

**Unfinished Debates:
Settler Liberalism, East Africa, and the Origins of Non-Racialism¹**

“But white civilization in this land, with its diversity of races and its preponderance of colour, will be best maintained, and in the end can only be maintained, by admitting every race to our polity, so far as it is civilized.”

--James Rose-Innes, Address to the first meeting of the Non-Racial Franchise Association, 1929

“Here is a tree rooted in African soil, nourished with waters from the rivers of Africa. Come and sit under its shade and become, with us, leaves of the same branches and branches of the same tree.”

--Robert Mangiliso Sobukwe, Address to the inaugural conference of the Pan Africanist Congress, 1959

This essay is an attempt to trace the history of four words: non-racial, non-racialism, multi-racial, and multi-racialism. Its main concern is to locate when and how these terms developed a role within political discourse. At what points do these words acquire a regular usage associated with a set of institutions, practices, standardized arguments, and correlated or opposing terms? In contrast to earlier attempts to write about the history of non-racialism (interestingly, multi-racialism had not benefited from the same attention), this essay does not presuppose that the words non- and multi-racial—with or without the “ism”—refer to stable concepts. Not only did their meanings change over time, but at certain key moments in their history, no consensus existed regarding their usage. Like many politically significant concepts, they acquired their present importance because they were central to an ongoing—and historically shifting—dispute over a set of questions that refused simple or definitive resolutions. Non-racialism has long been, to borrow a phrase from the philosopher W.B. Gallie, “an essentially contested term.”²

In larger part, the ambiguities surrounding the term “non-racial” reflect its semantic and conceptual dependency on the sign “race.”³ Not only do ideas and practices of race possess their own complex, stratified, and contested histories, but race is an inherently unstable

¹ As this paper represents work in progress, please do not cite without written permission of the author: jon.soske@mcgill.ca.

² Walter Bryce Gallie, “Essentially contested concepts” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (London: Harrison & Sons, Ltd., 1955), 167-198.

³ McDonald makes a similar observation, but then attempts to resolve this instability through an analysis of the distinction between racism and racialism. See Michael MacDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006), 93.

concept. As a discourse that both organizes and naturalizes inequality, race functions through the confusion of the biological and the social, and therefore resists systematic definition (and thus refutation) in either framework.⁴ The production of racial difference operates at the scale of political economy and in everyday gestures, it functions through state violence and in individually embodied experiences, it is statistically measurable and profoundly subjective. Race is simultaneously a structure of domination and a historically rich terrain of contest where identities and cultural practices are produced, deployed, nurtured, and disavowed. Because of its “articulation” with categories like gender and class, racism often functions through liberal discourses and institutions that are explicitly “race neutral” such as the law or market.⁵ In some contexts, “antiracist” ideologies, such as liberal colorblindness and multiculturalism, have masked profound ambivalence or hostility towards blackness as an historically specific identity.⁶ Moreover, the concepts that social scientists and activists frequently use to critique racism, like ethnicity and culture, are themselves embedded within the history of racial thought and often serve as racial euphemisms.⁷ Stuart Hall famously described race as a “floating signifier.”⁸ This epistemological instability haunts the idea of the non-racial.

It also marks the term’s early history in South Africa. The word “non-racial” became common in South African public discourse after the South African War. In 1902, the Afrikaner Bond held a widely reported meeting where it announced plans to reorganize the association on a “non-racial” basis, that is, including English and Afrikaners.⁹ This usage reflected the early 20th century understanding of the “race question” as referring to relations between English and Afrikaner. In contrast, the “Native Question” named not only to the putative biological differences between black and white, but the coexistence of groups at different levels of

⁴ See Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Race, Slavery and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* I/181 (May-June 1990).

⁵ See Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 342.

⁶ See Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, “Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 183-206; Saul Dubow, “Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, no. 3 (1994): 355-370.

⁸ Stuart Hall, *Race: The Floating Signifier*, edited by Sut Jhally (Nottingham: Media Education Foundation, 1996).

