

IDENTITY, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL RIGHTS: SOUTH AFRICA IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

In contemporary South African political discourse, notions of liberation, majority rule, non-racialism, and the restitution of indigenous rights are associated with the concept of democracy. This association seems natural enough when we consider that the majority of the population are indigenous people who have been subject to a racial system in which their political rights were denied. The struggle of the African National Congress and its allies for a democratic and non-racial South Africa, a political system based on the principle of one person, one vote, came to embody the articulation of these concerns in a programme which gained a majority support in the 1994 elections.

Despite its ostensibly natural character, this specific political articulation is recent in origin. It emerged in its present form in the early 1940s and did not reach a state of consolidation until the mid-1950s. Even after that, it has not remained fixed and will continue to undergo changes. Its initial advent should be seen against a background of disparate, partially overlapping and partially competing, modes of indigenous responses to the challenges of colonial rule. It is with these historical antecedents in the first half of the 20th century that this paper is concerned. It sets out to explore the formation of indigenous political identities associated with varying conceptualisations of rights, citizenship and democratic rule in a settler-colonial context.

The approach here is premised on the assumption that there are no necessary relations between demographic-historical realities (pitting an indigenous majority against a settler minority), on the one hand, and their expressions in the form of a programme based on notions of majority rule and democracy, on the other. The relations that *are* established are the result of specific configurations which do not reflect a universal democratic logic. What does democracy mean, how is the collective identified as the 'demos' defined, in which ways are political rights fought for, and when does a majority become the ground for a political strategy - these are all questions that need to be studied in a historically specific

manner; they have no ready-made answers.

The quest for historical specificity should not be construed as a denial that anti-colonial political struggles have much in common across boundaries of time and space. In order to focus more sharply on the relations between the specific and the general in the context of political identity formation and conflict in South Africa, the issue is examined from a comparative angle. The last section of the paper discusses the formation of indigenous discourses on political rights in the context of a similar type of colonial-settler conflict in Palestine/Israel during the same period (drawing on Greenstein, 1995).

Part 1: South Africa

The Historical Background

The 19th century was the scene of extensive processes of conquest and state formation in southern Africa. These culminated in the defeat and political incorporation of independent African states and chiefdoms into white-dominated structures. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century the Union of South Africa had come into being as a unified political-administrative unit, with indigenous people forming a majority of the population. People of diverse backgrounds were incorporated into the new state in a differentiated manner. The various citizenship categories opened up new terrains of struggle over the extent and terms of political incorporation, and gave rise to conflicts between, as well as within, various black and white groups which frequently cut across racial boundaries (though rarely on an egalitarian basis).

These political developments were accompanied by social processes leading to a degree of cultural interpenetration between people of different backgrounds. New groups labelled as 'de-tribalised natives' came into being in the urban areas, maintaining loose connections with ethnically and regionally specific African traditions. The newly urbanised population eventually became a constituency for movements which advanced conceptions of a comprehensive African political identity. However, the emergent African identity coexisted with, and was initially overshadowed by, locally-based indigenous identities. The strength of the latter was particularly notable in regions such as Zululand and the Transkei whose inhabitants retained a vibrant pre-colonial consciousness. The consolidation of a nation-wide indigenous political identity was evident, but it did not displace specific ethnic and regional identities which have persisted well into the late 20th century.

Another tendency manifesting itself at the same time was the rise of indigenous intellectual elites, consisting largely of mission-educated teachers, journalists, lawyers and clergy, especially strong in the eastern Cape and Natal. They played

a crucial role in articulating the desire of Christianised Africans to integrate fully into British-dominated cultural and political structures. Though a minority among Africans, they made important contributions to the rise of an African political identity with their support for equal citizenship rights for all.

Responses to Colonial Challenges

Although pre-conquest African societies had engaged in relations of trade, warfare and politics with white-controlled colonies for many decades, they did not fall under direct colonial domination until the latter half of the 19th century. Settler political institutions did not possess sufficient administrative, legal and coercive capacities to dominate indigenous people effectively until the beginning of the 20th century. It was only with the emergence of a nation-wide political apparatus after 1910 that the process of the transformation of indigenous people into subjects of the South African state could be completed.

The incorporation of indigenous people into the new political structures marked the beginning of a shift in the locus of their organisation. In earlier times indigenous struggles focused on resistance to colonial conquest. These extended from the Frontier Wars of the early 19th century in the eastern Cape, through the clashes between settlers and the BaSotho in the middle of the 19th century, to the confrontation between the British and the Zulu kingdom in the late 1870s and the annexation of Venda and Pondoland in the 1890s. Even after that, the 1906 Bambatha rebellion in Natal was conducted in a spirit of resistance to colonial expansion, and armed uprisings in rural areas, drawing on similar historical foundations, erupted in a sporadic manner as late as the 1960s.

Since the turn of the 20th century, however, struggles for political rights within the framework of white-dominated state structures, rather than the reversal of conquest or the creation of independent state institutions, increasingly became a salient feature of the indigenous political organisation. It was a particularly notable development in light of the fact that the dominant trend in white politics until the 1980s was the precise opposite - the persistent attempt to purge state institutions of any direct indigenous representation.

The demand for political incorporation was not an inevitable response to colonial challenges, nor did it mean the obliteration of other responses or the marginalisation of other bases for social identity. In addition to attempts to reverse conquest altogether, at least two other responses asserting indigenous rights were possible, based on different claims: (1) a claim that all people should be incorporated on an equal basis, rather than be evaluated on the basis of 'civilisational' criteria. In this approach a numerical majority may be translated into access to power which, in turn, may entail changes in the way institutions operate but without affecting the nature of the state itself; (2) a more radical claim

that the majority status of indigenous people entitles them to reshape the state in their own image, rather than be absorbed into the system on terms defined by the white minority. In this response, the state should acquire an indigenous character in terms of its mode of operation, structure, language and criteria for citizenship.

It is the argument of this paper that indigenous assertions of political rights moved from a focus on limited incorporation to a focus on full incorporation (the latter corresponding to the current understanding of non-racial democracy). In this process, the sweeping rejection of colonial presence became marginalised, and attempts to define the state in indigenous terms never materialised. The reasons for these developments will be clarified in the last section of the paper by comparing them to Palestinian-Arab responses to the challenge of Zionist settlement. In this latter case, indigenous responses centred on a rejection of the settlement project and a struggle to define the state in terms drawn from indigenous sources. Political rights were advocated in a framework with a pronounced indigenous character (corresponding to an ethnically-defined form of democracy).

Cape African Political Organisation

The African political organisations which came into being in the late 19th century put an emphasis on work within the colonial system, on terms set by the Cape Liberal tradition. These organisations were particularly active in regions which were subject earlier and more thoroughly to British domination. Protest politics in the Cape became a model for other parts of the country due to the privileged political status of Africans there. In other regions, expressions of grievances were less organised because of the lack of direct access to the political system. Starting from cultural-educational concerns, activities acquired a political focus at the turn of the century, and were expressed in the efforts of teachers, clergy and journalists to voice the grievances of their constituencies over issues of pass laws, franchise qualifications and state discriminatory practices. These were largely conducted within the framework of white politics, rather than as a part of an independent African project. A crucial change in this respect took place in 1902 when the South African Native Congress, the nucleus of the most prominent 20th century African political organisation, came into being (Odenaal, 1984:5-16).

