nationalism. Despite this fact, the ANC incorporated Luthuli into a narrative of its history organized around major figures (especially presidents) and "stages" of struggle. Even if represented as surpassed, earlier leaders functioned as symbols of tactics and values that remained part of a living Congress tradition. At key moments during the Mass Democratic Movement of the 1980s and early 1990s transition, ANC leaders drew on the political aesthetic of the Congress Alliance and revived elements of the Natal synthesis.



In his memoir, the antiapartheid activist Ismail Meer recalls a day he spent with Lembede shortly before the philosopher unexpectedly died at the age of thirty-three. After walking through Johannesburg, Meer took Lembede to see the library at Wits University. Lembede, who had earned two advanced degrees by correspondence, physically trembled at the site of the books. "This is what the bastards have kept from me," he exhaled.⁹³ The two young men proceeded to Orient House, where they shared a lunch of curry cooked by the charming Amina Pahad, whose imprisonment in the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign helped shatter Mandela's belief that Indians were incapable of struggle.⁹⁴ Lembede later wrote a letter thanking Meer: "The day was full of wonders, but what moved me most was to see all of you eating with your fingers." He then claimed this experience as his own: "Unless we respect our own culture we will never be able to respect ourselves and we will never be free."⁹⁵

The individuals discussed in this book are often described as elite. In some respects, they merit this designation. Their education, literacy, facility with Western languages, urban status, and social position differentiated them from most other black South Africans. The main figures of this book also enjoyed the privileges of masculinity in a decidedly patriarchal world. But an adequate treatment of their careers must also capture the insecurity, poverty, family worries, confrontations with subtle and brute racism, and genuine vulnerability to violence that

permeated each day of their lives. Despite many advantages, they lived in black working-class and rural communities, participated in their struggles, and suffered their strangulation by the apartheid regime. They saw their most important work as the distillation of these experiences into a new philosophy of nation. Ultimately, it is the dialectic between a group of extraordinary, if flawed, thinkers and the lives of their complex, multiracial, and deeply divided communities that this book strives to recover.