⁹ “South Africa” *The Scotsman* (15 November 1902); “The Bond Regenerate,” *The Rhodesia Herald* (22 November 1902).

development, the “civilized” and “semi-civilized/barbarian.” The Bond’s use of non-racial may have been drawn from other white settler colonies in the British Empire, particularly Canada.¹⁰ From 1904, the word was included in the motto of a festival celebrated across the colonies, Empire Day: “non-party, non-sectarian, non-aggressive, non-racial.”¹¹

“Non-racial” became increasingly common in the lead up to the 1910 Union. Alongside “non-party,” it became a slogan of post-war reconciliation. By 1907, Louis Botha used “non-racial” as a shorthand for his political views and it later became closely associated with the South Africa party’s pro-imperial policy of white national unity.¹² Jan Smuts adopted the term in 1910.¹³ Contrary to popular misconception, “non-racial” did not become linked with the Cape’s qualified franchise until after the 1929 foundation of the Non-Racial Franchise Association by a group of liberals, including James Rose Innes and Moris Alexander, who sought to prevent the creation of separate African voting lists.¹⁴ Later writers, like Arthur Keppel-Jones, applied this term to the 19th century Cape Franchise, a key institution of colonial trusteeship and the liberal civilizing mission.¹⁵ “Without regards to race” implied that other criteria were in place, namely property. Protesting the growing rise of segregationist sentiment in the late 1920s, D.D.T. Jabavu lamented the lost “Christian spirit of non-racialism” that ruled in 19th century Cape colony.¹⁶ But this invocation, perhaps influenced by American writers, was a rarity. The word “non-racial” would not assume a central place in African thought until decades later.

¹⁰ An early use of non-racial in the London *Times* appears in an 1897 article that described the authorization of Dutch in parliamentary debate as giving South Africa the same “non-racial” system as Canada. “The Colonies,” *The Times* (15 June 1897). The following year, the Graham’s Town-based *The Journal* quotes Sauer’s use of the term in a debate over the Redistribution Bill. The meaning is not fully clear, but he is likely using it in this sense. See “South African Politics,” *The Journal* (7 June 1898).

¹¹ Jim English, “Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958,” *Historical Journal* 49.1 (2006): 247.

¹² “Botha’s Non-Racial Views,” *The Journal* (October 15, 1907); “General Botha and the “Mother Country,” *The Manchester Guardian* (16 June 1910).

¹³ “General Smuts on Union,” *The Journal* (12 February 1910). He used the term in this sense into the 1920s. See “General Smuts Appeal for a Party on Non-Racial Lines,” *The Scotsman* (29 Oct 1920); “Letter to C.P. Crewe, 25 June 1924” in Jean van der Poel, ed., *Selections from the Smuts Papers: September 1919-November 1934*, vol. 5. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 230.

¹⁴ In his founding address to the Non-Racial Franchise Association, Innes consistently used the term “Cape Franchise” to refer to the existing institution. See “The Native Franchise Question” appendix A. in *James Rose Innes: Autobiography*, ed. B.A. Tindall (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1949), 310-27.

¹⁵ Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Friends or foes?: A Point of View and a Programme for racial harmony in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1950), 150.

¹⁶ D.D.T. Jabavu, *The Segregation Problem and Other Papers: A Native View of some South African Inter-Racial Problems* (Lovedale: Lovedale Institution Press, 1928)

The Multi-Racial Society

The first major analysis of the “multi-racial society” appeared in the writings of R.F.A. Hoernlé, a philosopher and the second president of the South African Institute of Race Relations.¹⁷ In the aftermath of the intense, country-wide debates over the 1936 Hertzog Native bills, Hoernlé—like a number of his contemporaries—argued that the government’s “native policy” represented an incoherent mixture of white supremacist, assimilationist, and separatist elements. Hoernlé’s views drew heavily on French and American traditions of anthropology and racial relations theory, frameworks which led him to conclude that the Native Question was not reducible to the problem of civilizational difference. Inverting the terms of earlier discussions (including much of his own writing), he argued that the central problem facing South Africa was the white population’s intractable commitment to maintaining its domination.¹⁸ As a result of settler racism and other factors, European colonialism had abandoned the 19th century liberal project of assimilating the colonized into Western civilization. Concurrently, the development of South Africa’s economy and missionary activities had incorporated an increasing number of Africans into European society in subordinate roles, producing a “race caste system” in which the minority dominated the majority under cover of “trusteeship.” Hoernlé’s isolation of racial consciousness as an independent social factor allowed him to extrapolate from the South African situation to the problems of multi-racial societies in general. Pointing to the U.S., he concluded that this strong sense of group identity would persist even if Africans fully assimilated to European social norms, an outcome—he underlined—vehemently opposed by the vast majority of whites. This result undermined a core premise of liberalism: a political community based on shared loyalties and interests. How was it possible, Hoernlé inquired, for liberal institutions and ideals to thrive in such circumstances?