In a statement to the British Colonial Office in 1903, the Native Congress expressed its loyalty to the Empire and appealed against the danger of disenfranchisement faced by Africans as a result of settler demands in Natal, the Free State and the Transvaal. The Congress sought to extend the limited colour-blind franchise enjoyed in the Cape, and allow those 'fully qualified by education, property and domicile, to vote as free citizens' (Karis and Carter, 1972,

V.1:22). It expressed fear that the rights of indigenous people would be sacrificed to the imperative of 'uniting Briton and Boer so as to present what is called a "solid front" to an alleged "black menace"' (ibid:27), and it called on Britain to keep its imperial obligations and protect 'His Majesty's black and coloured subjects' (ibid:29).

The statement reveals an interesting ambiguity in the manner in which the Congress envisioned its constituency. It was speaking for the rights of all 'Natives' yet at the same time it rejected the notion of indigenous unity against white rule as unrealistic and contrary to 'traditional tribal disunity' (ibid:28). Furthermore, it made references to 'intelligent Natives' who were willing to provide assistance to the Crown in maintaining law and order among the ignorant 'mass of the people' (ibid). The organisation of indigenous people, then, was not primarily seen as a vehicle for national liberation, but rather as a means for gradual integration into the state as imperial subjects, as 'natives' became better educated and more 'intelligent'.

Under conditions of unchallenged colonial domination, the desire of indigenous elites to appear as representative of a large mass of people and thereby to enhance their position vis-a-vis the authorities, seems to have clashed with their need to distinguish themselves as educated and civilised, and thus different from their unrefined fellows. If indigenous people were all granted the same rights, the more 'civilised' among them would lose their relative privileges. Of course, indigenous professions of submission and acknowledgment of inferiority (as a group) should not be taken at face value. The Congress employed the weapons of the weak to bolster its case in the eyes of the powers that be. Activists may have calculated that a gradual approach, falling short of political equality, was more likely to yield concessions than an all-out assault on the foundations of the system. Even so, the use of an incorporationist language to articulate political rights had a significant effect on the terms in which struggles for indigenous demands were defined: not for independence or equality on their own terms, but rather for integration into existing structures.

Religious Separatism and SANAC

A different focus for conceptualisations of rights was provided by religion. The rise of indigenous Ethiopian churches at the end of the 19th century, coinciding with the conclusion of colonial conquest, reflected a growing interest in African administrative and doctrinal independence from white control (see testimony by Rev. Brander of the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion to the South African Native Affairs Commission in Karis and Carter, 1972, V.1:39-42). The move signified a reaction to incorporation into colonial structures, and it was motivated by a desire to 'go and teach our own people by ourselves' (ibid:41; Odendaal,

1984:23-29). At the same time, Ethiopianism was articulated in the language of Christianity, historically a European-centred religion which made its way into the region as part of the colonial enterprise.

The dual nature of religious symbolism and practice, playing a role in the colonisation of consciousness as well as in the emancipation from colonial subjugation, has characterised indigenous religious movements throughout the century (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991 for religious dimensions of the colonial encounter among the southern Tswana people). The drive towards religious separatism asserted the need for independence from colonial rule, though it was different from the adherence to indigenous religions still widespread in the countryside. The Ethiopian Christian churches generally were open to all Africans, regardless of their ethnic and tribal origins. In that sense they consciously sought to transcend pre-colonial divisions and act on the terrain created by colonial conquest.

The Ethiopian movement had a considerable political potential. It posed a challenge to white supremacy on the one hand, and to political incorporation into white-dominated structures on the other. The idea that church organisation could be controlled by indigenous leaders made white authorities nervous. It was perceived as an anomaly, given the identification between Christianity, colonial conquest and the subjugation of indigenous people. Consequently, the 1905 South African Native Affairs Commission [SANAC] castigated the idea as irresponsible, and was anxious to discourage 'those bodies which owe their existence to the discontent, or...the very misconduct of men who...have severed connection with their parent church, and own no competent central authority' (South African Native Affairs Commission, 1905:63).

The condemnation of religious separatism was part of an overall evaluation of indigenous organisation by the newly emergent state, informed by 'the advisability of harmonising so far as practicable the direction of Native affairs in the various states of South Africa' (SANAC, 1905:11). Indigenous people, the object of state attention, were referred to in comprehensive terms as 'Natives', a term denoting 'an aboriginal inhabitant of Africa, South of the Equator', including 'half-castes and their descendants by Natives' (ibid:13). The crucial defining feature of 'natives' in official eyes was not their ancestry, colour or residence as such, but rather their presumed links to the pre-colonial past in terms of land claims, ethno-linguistic identifications and supposed allegiance to traditional political institutions.

SANAC advocated limited indigenous political incorporation in order to allow them to express their views and ventilate their grievances, 'without conferring on them political power in any aggressive sense, or weakening in any way the unchallenged supremacy and authority of the ruling race which is responsible

for the country and bears the burden of its government' (ibid:96). Indigenous participation was to be based on a separate voters' roll and the selection of a small number of delegates regardless of the size of their constituency. Thus, it was hoped, indigenous issues would be removed from the white party-political arena. Even this restricted attempt to provide a channel for expressions of discontent went too far for the liking of segregationists and the recommendation was abandoned.

The Union of South Africa

The Union of South Africa which came into being in 1910 retained the pre-existing franchise requirements in the four provinces, thus denying the vote to non-white people in the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal. Only in the Cape were African and coloured people allowed to vote, subject to high property and literacy qualifications; even there only a 'British subject of European descent' could become a member of parliament (Eybers, 1918:525; 531), contradicting the principle formally adhered to by the British of equal rights for all 'civilised' persons in southern Africa (for the origins of Rhodes's slogan - 'equal rights for every civilised man south of the Zambesi' - see Van der Ross, 1986:22-23).

The common predicament in which various black groups found themselves with Union encouraged joint action. In 1909 a delegation of 'representatives of the coloured and native British subjects' in South Africa, in co-ordination with Natal Indians, appealed to the British parliament to grant 'equal political rights to qualified men irrespective of race, colour, or creed'. They expressed fear that 'the prejudice already existing in the Transvaal, Orange river Colony, and Natal, will be accentuated and increased' and extended to the Cape as well (Karis and Carter, 1972, V.1:55-56). They failed, however, to reverse the 'Act of Separation' (thus referring to the Act of Union), and it went into effect in 1910 (Odendaal, 1984:197-227).

Faced with inability to make progress by using the services of sympathetic whites, a meeting of African organisations was called for to create a counterweight to the white political Union. In January 1912 the South African Native National Congress (renamed African National Congress in 1925) convened in Bloemfontein with delegates from all four provinces and the British Protectorates. In the call for the Congress, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, its future president, argued that the lack of indigenous unity was the greatest obstacle to progress. To be able to speak for the concerns of indigenous people, there was need for co-operation. This meant putting an end to 'the demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other Native' (Karis and Carter, 1972,

V.1:72). As all Africans were 'one people', the Congress was to be 'a National Society or Union for all the Natives of South Africa' (ibid:73).

The draft constitution of the Congress set as its goals 'the promotion of unity and mutual co-operation between the Government and the Abantu Races of South Africa', and 'the maintenance of a central channel between the Government and the aboriginal races in South Africa' (Odendaal, 1984:274-5; see the 1919 Constitution of the Congress in Karis and Carter, 1972, V.1:76-82). The Congress saw its role as representing indigenous people in relation to government, thus acknowledging that the state itself was a white institution to which Africans lay no claim. Its focus was on African unity and it regarded fragmentation on the basis of clan and tribe as a serious danger. To avert such affiliations from becoming divisive, a 'Council of Chiefs' was proposed. In this body, chiefs deemed representative of people in their areas were to sit in an advisory capacity, alongside the presidency and other committees which controlled the day-to-day activities of the Congress (Walshe, 1970:205-6).

Tribalism as a Contested Terrain

The continued importance of traditional leadership created a terrain on which various political actors vied with each other in the Native Reserves. The state sought ways to incorporate chiefs into the machinery of control to strengthen its domination over indigenous people by employing traditionally legitimate means of rule. The Native Administration Act of 1927 was meant to streamline the entire administrative machinery at all levels. It was modelled on the practice, first established in 19th century Natal, of investing the Governor with the position of a Supreme Chief who 'exercises in and over all Natives... all political power and authority', including the power to appoint chiefs, amalgamate or divide tribes, and otherwise tamper with traditional forms of rule (Natal Native Administration Law, 1887, in Eybers, 1918:254). The Natal model was extended to the entire country in the South Africa Act of 1909 which made the Governor General the Supreme Chief of all indigenous people in Natal, Transvaal and the Free State but not in the Cape (ibid:553).

The 1927 Act established a hierarchy from the Supreme Chief through Chief Native Commissioners, regional, district and local Commissioners, Location Superintendents, Chiefs and Headmen (Rogers, 1933:12-13), all of whom, except for the latter two categories, were white. The entire machinery was governed through legislation by proclamation, a system which acted to remove 'questions of Native administration from the arena of [white-parliamentary] party politics' (ibid:22). To the Governor-General, and through him to the lower levels in the hierarchy, power was given to control political activity in indigenous areas and to take steps which they 'consider necessary for the protection, control,

improvement, and welfare of the Natives, and in furtherance of peace, order and good government' (ibid:25; see the powers of different levels in ibid:259-65; a survey of the apparatus of indigenous control in May, 1949:310-75).

In this mode of rule, indigenous people living in the reserves were subject to a specialised administrative apparatus, and were excluded from any say in the legislation affecting them, or in the operation of the state. While these policies formed a part of the segregationist programme applied by successive South African governments, they also satisfied indigenous forces seeking to preserve customary law and traditional forms of rule by chiefs, with minimal outside interference. This implied a very different conceptualisation of indigenous political rights than that pursued by Congress and similar political forces. Although chiefs were subsidised by the state, and therefore were not independent, at a deeper level tribal sentiments signified a rejection of white colonial rule rather than an attempt to find a place within it (Marks, 1986:15-41).

Traditional rule held a resistance potential inasmuch as it was based on an indigenous claim to the land. The persistent political significance of the land issue led to a series of peasant revolts which, due to their fragmented, small-scale and disorganised nature, were generally short-lived and ended in failure. Although the concern with land was general throughout the countryside, its manifestations were localised, as claims to the land were invariably linked to specific territories rather than to indigenous rights in the abstract. As a result, rural causes were infrequently taken up by urban-based political organisations and their potential remained untapped, at least until the late 1950s (Bundy, 1987:254-85).

Traditional rule was most legitimate in areas conquered in more recent times and which maintained dense concentrations of indigenous communities, with few pockets of white settlement. This applied to the Transkei and Zululand in particular. Chiefly rule there was less disrupted by settler encroachments on land, and could provide a solid foundation for political accommodation on a relatively equal footing between the state through the Department of Native Affairs, and the chiefs. The ability of chiefs to manoeuvre between their dependence on the state and their power over their constituencies varied in time and space, but generally it allowed them to play a dual role: as agents of external domination as well as representatives of the population. Even as chiefs assumed positions within the state apparatus, they continued to conduct court cases, collect tribute and be guardians of the communal tenure of land. They thus maintained attributes of autonomous rule which provided a symbolic basis for separatist politics (see Mda, 1929:86-95 for the Bunga - the Transkeian system of chiefly rule - and Beinart and Bundy, 1987:106-37 for the Mpondomise chieftaincy).

Resistance and Identity in the Countryside

Localised resistance politics in the countryside persisted alongside the operation of national political movements such as the ANC. People in rural areas frequently adhered to tribal, ethnic and regional identities, leaderships and organisations with a pronounced pre-colonial bent. These were perceived as means of confronting threats to the indigenous moral economy which was centred on access to communal land. The increasing loss of land and the compulsion to enter the labour market were a danger, not only to the material welfare of people, but also to their entire socio-cultural fabric. Much of indigenous resistance was phrased in terms of clinging to pre-colonial identities and forms of rule (see Marks, 1986 and Hamilton, 1993 for the example of Zulu identity), but it is important to realise that it emerged in response to colonial conquest and incorporation. Traditional symbols frequently joined new identities and organisations to provide legitimisation for defiance politics. Christianity in its Ethiopian forms provided one such basis for independent action (for its spread over the period see Brookes, 1934, Appendix I:193-201 and Mokitini, 1949:556-72). The Israelite movement of the eastern Cape, for example, though not openly political, expressed strong rejectionist sentiments, opposing white domination and state authority in a mixture of indigenous and Christian prophetic symbolism. Relying on a divine order to challenge authority, its members refused to pay taxes and obey orders to move from their camping grounds. This culminated in the Bulhoek massacre of 1921 in which about 200 unarmed believers were killed by government troops (Edgar, 1988).

Traditional and Christian religious images combined with modern trade unionism and Pan-Africanism in the shape of the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) in the 1920s, a union which accepted white members but prohibited them from holding office (see ICU constitution in Karis and Carter, 1972, V.1:325-26; Bradford, 1987:123-7). This was especially the case in regions where the legacies of the pre-colonial past were particularly vivid. The battle cry of 'the Americans are coming' became a popular idea in the Transkei, a territory with the densest concentration of indigenous people in South Africa. It conveyed a vision of a mighty black race from overseas who would come in their aircraft, destroy white domination and liberate Africans from oppression. This was one of a series of apocalyptic revelations articulated by the movement associated with the Garveyite leader Wellington Buthelezi and local diviners, all promising climactic action which would annihilate all but the devout (Bradford, 1987:213-45; Hill and Pirio, 1987:238-42).

The clear rejection of white presence and the symbolic return to the idyllic pre-colonial past was also deployed in more realistic campaigns which focused on socio-political power and on wages, prices, labour conditions, taxation and

land ownership (for the Transkei anti-dipping movement see Beinart and Bundy, 1987:191-221). Visions of the past and the future were articulated with present concerns to mobilise people. The centrality of land in indigenous consciousness and the historical memories of independent rule predisposed rural struggles to be phrased in rejectionist terms. This implied opposition to the entire notion of incorporation, rather than its acceptance as inevitable and a struggle for equal rights within new political frameworks. The diminishing viability of subsistence production in the reserves gradually undermined, however, the prospects of locally-based separatist resistance (though without eliminating locally-based social identities), and directed renewed attention on the national level where incorporationist tendencies became ever more powerful.

Rural-Urban Identities and Contradictions

The centralised dynamics of national politics and the fragmentary dynamics of localised struggles exhibited inherent tensions. The embeddedness of rural resistance in local practices proved to be its strongest asset, but it also led to its demise. Success in effecting a change of social relations in a centralised system demanded that rural movements transcend their confinement to their boundaries and make an intervention at the national level. To do so effectively proved difficult when the mobilising power of such movements was premised on localised identities. This contradiction turned out to be a major stumbling block for indigenous political action, and was aggravated by the consciously trans-ethnic and trans-tribal stance of the major urban-based movements. The desire to build comprehensive African organisations led to the choice of English rather than vernacular languages as the medium of indigenous politics, thus creating a gap between urban and rural constituencies which was not easy to overcome.