¹⁷ An early use of the term appears in Hoernlé’s 1937 lecture entitled “Liberty in a Multi-Racial Society.” See *Annual Report of the South African Institute of Race Relations* (1937). The concept is developed at length in R.F.A. Hoernlé, *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town). Two other well know writers on colonial issues used the term in 1937, which suggests an earlier source. See W.K. Hancock, “The Colonial Problem: Native Races,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 22, 1937) and Brown, W. O. “White Dominance in South Africa: A Study in Social Control,” *Social Forces* 18 (1939).

¹⁸ Paul B. Rich, *Hope and Despair: English-speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics, 1896-1976* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 40-65.

This question defined the multi-racial society as a distinct problem in 20th century social and political thought. As an extrapolation from the binary terms of American racial sociology, this concept redefined the central question of South African politics as the co-existence of four self-conscious groups and the crosshatching interactions between them. Observing that earlier political theorists presupposed a racially and culturally homogenous nation, Hoernlé asserted that liberal ideals, including the nature of governing institutions, must be rethought in the multiracial context.¹⁹ It is crucial to underline that Hoernlé did not understand “race” solely, or even primarily, in biological terms. Like many of his contemporaries, Hoernlé employed the vocabulary of race and civilization almost interchangeably: race possessed biological, cultural, economic, social, and legal dimensions. In effect, “white South Africa” referred to a vision of political economy and its interlocking bio-material forms: private property (and, by implication, the nuclear family), western jurisprudence, and formal education. The framework of trusteeship, and the development of a racial caste society, arose from the Native’s incomplete assimilation into the institutions of civil society which defined the European as a racial group. Hoernlé believed that three political arrangements were compatible with liberal principles: the biological and social assimilation of the colonized and the white race, “parallelism” (racially distinct civil societies united by a federated political structure), and total separation. Deeply pessimistic regarding the prospects for each, he endorsed separation as a desperate recourse that might eventually win acceptance by whites.

South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit was widely discussed in the country and abroad. As Paul Rich observes, Hoernlé’s arguments influenced later South African liberals by challenging the classic focus on individual liberties and introducing the question of group identities into political discourse.²⁰ Significantly, ANC leader and intellectual Z.K. Mathews contributed a review to a forum published in the *Race Relations* journal and set the book as standard reading for the second module of his course on Native Administration at Fort Hare university.²¹ The Fabian colonial bureau printed an approving resume of its contents (the author italicized “multi-racial society”).²² In an exchange of letters, the British Africanist and

¹⁹ Hoernlé, *South African Native Policy*, 136-7.

²⁰ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, 41.

²¹ Chief M. Gatsha Buthelezi, *White and Black Nationalism, Ethnicity and the Future of the Homelands* (South African Institute of Race Relations, 1974), 1.

²² “Guide to Books,” *Empire* 5.3 (September 1942).

Fabian Margery Perham queried the term multiracial and suggested that Hoernlé consider J.S. Furnival's concept of a plural society. The philosopher replied that the word "plural" did not capture the white dominance at the heart of South Africa's *Herrenvolk* democracy.²³ Following Hoernlé's death in 1943, the psychologist I.D. MacCrone edited a collection of the philosopher's essays and began to employ ideas of the "multi-racial society" and "colour caste society" in his own widely influential research.²⁴ The term became increasingly common in social scientific writing. By the early 1940s, Christian writers also began to refer to the multiracial society in articles that discussed the dilemmas of building an universal fellowship within a racially divided country.²⁵ In 1949, the Christian Council of South Africa organized a three-day conference in the Johannesburg suburb of Rosettenville under the title "The Christian in a Multi-Racial Society."²⁶ Significantly, Albert Luthuli spoke at the meeting.

An important development of the concept occurred in a 1949 pamphlet written by a young historian named Leonard Thompson. Originally presented to a meeting of the Race Relations institute, Thompson's essay revised and extended Hoernlé's arguments in the context of the postwar rejection of Nazi race theory and the increasing acceptance of popular sovereignty (and its expression in the form of universal adult suffrage) as a globally recognized principle. Thompson argued that democracy and electoral politics posed two questions in multiracial societies: the adjudication of political claims made by "ethno-cultural groups" at a similar stage of development and the reconciliation of groups of uneven capacity (the "civilized" and "uncivilized") in the political process.²⁷ In this formulation, the multiracial society functions as a transitional stage between a colonial order characterized by civilizational difference and the

²³Rich, *Hope and Despair*, 56.

²⁴I.D. MacCrone, "R.F.A. Hoernlé—A Memoir," in R.F.A. Hoernlé, *Race and Reason*, ed., I.D. MacCrone (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1945); I.D. MacCrone, "Reaction to Domination in a Colour-Caste Society: A Preliminary Study of the Race Attitudes of a Dominated Group," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 26, no. 1 (1947): 69-98. MacCrone also delivered the annual Hoernlé Lecture of the SAIRR in 1947. See I.D. MacCrone, *Group Conflicts and Race Prejudice* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1947).

²⁵See H. S. Scott, "The Christian Churches and the Colour Bar," *International Review of Mission*, 31 (1942): 301-307; S.M. Mokitimi, S. M., "Apartheid and the Christian Spirit," *International Review of Mission* 38 (1949): 276-279; G.B.A. Gerdener, "The Crux of the Racial Situation in South Africa," *International Review of Mission*, 38 (1949): 280-294.

²⁶*The Christian Citizen in a Multi-Racial Society: A Report of the Rosettenville Conference* (Cape Town: The Christian Council of South Africa, 1949).

²⁷L.M. Thompson, *Democracy in Multi-Racial Societies* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1949), 5.

emergence of modern nationhood. Consequently, Thompson advanced a federalist model of democracy (akin to Hoernlé's parallelism) and separate racial franchises based on a qualified suffrage. Complementing an expanding system of education, electoral politics would train increasingly large sections of the colonized populations in the norms of modern life. The power of Africans would "progressively increase with their civilization."²⁸ Far from undermining "white supremacy," Thompson insisted, this gradual process would insure European leadership and the spread of Western culture in Africa.²⁹

Although he retained the word "multiracial," Thompson rejected the biological substratum that still informed Hoernlé's work and took great care to articulate difference through the category of culture.³⁰ In this respect, Thompson drew on the anthropological critique of racial science that began with the work of Franz Boas and culminated with the postwar UNESCO statements on race.³¹ By identifying white supremacy with a biological theory of human difference, Thompson and other liberal thinkers could insulate the core values and institutions of Western culture from the (now externalized) idea of racism. In other words, the critique of scientific racism allowed Thompson to distinguish civilization from race. As the journalist Arthur Keppel-Jones argued, the confusion of these two concepts denied civilization's basis in liberal values, particularly the sanctity of the individual, and therefore gave birth to a "white barbarism" that was the true enemy of Western culture in Africa.³² In effect, Thompson and others claimed that biological racism obscured the essential content of European civilization and the colonial project: the universalization of civil society.

This argument was closely related to two other developments in colonial intellectual circles. In the 1940s, South African liberals increasingly stressed the plural origins of European civilization in the Greco-Roman antiquity, German tribal democracy, and Christianity. Since the West had emerged out of a slow fusion of diverse elements, Keppel-Jones argued, it was capable of absorbing new peoples and ideas without imperiling its basic unity.³³ Not only

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ See Michelle Brattain, "Race, racism, and antiracism: UNESCO and the politics of presenting science to the postwar public," *The American Historical Review* 112.5 (2007): 1386-1413.

³² Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Race or Civilization?: Who is Destroying Civilization in South Africa?* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, N.D. [1951?]).

³³ Ibid.

was native labor essential to consolidating civilization in Africa, the modern African would play a significant role in propagating European culture. Conceived as an advance over the colonial doctrine of trusteeship, this line of thinking echoed the new language of “partnership” advanced by the British administration following the release of the Atlantic Charter in 1943. As intellectuals like Z.K. Mathews and Luthuli underlined, this view also implied that Africans could contribute new elements to Western civilization by assisting in its expansion and elaboration.³⁴ Second, a number of voices, including figures close to the Fabian Colonial Bureau and SAIRR, began to advocate education, rather than property, as the criteria for determining franchise—that is, as the basic indicator of democratic capacity.³⁵ In part, this shift reflected the influence of the post-war Labour government, which saw itself as the heir to 19th century struggles for universal male franchise and a conception of citizenship that stressed the development of personality rather than property qualifications. It also flowed from sheer pragmatism. As nationalist political activity gained strength across the continent, the Fabian Colonial Bureau (which was closely allied with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones) and the Race Relations institute concluded that the colonized must be inducted into new structures of governance on a scale that far exceeded the numbers of the small African middle classes. The colonial office began to draw similar conclusions. In this context, British officials understood the classroom and franchise as pedagogical instruments that would incorporate Africans into a de-racialized imperial project.

From the Multi-Racial Society to Multi-Racialism

In the late 1940s, the term “multiracial” proliferated in international reporting on South Africa, Malaya, and (especially from 1951) East and Central Africa.³⁶ Launched a little more than a year after the first widespread coverage of the Holocaust, India’s 1946 case against South Africa at the United Nations brought the union’s racial politics, and the situation of the

³⁴ For a discussion of Luthuli’s idea of civilization, see Scott Everett Couper, “Chief Albert Luthuli’s Conceptualisation of Civilisation,” *African Studies* 70.1 (2011): 46-66.

³⁵ See Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, *Education for Citizenship in Africa*, Colonial no. 216 (London: HMSO, 1948); “Education with a Purpose,” *Empire* 10.11 (May 1948), 3; *East African Future: A report to the Fabian Colonial Bureau* (London: Fabian Colonial Society, 1952); *Advance to Democracy: A Report to the Fabian Colonial Bureau on the Implications of “Partnership” In Multi-Racial Societies* (London: Fabian Colonial Society, 1952).

³⁶ According to database searches, *The Manchester Guardian* contains 4 uses of the word multi-racial in the 1940s versus 352 for the 1950s; *The Times* contains 1 use of the word in the 1940s versus 354 in the 1950s; and *The Hansard* contains 1 use in the 1940s versus 400 uses in the 1950s.

Indian minority, to global attention. In its defense of segregation, the government invoked the country's multi-racial population, "barbarian and civilized," in order to deny that South Africa's policies represented a form of racial oppression.³⁷ It would be irresponsible, Smuts insisted, to apply liberal principles uniformly when population groups existed at different levels of civilization: "Equality in fundamental rights and freedoms could be assured in a multiracial state only by a measure of discrimination in respect to non-fundamental rights."³⁸ The election of the Nationalist Party two years later ushered in a new period of regular international news coverage and analysis, much of which was framed in terms of the problems facing South Africa as a multiracial society. The London *Times* was typical: "It [is] true that South Africa had problems of great complexity—problems inevitable to a sturdy, growing new country, and accentuated in this instance by the multiracial composition of the population."³⁹ International reporting on South Africa began to popularize the idea that the multiracial society represented a particular *kind* of sociological problem associated with colonial situations. Officials in Kenya and Central Africa also began to invoke this term, although it still remained uncommon.⁴⁰

Decolonization propelled the circulation of this vocabulary. The "new nations" defied the conventional wisdom that democratic self-government necessitated an unitary national subject—a shared consciousness grounded in common territory, institutions, and historical experience. In contrast, the independent states appeared to most observers as entities different in kind than Western societies. The concepts of "plural society" and "multiracial society"—sometimes differentiated, sometimes employed interchangeably—preserved the normative status of the nation state by grouping a range of colonial and post-colonial situations under an alternative category.⁴¹ These terms named a phenomena that was seen as provisional and inherently unstable: democracy in the absence of a singular people. This usage intersected another development. From the early 1950s, Labour Party politicians and intellectuals revived an idea initially formulated decades earlier, the multi-racial Commonwealth. As James Griffiths, a former

³⁷ See "Choice before Indians in South Africa," *The Times of India* (7 November 1946).