A rare combination of rural and urban appeals was evident in the Universal Negro Improvement Association - the Pan-African movement led by Marcus Garvey (Hill and Pirio, 1987; Copley, 1990:183-8). As with the ICU and the Ethiopian churches, the support for the Garvey movement was partly based on its ability to project power and deliverance through association with larger forces. The call 'Africa for the Africans' had an enormous unifying potential as it resonated with the concerns of all segments of the indigenous population. Despite widespread popular support, the movement did not survive. Its millenarian tendencies and dependence on the glorified but problematic figure of Garvey led to a neglect of organisational capacity. The expectations generated for a spectacular change could not have been fulfilled and the resulting frustration was inevitable. More importantly, the relations between Pan-African and more circumscribed identities were never thought through. The adherence to a global identity did not make other bases for identity disappear. Without explaining how

different levels of identity could be articulated, Pan-Africanism remained an empty shell with much emotional appeal but little political impact.

Struggles conducted in the rural areas continued to affect a large number of people, but they generally remained hidden from public and scholarly views which focused on the development of urban-based movements (Beinart and Bundy, 1987). The latter advanced notions of a comprehensive trans-ethnic African identity which continued to face competition from localised identities. Even long-term urban migrants (but not the permanently urbanised population) frequently maintained a base in the countryside in which they invested their savings and to which they planned to return. The organisation of work in the mines and residential patterns in compounds and townships on an ethnic basis further inhibited the development of broad national identities (see Ranger, 1982 for tribalism in the Johannesburg mines and Beinart, 1987 for rural-urban links in migrant identities).

The tensions between centralised and local identities affected national organisations as well. The ANC was plagued by ethnic divisions, a problem decried by activists such as Sol Plaatje, who complained in 1931 that the 'failure of our race to unite is due to the failure of its leaders to unite. The demon of tribalism is the great stumbling block to our unity' (Walshe, 1970:213). Ethnicity was not necessarily obstructive to nationalism, however. It provided building blocks for the construction of a comprehensive African identity, promoting pride in African history within the context of a regeneration of tradition on new foundations (Cobley, 1990:82-88). Pixley Seme, president of the ANC, appealed for African national unity by his invocation of the images of Shaka Zulu, Sobhuza of Swaziland and the Xhosa prophet Ntsikane, all ethnically-specific symbols (see his 1932 pamphlet in Karis and Carter, V.1:313-5). Only when ethnicity was constructed as a direct alternative to nationalism (as happened with apartheid homeland policies), did a clash between the two become inevitable.

Segregation and Incorporation at the National Level

As the social bases for rejectionist politics in the countryside eroded during the 1920s, a rapid increase in the urban African population proved to be a constituency for new incorporationist politics. To counter that, the state devised an elaborate legal and administrative apparatus to contain indigenous people within state structures (and thereby effect their incorporation) on a separate basis. From the perspective of the white government, all 'Natives' were distinct in that their history and culture made them unable to participate in 'civilised' political life, and the machinery of control was applied to all of them. The goal was to extend the racially-exclusive franchise throughout the Union by abolishing the privileged status of Africans in the Cape. Bills to this effect were adopted in 1936,

allowing Africans to elect indirectly four white senators to the Upper House of parliament, and twelve African members to a new Native Representative Council (see the Representation of Natives Bill in May, 1949:351-8).

The campaign against the abolition of the Cape franchise brought together people of different political backgrounds in the All African Convention (AAC) of December 1935 (a history of the AAC and its transformations in the 1940s is found in Tabata, 1950). The AAC condemned the Bills and campaigned against political segregation. It argued that this led to the consolidation of divisions and the creation of 'two nations in South Africa, whose interests and aspirations must inevitably clash in the end and thus cause unnecessary bitterness and political strife' (Karis and Carter, 1973, V.2:31). The Convention called for common citizenship for Africans and asserted their right to participate in governing their own country, without being subject to the tutelage of fellow white citizens.

In rejecting the notion that African interests were to be realised in the reserves, the AAC argued that segregation and tribalism were 'diametrically opposed to the facts of the South African situation', since 'where the interests of the racial groups are inextricably interwoven, the attempt to deal with them separately is bound to defeat its own objects'. The way forward was to adopt a policy of political identity ensuring 'the ultimate creation of a South African nation in which, while the various racial groups may develop on their own lines, socially and culturally, they will be bound together by the pursuit of common political objectives' (ibid:32). The deferential tones which characterised early African appeals to the government and the Crown did not disappear from the resolutions of the Convention, but were considerably weakened. Political incorporation on equal terms, but not social assimilation, became the major demand of the movement, thus finding common ground with certain white liberal positions (see in particular Hoernlé, 1934:263-81 for his distinction between political equality and social mixture).

The determination of Africans to oppose segregation did not amount to a strong political challenge. An unprecedented white front, with minor dissensions, united to pass the Bills in parliament. While the white supremacist opposition National Party supported the removal of Africans from the common voters' roll, its leader claimed that the ability of Africans to elect members of parliament on a separate basis contradicted the principle the Bill meant to uphold: 'The natives in the country will make use of the representation that they have to obtain more and better representation in our European legislative body. Out of that will come an agitation...for an extension of a representation of natives, and a conflict between Europeans and non-Europeans in the country, such as has not existed up to the present' (speech by D.F. Malan in Union of South Africa, 1936:706-7).

Even a would-be liberal as General Smuts, then Minister of Justice, supported

the Bills as an extension of the successful system of native representation in the Transkeian Bunga (*ibid*:893-4). Only a few liberals such as J.H. Hofmeyer, Minister of the Interior, opposed the Bill (but not segregation in principle) because its central feature was 'to give to the natives an inferior, a qualified citizenship...which bears the added stigma that whatever may be the advance of the native in civilisation and education, to all intents and purposes he is limited for all time to three members in a House of 153' (*ibid*:1085). In a revealing passage, Hofmeyer ascribed the Bill to the fear of all whites of 'being drowned in a black ocean' and being subject to 'race mixture and miscegenation' (*ibid*:1089).

To counter white racial fear, Africans needed to mobilise their own sense of racial identity. A major failing of the AAC, despite its representative character, was that it did not lead to mass campaigns involving the majority of Africans who did not have much to gain from retaining a system of suffrage from which they were excluded anyway. To facilitate action, the AAC adopted in December 1937 a Constitution with a view to the formation of a unified organisation, asserting that:

the African races of South Africa as a national entity and unit should henceforth speak with one voice, meet and act in all matters of national concern...a Central Organisation shall be formed with which all African religious, educational, industrial, economic, political, commercial and social organisations shall be affiliated (Karis and Carter, 1973, V.2:64).

Despite its commitment to a policy of political unity and mobilisation, the AAC did not develop as a mass organisation. The energies of African activists were directed at the new terrain created by the formation of the Native Representative Council (NRC). ANC leaders decided to contest the elections to the NRC and therefore ceased working with the Convention (Tabata, 1950:30-43). The first elections based on the new system of representation took place in 1937. Although an advisory and not a legislative body, the NRC was taken seriously by Africans as perhaps a future house of parliament. These were the only elections at the national level in which Africans participated, though only adult male taxpayers could vote. The electorate voted for seats on the NRC and for the four white senators representing Africans in the Cape, Natal, Transkei and Transvaal together with the Orange Free State (Roth, 1986:144-67).

Voting was indirect as chiefs, headmen, local councils and native advisory boards voted as units on behalf of the people under their jurisdiction. The strength of each unit was equal to the number of taxpayers it represented. Given this procedure, the striking aspect of the operation of the Council was that it involved an unprecedented number of indigenous people in political campaigns. However,

by 1946 the NRC had ceased to function as a result of the frustration of its members with their inability to affect state policy in any way. As Professor Z.K. Matthews, relying on African public opinion, explained:

this experiment in political segregation has been given a fair trial by the African people during the last decade...the time has come for them to recognise that the experiment had failed and to embark upon a boycott of the scheme (Karis and Carter, V.2:233; for the affair see *ibid*:224-61).

The Rise of African Nationalism

The suspension of the Native Representative Council marked an important transition in African political organisation. It paved the way for the growth of a mass-based African consciousness and weakened, though by no means eliminated, the bases for local and regional politics based on loyalties to traditional leadership. Although the various urban-based political organisations differed in their ideologies, social bases and strategies, they shared an appeal to all Africans, regardless of ethnic affiliations. A new incorporationist strategy expressing a quest for incorporation on an equal basis was thus gaining ground, and was sustained by the powerful assertion of African identity.

The distinctive feature of African nationalist policies of the 1940s was not the call for equal rights as such, but the new assertiveness that underwrote it. The new era of international relations and the anti-Nazi campaign exposed the anomaly of the South African state which practised discrimination at home while fighting for democracy abroad. In *Africans' Claims in South Africa*, adopted by the ANC 1943 convention (in *ibid*:209-23), the Congress proclaimed that 'the African people in the Union of South Africa urgently demand the granting of full citizenship rights such as are enjoyed by all Europeans in South Africa'. It demanded 'the extension to all adults, regardless of race, of the right to vote and be elected to parliament, provincial councils and other representative institutions' (*ibid*:217), and the abolition of the legal apparatus of racial discrimination and control. The substance and tone of these demands were unprecedented.

The following year saw a step towards the adoption of Africanist principles as a foundation for indigenous organisation. The ANC Youth League issued a manifesto in which the goals of struggle were defined for the first time as national liberation and self determination (*ibid*:300-8). In elaborating the meaning of African national identity, Anton Lembede, a leader of the Youth League, invoked in 1945 the memory of 'the glorious achievements of our great heroes of the past, eg. Shaka, Moshoeshe, Hintsa, Sikhukhumi, Khama, Sobuza, and Moslikazi' (*ibid*:315). Significantly, all these people worked and identified in their times

with specific groups rather than with the general African collective. Furthermore, some of them showed greater readiness to wage military campaigns against other Africans than against colonial forces. At the same time as they were appropriated by Africanists as heroes, they were also claimed by specific ethnic movements in and outside of South Africa. The relations with the African heritage were thus much more complex than was acknowledged by African nationalists.

Echoing themes first raised by Marcus Garvey, the Youth League defined Africa as the 'Blackman's Continent' (*Basic Policy of the Congress Youth League*, in *ibid*:327). It saw a place in the country for other groups but denied them a leadership role in the liberation struggle. South Africa was 'a country of four chief nationalities...three of which (the Africans, Coloureds and Indians) suffer national oppression' (*ibid*:329), and co-operation was called for between those excluded by white domination. Nationalism was deemed superior to tribal identities, even when drawing on the historical legacies of struggles waged in the name of pre-national concerns. With the emergence of nationalism, tribalism became 'the mortal foe of African Nationalism', necessitating a 'relentless war on Centrifugal tribalism' (*ibid*:330; Tabata, 1950:101-10).

The Africanist transformation of the ANC was completed by the adoption of a new programme in 1949 in which 'National Freedom' was declared the foremost goal of the Congress (*ANC Programme of Action*, in Karis and Carter, 1973, V.2:337). The rejection of white domination did not stand in contradiction to political incorporation. On the contrary, it asserted the right to participation on a basis of equality in all state structures. On the eve of the 1948 elections, Dr. Xuma, president of the ANC, called on Indians, Coloureds and Africans to 'organise their respective communities' to fight 'the policy of discrimination and differentiation' in order to attain 'common citizenship for all races' (*ibid*:278). The 1949 programme, signifying the triumph of Africanism (and democratic principles as currently understood) advocated 'direct representation in all the governing bodies of the country' and 'the abolition of all differential institutions or bodies specially created for Africans' (*ibid*:337). This policy has remained the goal of most African political organisations to this day.

Reviewing the Major Trends of the Period

The first half of the 20th century saw the struggle over the terms of political incorporation between conflicting parties. The state moved towards the disenfranchisement of Coloureds and Africans as people with a right to representation as individuals. It sought to create structures to represent people as members of collectives rather than as individual citizens. Tribal authorities and the Native Representative Council were attempts to give black elites a share of control on a segregated basis, in return for a share of responsibility for maintain-

ing law and order. These arrangements did not amount to true separation since 'no segregationist is prepared to surrender ultimate control, whatever limited measures of political self-government he might be willing to concede to the Bantu' (Hoernlé, 1934:264).

The focus of African political organisation shifted over the period from the initial attempts to gain limited and indirect access to white-dominated structures. From the 1930s onwards political struggle focused increasingly on direct incorporation on equal terms, and on the abolition of specialised institutions which set Africans apart and denied them common citizenship rights. Towards the end of the period these goals were mixed with an increasing dose of African nationalism. It should be noted, however, that the Africanist rhetoric did not amount to a claim that indigenous people should have privileged citizenship rights or power. The underlying thrust was that of a democratic programme, in which no distinctions between citizenship categories were to be made on the basis of race, culture or origins. In this sense, it is difficult to regard it as a full-fledged nationalist programme.

Indigenous political forces fighting for incorporation on equal terms in state institutions had the growing African population of the cities as their base. In slums and townships a new culture developed, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the urban masses. These people were becoming free of the hold of traditional authority structures, and they had great affinity with movements which addressed their concerns as permanently urbanised people. The increased centrality of the cities allowed the urban population to dominate the scene of national politics, despite their numerical minority status. They did not abandon their roots and frequently maintained family and other links with the rural areas. The living circumstances shared by people of various backgrounds, and their common exposure to the unifying force of the state, predisposed them to act together to assert their rights. With little basis (and consequent claims to land and power) in the countryside, they had to operate on the new urban terrain. The move to the cities did not mean a total separation from the rural areas and the identities and organisations that characterised them, however. While it represented an important shift, it co-existed with a variety of ethnic, religious, regional and localised concerns which continued to shape people's social identities.

The adoption of democratic principles based on majority rule was not an inevitable outcome of historical processes. It was only in the 1940s that the indigenous majority began to form the basis of a new political strategy in which all citizens were to be incorporated equally. The continued viability of pre-colonial identities and modes of organisation militated against the transformation of demographic realities into bases for political mobilisation. To organise politically on pre-colonial foundations meant to abandon the national terrain of the

South African state. To tackle the state effectively a national indigenous political organisation was necessary. It was only when the mass base, possessed by traditional authority structures, could be combined with the national focus of new indigenous political forces that the struggle for democracy and liberation could take off.

The relations between indigenous capacities to organise for national liberation, and the extent to which pre-colonial foundations formed a basis for political action, are explored in the next section. The discussion centres on a comparison of responses to colonial challenges by Palestinian-Arabs and black South Africans, two indigenous groups which stood in similar demographic relations to settler populations.