³⁸ Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa Before the United Nations Organisation India (Simla: Government of India Press, 1947), 86.

³⁹ "British Investment In S. Africa," *Times* (2 February 1950).

⁴⁰ For example, in 1948 the Governor of Kenya invoked the good of "complex, multiracial communities." See "Education with a Purpose," *Empire* 10.11 (May 1948).

⁴¹ For a discussion of plural society, see Julie Pham, "J. S. Furnivall and Fabianism: Reinterpreting the 'Plural Society' in Burma," *Modern Asian Studies* 39.2 (2005): 321-348.

Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated in the House of Commons: “We belong to a multi-racial community and a multi-racial Commonwealth, and it is important for us to realize that... people with different-colored skins from ourselves are the majority of its citizens.”⁴² According to this vision, Britain’s management of its remaining colonies was a matter of great diplomatic significance: it served as a microcosm of the government’s capacity to lead the Commonwealth of Nations on a global scale. Increasingly, liberal intellectuals described empire’s vocation in terms of the technocratic management of democratic transition.

This set of issues came together in the debates over the federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. In July 1948, the Northern Rhodesian trade politician Roy Welensky put forward an ambitious proposal for a federation of the three Central African colonies. The Colonial Office, which had long opposed settler schemes for amalgamation, rejected the plan on multiple grounds, including its failure to provide adequate safeguards for “African interests.”⁴³ Nevertheless, Welensky’s gambit reinforced the view within the Labour government and sections of the colonial civil service that a unified policy for the central Africa was desirable, if not inevitable. Additionally, the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948 stoked fears in London regarding Afrikaner immigration and South African political expansion northwards—fears that the white political leadership of both Rhodesias skillfully manipulated. Following the 1950 British general election, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Griffiths, agreed to a conference of British and Rhodesian officials to devise a practical outline for federation that would include strong protections for Africans, including some form of representation within a federated parliament. After Griffiths visited Northern Rhodesia in September 1951, however, he grew increasingly cautious regarding federation. Everywhere he travelled, he encountered bitter African opposition to the plan. As a member of the Northern Rhodesian Native Representative Council declared: “We, as Africans, would like to make it perfectly clear that we register a thousand times, ‘no’, to federation proposals, in which we have

⁴² Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 16 December 1952, vol 509, c 1213.

⁴³ For background on the CAF, see Ronald Hyam, “The Geopolitical Origins of the Central African Federation: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1948–1953,” *Historical Journal* 30.1 (1987): 145-72; Philip Murphy, “‘Government by Blackmail’: The Origins of the Central African Federation Reconsidered,” in Martin Lynn, ed., *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006): 53-76.

taken no part.”⁴⁴ The debate centered on the colonial policy of “partnership” between black and white. The settler leadership, especially Welensky, invoked the rhetoric of partnership in order to assert the permanent character of the European settler population.⁴⁵ African political opinion countered that “partnership” merely served as a gloss for naked exploitation, especially south of the Zambezi.⁴⁶ In this polarized climate, Welensky published an article challenging Griffiths to demonstrate that Britain was capable of devising a workable system of government for a “multi-racial society.”⁴⁷ Rhetorically, he invoked the (putative) vulnerability of the white population by placing its future, and the future of a “civilized” Central Africa, in the hands of the British government. The implication was clear. Multi-racial society stood as the alternative to African majority rule and, therefore, barbarism.

As observers noted, the proposals for Federation, particularly the possibility of direct African representation in a central legislature, carried major implications for the other countries of central and eastern Africa (Kenya, Tanganyika, and to a lesser extent Uganda). These discussions also coincided with growing strength of Nkrumah’s CPP, which intensified its campaign of “positive action” in 1950, and early discussions over Tanganyika’s constitutional future. All parties watched developments across the continent carefully. It had become clear that the constitutional status of European and Asian minorities would play a central role in determining southern and eastern Africa’s immediate future.