Part 2: Palestine/Israel: Comparative Dimensions

The Balfour Declaration and the Mandate Framework

The framework for political developments in the period, opened by the takeover of the country by the British during the First World War, was the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. The declaration, issued by the British Foreign Office, proclaimed British support for 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people', without prejudicing the 'civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country' (Preamble to the Mandate in League of Nations, 1922:2). It was based on two assumptions. First, it recognised the right of 'the Jewish people' to the territory. It was thus based on the abstract rights of an extra-territorial people, rather than the concrete rights of a territorially-based Palestinian-Jewish community. Secondly, the statement did not recognise the existence of a Palestinian-Arab *national* community in the country. Rather, it referred to a plurality of non-Jewish communities, defined by religion, who resided in the territory but had no identifiable legal and historical relation to it.

The legal framework established by the Balfour Declaration, later ratified by the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in 1922, was crucially important in that it created the terrain on which the Jewish-Zionist and the Palestinian-Arab national movements conducted their conflicts and formed their institutions with a view to gaining control over the country. The creation of a British administration for the purpose of preparing the country for independence allowed a degree of mediation between the parties, neither one of which enjoyed political dominance.

Indigenous Palestinians began organising on an Arab nationalist basis in the form of the General Syrian Congress in 1919 which expressed its opposition to Zionist demands that 'Palestine be made a National Home for the Jews, and that

Jews be allowed to immigrate to any part of our country, as they have not the least claim thereto'. The Congress went on to distinguish Zionism from Judaism by asserting that 'our brethren the Jews, who originally inhabited the country, shall have the same rights and be subject to the same obligations as ourselves' (in Mogannam, 1937:119).

In Palestine itself, the Muslim-Christian Associations, which were established in various cities in 1918, protested the implications of the Declaration and called on the British to refrain from determining the future of the country without the consent of the Arab population (Muslih, 1988:107-9). They regarded the country as Arab in terms of its inhabitants, land ownership and the language spoken by its people (Kayyali, 1979:57-58). In a petition in November 1918, the Associations identified themselves as 'Arabs, Muslims and Christians' and claimed Palestine as 'the Holy Land of our Fathers and the graveyard of our ancestors', a country 'which had been inhabited by the Arabs for long ages who loved it and died in defending it'. At the same time as they rejected the idea of a Jewish national home, the petitioners asserted their will 'to live with our brothers the Jews of Palestine in peace and happiness and with equal rights' (in Lesch, 1979:86). The acknowledgement of the rights of Jews as individuals within a larger Arab national framework was coupled with the rejection of a separate Jewish political identity.

The Zionist Organisation, speaking in the name of a minority in the country who were seeking to establish their position, emphasised the supposed benefits to Arabs from Jewish presence. It declared that 'the two brother nations, Jews and Arabs, working together in peace and harmony, are destined to bring about the cultural and economic revival of the awakening peoples of the Near and Middle East' (Palestine, 1922:154). As local Zionist officials made clear, however, such co-operation was possible only within a framework of Jewish demographic and political dominance. They saw no room for an Arab national home alongside the Jewish national home. Their argument was that only after a large number of Jews had entered the country and built up its civilisation and culture could the population be fit by experience and political judgement to rule themselves (see statement of Dr. Eder, Acting Chairman of the Zionist Commission, in Palestine, 1921:57).

The British largely adopted this logic. The rationale for their policies was articulated by Lord Balfour, who argued that there was no symmetry between Jewish and Arab rights as 'Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700 000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land' (internal memorandum addressed to Lord Curzon, 11/8/1919 in Ingrams, 1972:74). Herbert Samuel, British High Commissioner for Palestine, made

similar points. He counterposed 'the legitimate aspirations of the Jewish race throughout the world in relation to Palestine' with 'a full protection of the rights of the existing population'. Fourteen million Jews have a right to ask 'that this home should possess national characteristics in language and customs, in intellectual interests, in religious and political institutions', though the degree to which these aspirations could be fulfilled 'is conditioned by the rights of the present inhabitants' (in Esco Foundation, 1947:275-6).

This definition of the situation, echoing Zionist arguments, was the source of the problem as far as Palestinians were concerned. The Zionist movement, the British government and the League of Nations, all operated in the framework of the western discourse of the 'Jewish Question' as an issue of prime importance as far as the question of Palestine was concerned. Palestinian-Arabs, in contrast, regarded the rights and privileges of the local inhabitants of the specific territory of Palestine/Israel as the focus of consideration. From their perspective there were no fourteen million Jews (overshadowing the 700 000 Arabs in the territory) with national rights to the country, but at most the 100 000 who actually resided there at the time.

The point Arab representatives contested most fundamentally was the introduction of a totally foreign element into the picture. They regarded Zionism as an external element with which no reconciliation was possible:

because the immigrants dumped upon the country from different parts of the world are ignorant of the language, customs, and character of the Arabs, and enter Palestine by the might of England against the will of the people...Nature does not allow the creation of a spirit of co-operation between two peoples so different, and it is not to be expected that the Arabs would bow to such a great injustice (Palestine, 1922:28).

Due to the special position of the Jewish community under the Mandate, Palestinian-Arabs found themselves in an anomalous situation when compared to the legal status of Arabs in other countries. Their demographic majority was not translated into political power, even if only a potential one. Democracy as majority rule was rejected by the Zionist movement and the British. As the Zionist leader Jabotinsky argued in his 1923 article, 'The Morality of the Iron Wall', since 'the civilised world' recognised that Jews all over the world are in principle citizens of Palestine who have the right to return to it, the local population should not be allowed in the name of democracy to block their return. Democracy is premised on the existence of two national groups: the Arab one residing in the territory itself, and the Jewish one which was forcibly removed from the territory and is now seeking to return. The latter among the two groups is larger, thus making Zionist principles compatible with democracy as majority

rule (Jabotinsky, 1969:469-75).

Similar arguments for group rights were advanced by the Zionist Labour movement, which regarded majority rule as incompatible with the ability of the Jewish community to maintain its language, education, settlement, family and national institutions (Gorny, 1985:178-84). The suspension of democracy was defended by Ben-Gurion who argued in 1924 that:

any political programme adopted now must logically correspond to the current balance of forces. Such a programme would of necessity work against us. We have to evaluate the various forces not only according to their current weight but with a view to the future (1931:73).

This line of thought was implicitly accepted by the British who devised arrangements premised on the existence of a Jewish community whose political autonomy should not be submerged by the Arab majority.

The Boundaries of Indigenous Identity

The Third Palestine Arab Congress of December 1920 was the first congress to confront the specific character of the national struggle in the context of British rule. The Congress advocated the creation of a *national* government in Palestine responsible to a representative council, to be elected by the Arabic speaking people who were living in Palestine at the outbreak of the Great War (in Mogannam, 1937:127). It emphasised the national unity of Muslims and Christians as *Arabs* and modelled its demands on the example of Iraq and Jordan, thereby refusing to acknowledge any special status to Palestine as a result of Jewish presence.

While the rejection of Zionism by the Palestinian-Arab movement was clear, the assertive principle in which name it was rejected was more ambiguous. In March 1921 the Executive Committee of the Congress submitted a deputation to the British in which it asserted the right to speak as 'a true representative of Palestine' as it enjoyed support of 'all the live aspects of the nation...from Dan to Beersheba' (Colonial Office, 1921:142). The nation was geographically defined, not restricted by any ethnic criteria and not extended to include members of the Arab ethnic group from beyond the boundaries of the country. The deputation went on to deny any political role for religious differences.