In March 1950, the Fabian colonial society published a major statement that sought to elaborate a common policy for the territories of Eastern and Central Africa under the rubric of the multiracial society.⁴⁸ Endorsing the conclusions of Thompson’s 1949 pamphlet, the anonymous writer rejected the constitutional paths of India and Ceylon even while conceding the eventual goal of a unitary constitution and majority rule. The main difficulty, according the article, was balancing between European and native demands. The settlers, slated for leadership due to their vastly superior wealth and skills, were imperiling their own future by opposing the

⁴⁴ Northern Rhodesia African Representative Council: The Proceedings of the second session of the Second Council, 22nd January to 27 January 1951 (Lusaka: The Government Printer, 1951).

⁴⁵ Roy Welensky, *Welensky’s 4000 Days: The Life and Death of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1964), 34.

⁴⁶ Colin Leys and Cranford Pratt, eds., *A New Deal in Central Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1960), 29-30.

⁴⁷ Roy Welensky, “Closer Union in Central Africa,” *The National and English Review* (September 1951), 148.

⁴⁸ “New Approaches to East Africa,” *Venture* 2.2. (March 1950).

extension of political rights to increasingly resentful (but still politically “unversed”) Africans. The author proposed a constitutional architecture that reflected an emerging consensus in liberal circles: a qualified franchise, separate election lists for each racial group, parallel institutions with jurisdictions limited to individual groups, and a federal assembly including equal representation for Europeans, Africans, and Asians. In theory, collective responsibility in government would force the different groups to collaborate, creating the basis for interracial political parties and “friendship” at a future date. Nevertheless, the Labour government strongly resisted articulating a general policy for its east and central African territories. The cabinet declared in November 1950: “language applicable to all of these territories was not likely to be specially apt to any.”⁴⁹ This caution was also present among many officials and settlers. When the 1952 Tanganyika constitutional committee published its recommendations, it suggested policies identical to those of the Fabians (with an additional emphasis on African participation in local government as preparatory for parliamentary representation), but it avoided the term “multi-racial” and references to other colonial situations.⁵⁰ Partnership still remained the dominant framework for articulating colonial policy for the region.

Perhaps ironically, the Labour Party’s defeat in the 1951 general election led to the generalization of the multi-racial society framework in British Africa policy and colonial social science. Griffiths’s replacement, the Tory businessman Oliver Lyttelton, inherited the proposal for the Central African Federation and moved forward with its implementation over and against African opposition. In his statement of policy to the House of Commons, Lyttelton declared the core pillars of colonial policy would remain unchanged: the building of institutions that would allow colonies to achieve self-government within the Commonwealth and economic development. Griffiths, now in opposition, asked if self-government in multi-racial communities “must include participation of all the people in the territories, irrespective of race, creed, or colour?”⁵¹ Lyttelton assented in principle. When the House considered the question of federation the following year, the debate focused initially on meaning of the term “partnership.” In his lengthy comments, Griffiths returned to the concept of the multi-racial society and drew strong

⁴⁹ “Document 62: Constitutional Development in East Africa: Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 20 November 1950” in Andrew Porter and Anthony J. Stockwell, eds, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-64*. vol. 1. (London: Macmillan, 1987), 368-9.

⁵⁰ Report of the Committee on Constitutional Development, 1951 (Dar Es Salaam: The Government Printer, 1952).

⁵¹ “Development Of The Colonies,” *Times* (15 November 1951).

parallels between the situations in Kenya, Tanganyika, and central Africa.⁵² Endorsing the Tanganyika proposals for equal representation of whites, Africans, and Asians, Griffiths argued for the idea of parity in its “spirit,” i.e. as a general principle of democracy in contexts where racial groups lived together at unequal stages of civilization.