At the same time, the Executive asserted that:

there can be no question that Palestine belongs legally to the Arabs. They inherited it from their ancestors and have been occupying it for more than twenty centuries. The Jews saw, knew and accepted this fact (ibid:145).

The nation defined in territorial terms acquired thereby an ethnic character.

From being the possession of 'the people of Palestine' it turned to being the property of a segment of that people (though admittedly the majority segment). As the document continues, arguments in terms of universal principles of national heritage and historical rights give way to accusations against Jews in particular, appealing to the real or imagined anti-Jewish sentiments of the British. Jews were rejected as the 'most active advocates of destruction', who harbour 'pernicious motives...towards civilisation' (ibid:146), sentiments expressed in Jewish promotion of Bolshevism and attested to by the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

The demands made by the Executive at the end of the document reflect again a territorial non-ethnic nationalism, calling for the formation of 'a national government...which shall be responsible to a Parliament elected by the Palestinian people who existed in Palestine before the war' (ibid:150). This document, indicative of the political tone of the period, demonstrates the ambiguities in indigenous definitions of identity and political rights (similar themes run through other official statements of Palestinian-Arab positions; see Palestine Arab Delegation, 1922 and Palestine, 1922). It is crucial to note, though, that these definitions never explicitly included Jews of immigrant origins.

The contestation over the boundaries of identity was particularly pertinent to issues of self-government and representation. Attempts to involve Arabs in governance by establishing an Arab Agency which would have 'a position exactly analogous' to that of the Jewish Agency with regard to their respective constituencies (Palestine, 1923:5; for the role of the Zionist Organization in representing the Jewish community and facilitating immigration and settlement see League of Nations, 1922:3). The establishment of such an Agency would have created political parity under conditions in which Arabs were more than 80 percent of the population. The proposal was rejected, since the Arabs as:

owners of the country cannot see their way to accept a proposal which tends to place them on the same footing with the alien Jews. In addition, the name of Arab Agency would make them feel they are strangers in their own country (response by M.K al-Husayni, president of the Arab Executive, to the British High Commissioner in November 1923, in Lesch, 1979:187).

Advisory bodies of the nature proposed by the British were rejected by the Arab leadership as substitutes for independence, rather than as structures helping to prepare the ground for it. In view of this consistent opposition, the British concluded in November 1923 that they 'have no alternative but to continue to administer the country in conformity with their undertakings, even though they have to forgo the assistance that they had hoped to obtain from the Arab community' (Palestine, 1923:12). As a result, Mandatory Palestine was ruled by

a state bureaucracy not limited by any representative institutions conveying the opinions and demands of the population as a whole (for an account of the various failed attempts to form consultative and representative bodies, see His Britannic Majesty's Government, 1947).

Religion, Politics and Revolt

Palestinian-Arab national identity not only coexisted with, but also was challenged by, the use of Islamic symbols in political discourse. In a 1935 religious edict calling on peasants not to sell land to Jews, Palestine was referred to as the 'holy country...to which the nocturnal journey [*Isra'*] and from which the ascension to heaven [*mi'raj*] of your prophet Muhammad' took place, a country which therefore 'should forever remain tinged with the colour of Islam' (Kupferschmidt, 1987:241). In less obvious religious vein, the first communiqué by Fawzi al-Qawuqji, commander of the Arab forces during the 1936-39 Revolt, included verses from the Qur'an and called on people to take up arms 'in defense of the first *qiblah* [Jerusalem] and the second of the Noble Holy Sanctuaries' in August 1936 (in Johnson, 1982:55). The frequent references to holy war [*jihad*] during the Revolt were another indication of the appeal of Islamic terminology at the popular level.

The official goals of the Revolt were expressed in the memorandum submitted by the Arab Higher Committee (1937). The Committee asserted that it acted 'on behalf of the Arabs of Palestine' who were deprived of 'their natural and political rights', faced with the Jewish National Home which was liable to lead 'to the destruction of the Arabs as a national and cultural entity in the country' (ibid:5). Arabs were 'the legitimate owners of the country' (ibid:11), and the call for majority rule was asserted in the demand for 'an independent national government, constitutionally elected, in which shall be represented all sections of the population' (ibid:13).

An identical tone was evident in the testimony of Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the foremost Palestinian-Arab leader, to the Palestine Royal Commission, in which he asserted that Jews in the country 'will live, as they always have lived in Arab Countries, with complete freedom and liberty as natives in the country' (Palestine Royal Commission, 1937:298). In response to queries by the Commission, however, al-Husayni confirmed that Palestine could not absorb and digest the 400 000 Jews already living there. When it was suggested that this meant that 'some of them would have to be removed by a process kindly or painful as the case may be', al-Husayni responded in an elusive manner: 'We must leave all this to the future' (ibid). The willingness to incorporate all residents equally was thus undermined by the insistence on the essential Arab nature of the country, unmodified by the realities of Ottoman and British rule and by changing

demographic circumstances due to Jewish immigration and settlement.

With the conclusion of the Second World War the international community directed attention to the question of Palestine, seeing it as linked to the European Jewish refugee problem. This linkage was strongly opposed by Palestinians who felt they were made to bear a burden not of their own making. As activist Jamal al-Husayni put it, 'every Jew who enters Palestine is a further step towards our dispossession' (Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, 1946:C8). Arab spokesmen based their case 'on the natural right of a people to remain in undisturbed possession of their country and on the natural desire to safeguard their national existence' (ibid:C2). Al-Husayni coupled the demands for the creation of a sovereign Arab state and the cessation of Jewish immigration with a guarantee that Jews would have the same privileges and rights as Arabs and their status would be similar to that of American or British Jews.

The recognition of the rights of Jews as individuals was not accompanied by an acknowledgment of their rights as a collective. The official Palestinian position was thus a mirror image of the Zionist position which advocated a Jewish, rather than a non-ethnic state (for which see statements by Weizmann and Ben-Gurion in ibid:A2-45 and B1-42). Both parties subordinated their understanding of democracy to ethnic imperatives. Arab activists interpreted democracy as majority rule which was consistent with a state with an Arab ethnic character. Being a majority whose relative strength was in decline, they were opposed to any delays in the application of democratic principles. In contrast, as a fast growing minority, Jewish activists demanded that these same principles be suspended until Jews became a majority of the population. Neither side seriously considered an arrangement in which political power, land and immigration issues be decided upon in a non-ethnic manner, independently of the supposedly essential Arab or Jewish nature of the country.

Judged by the principles of democracy as commonly understood, Palestinians had a stronger case, as they based their claims on prevailing demographic realities rather than on future prospects as their Zionist counterparts did. Their case for an *Arab* state, rather than a *civil* state representative of all its citizens, was less sound. Professed guarantees of equal rights for Jews (as in the testimonies of Ahmad Shukayri and Albert Hourani in ibid:196-132) were undermined by demands that land and immigration policies be based on ethnic grounds. On the other hand, although the Zionist case for the suspension of democracy was untenable, the argument that the Jewish community acquired a corporate national character that had to be accommodated in any future dispensation was more convincing. Political disputes are not settled on the basis of the merits of conflicting arguments, however. Palestinians were less successful in getting international support for their cause, their capacity to mobilise resources

was lower, and consequently their ability to achieve their goals was eroded throughout the 1940s. As a result, when the final showdown took place in the war of 1947-48, they lost the military and political initiative and were consequently dispossessed of their national heritage.

Part 3: Comparison and Conclusions

The comparison between indigenous political strategies in the two cases makes clear that demographic majorities do not necessarily lead to similar conceptualisations of rights and advocacy of majority rule. For most of the period discussed here, indigenous South African strategies focused on a quest for incorporation into settler-dominated structures, on the one hand, and localised and increasingly fragmented attempts to throw the colonial yoke altogether, on the other. Only towards the end of the period did African activists start to consolidate a sense of political identity, potentially capable of uniting masses of the indigenous population in action based on their majority in the country as a whole (though the actual mobilisation did not make much progress until the 1950s or even the 1970s). Even then, the assertion of democratic principles was seen as the means in which political incorporation could be effected.

Indigenous Palestinian-Arabs, in contrast, from their earliest encounters with the settler political project, asserted as their historical birthright their right to the country as a whole. They did not seek incorporation into settler-dominated structures, but rather fought for a system in which their numerical majority and indigenesness would be translated into political power with a pronounced ethnic character. Even when they expressed willingness to accommodate settlers in their vision of a future arrangement, they insisted that such arrangement retain Arab features in terms of ethos, language, identity, historical connections and the composition of the population. Democracy was seen as the means to achieve these ethnic-defined goals, rather than a way to ensure incorporation.

Conceptualisations of democracy and majority rule are contingent on the identification of a group with a majority status. Overall, indigenous people in Palestine/Israel exhibited less internal diversity and a stronger sense of a unified identity than indigenous people in South Africa. Palestinian-Arabs entered the period of the British Mandate with a coherent sense of themselves as a distinct group, united by their language, ethnic heritage and territory. They shared the first two with other Arabs in the neighbouring countries, and they were divided by a fourth factor, religion, into Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless their nationalism was consolidated during the period, based on two crucial components which they shared with no others: the specific territory of Palestine (despite the fact that it was sometimes vaguely defined), and the shared exclusion from the Jewish-Zionist project. A unique sense of identity had thus developed

among Palestinian-Arabs, though not without its points of contact with other groups (such as Syrians, Arabs in general and Muslims in the region and elsewhere, but not Jewish settlers).

Indigenous people in South Africa, in contrast, had not possessed at the beginning of the period a unified sense of themselves as a group. There were many indigenous South African groups, divided by language, religion, region and political affiliation. There was little to unite them in the pre-colonial period, and they were conquered in a piecemeal fashion by colonial forces throughout the 19th century. They entered the political arena of the territorially-unified South Africa at different rates and within different regional constellations of forces. As a result, the process of constructing a grassroots-based, solid national identity, which could supersede regional and ethnic identities and form a foundation for a cross-ethnic and a cross-racial national movement, was much more problematic.

In addition to the initial heterogeneity of South Africans relative to Palestinian-Arabs, certain elements of the cultural attributes of settlers and colonial powers managed to penetrate, and to some degree colonise black consciousness. Christianity in particular became a medium for the articulation of grievances and a language of mobilisation for political struggle. While separatist sentiments were expressed through the independent Ethiopian African churches, it was very significant that they operated on a terrain constructed by colonialism. Indigenous systems of beliefs could not have provided a unifying resistance ideology, precisely because pre-colonial identity as well as political realities were themselves fragmented.

To address the new situation of common political incorporation in the white-dominated state, innovative modes of organisation were needed. In a sense, traditionally-based national politics, premised on the assertion of indigenous political rights, were a contradiction in terms. Whereas indigenous Palestinians could refer back to a recent history in which they were the indisputable majority with unchallenged claim to their territory, indigenous South Africans had to invent this past, or else operate without such powerful unifying symbols. It was only with the rise of the Africanist tendency of the 1940s that these symbols could emerge as part of the general rise of struggles for independence in the continent. Earlier attempts to resort to tradition were localised in nature, largely reflecting withdrawal to specific geographical and socio-political niches rather than attempts to transform society as a whole in indigenous image.

The consolidation of political identities was affected by the character and operation of leaderships. In Palestine/Israel indigenous political leaders could fall back on a rich tradition of political, governing, parliamentary and protest activity. They did not derive their experience from, nor were they trained by,

settlers. Their political culture was indigenous, not in the sense of being immune to external influences, but in the sense of owing nothing, directly or indirectly, to settlers in this respect. In South Africa, indigenous elites were very frequently mission-educated, they organised their local activities in the vernacular, but on a nation-wide basis usually ran their affairs in English. Furthermore, they initially enjoyed the support and guidance of white liberals, missionaries and politicians, who were possessed with a genuine desire to impart the benefits (or so they perceived it) of white civilisation.

These forces acted to promote, even if indirectly, political dynamics that militated against conceptualisations of indigenous rights to majority rule, as they were based on cultural affinities between coloniser and colonised. Needless to say, indigenous activists could articulate strongly nationalist and exclusionary messages in English, using Christian symbols, but in doing that they were testifying to the deep impact of some elements of colonial and settler cultures. Even when these elements were transformed and used as weapons against colonial rule, they had an inevitable effect on the terms within which struggles were waged. No such adoption of Zionist or Jewish symbols and cultural features into Palestinian-Arab political culture was necessary or even possible. Islam, Christianity and the Arabic language were all indigenous forces capable of investing political struggles with powerful ideological and organisational meanings without any need to borrow from the Jewish or Zionist modes of operation. In this respect, then, indigenous people in Palestine were able to maintain their cultural and political independence to greater extent than indigenous people in South Africa, and were consequently less open to any compromises on principles of majority rule.

The nature of the colonial state played an important role as well. In Palestine/Israel the state was managed by an external power, the British Empire, which saw its role as maintaining order, but not necessarily on settler terms. Its commitment to a secure framework for the development of the settlement project had to be balanced by the need to defend indigenous interests, if only in order to prevent large-scale political instability. Settlers constructed their own institutions in which they could pursue their own policies; the state itself operated under different parameters, including its regional interests and international obligations. It did not perceive its role as that of managing indigenous people on behalf of settlers. After its initial attempts to construct unified representative institutions failed, the state left the handling of relations between the national communities to the communities themselves. It thus created space for the development of indigenous political structures which formed the institutional basis for assertive conceptualisations of democracy and majority rule. The temporary mandate of the colonial state gave a clear focus and sense of urgency to the efforts of both

sides to accumulate political power and prepare for the eventual struggle for control over the country.

In South Africa, the state was controlled to a large extent by settlers. Even when it was part of the British Empire, it was run by officials who shared the settler goal of securing white domination. The state was not neutral in this respect. Whether through direct incorporation (as in the Cape), through indirect rule (through traditional chiefs in the reserves), or through segregated institutions, it took upon itself the responsibility of creating political and administrative structures to govern indigenous people. The South African state, unlike the British Mandatory state in Palestine/Israel, made a distinction between citizens and subjects. Both groups were incorporated into the political system but on differentiated and inequalitarian bases. The state was not external to the society but deeply implicated in indigenous-settler relations. As a result, it instituted the norm of incorporated but unequal in relation to the indigenous population.

The form of state affected indigenous political organisation as it defined the terms within which struggles were waged. Paradoxically, the hardening of segregationist attitudes which deprived indigenous people in South Africa of direct access to the state, also made the consolidation of indigenous political identity more likely. By removing the political privileges enjoyed by minority segments among the indigenous population and by restricting the autonomy wielded by elites in the rural areas, avenues of indigenous incorporation and accommodation were closed off. This left political forces no choice but to organise to assert their rights in full; compromises and limited measures became unviable. Although the fight for democratic principles and majority rights promised to be long and arduous, it increasingly became clear that nothing short of that would work. Indigenous politics in the aftermath of the Africanist turn of the ANC opened a new stage in which democracy became the major goal of struggle.

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