In effect, this intervention redefined “partnership” in terms of a particular constitutional form, the collective representation of racial groups within a government, and generalized its applicability. Over the course the next two years, the term “multiracial” began to compliment and then supplant “partnership” as the focus of debate over central and east Africa in the British parliament and the press.⁵³ According to its proponents, multiracial government represented the only alternative to both white domination (exemplified by apartheid) and the transition to African majority rule that was occurring in the Gold Coast. Group representation in government would mean that no one section would exercise power over the other communities—an arrangement designed to insure settler autonomy and leadership. Crucially, the idea of the multiracial society was predicated on white indigeneity. Multiple speakers reiterated this point in parliament. Settlers born in Africa had an equal claim to residency and power as other groups—if not a greater claim given their unique contribution to economic development and promoting civilization. They were truly “African.”⁵⁴

The constitution of the 1953 Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland did not employ the term “multi-racial”: the preamble invoked the (undefined) notion of “partnership” in order to avoid any implication of subordination or equality.⁵⁵ In March of the following year, Lyttelton introduced a new constitution in Kenya designed to create a broad consensus, including African and Asian support, for the state of emergency and the repression of Mau Mau. Introduced after consultation with leaders from different communities, Lyttelton’s plan expanded the number of Africans in the legislative council to eight, made provisions for the direct election of Africans (the first vote was held in March 1957), and created a council of ministers that would include six

⁵² Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 4 March 1952, vol. 497, cc 208-212.

⁵³ For example, see Hansard, House of Lords Debates, 2 July 1952, vol. 177, cc590-609; Hansard, House of Lords Debates, 07 July 1952, vol. 177 cc726-832; and Hansard, House of Lord Debates, 29 October 1952, vol. 178 cc1091-142.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Hansard, House of Lords Debates, 7 July 1952, vol. 177, cc726-832.

⁵⁵ *The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Constitution) Order in Council, 1953* (HM Stationery Office, 1953), 15; Claire Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia 1888-1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 348.

“unofficial” or elected members, including three Europeans, two Asians, and one African. This seat represented the first African cabinet minister in East Africa with portfolio.⁵⁶ The new constitution was widely described as “multi-racial” from its inception.⁵⁷ It also resulted in the popularization of the concept “multi-racialism.” Before 1954, a small number of writers had employed the term “multi-racialism” to refer to the general set of problems created by the co-existence of different racial groups, but the usage was quite uncommon.⁵⁸ In 1952, the liberal Afrikaner Leo Marquard invoked the concept in a widely reviewed book.⁵⁹ After 1954, the term “multi-racialism” came into widespread circulation to describe a political doctrine represented by the Lyttelton constitution.⁶⁰ Both the British government and the international press then adopted the word when describing policy developments in Tanganyika, Uganda, and the Central African Federation. When groups of Ugandan Africans mobilized against the appointment an Indian minister in 1955, they voiced their opposition as a rejection of “multi-racialism.”⁶¹

The Defiance Campaign and the Multi-Racial Nation

During the early 1950s, the speeches and publication by ANC leaders regularly used the term “multi-racial society.” In the case of figures like Luthuli and Z.K. Mathews, the invocation of the term drew on the earlier framework elaborated by liberal race relations theory and the broader framework of the Native Question. As Mathews wrote in 1953: “Not only do [South Africa’s] racial groups differ in number and in racial stocks, but they differ in cultural background, in the languages they speak, and in the level of their cultural development in terms of modern Western Civilization.”⁶² The central question of South African politics was need for these groups—which Mathews described as “inextricably interwoven”—to be welded together as

⁵⁶ D.A. Low, *Eclipse of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 209.

⁵⁷ “Multi-Racial Government to be Introduced in Kenya,” *The Irish Times* 11 Mar 1954; “African Will Sit on Kenyan Council,” *New York Times*, 11 March 1954; “Multi-Racial Council of Ministers will Run Kenya,” *The Times of India*, 11 March 1954. See also Hansard, House of commons Debates, 22 July 1954, vol. 530, cc1575-639.

⁵⁸ See Henry Gibbs, *Twilight in South Africa* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950).

⁵⁹ Leo Marquard, *Peoples and Policies of South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952). This sense of “multi-racialism” became more slightly common as the 1950s progressed, especially in South Africa. See, for example, Gwendolen M. Carter, “Multi-racialism in Africa,” *International Affairs* (1960): 457.

⁶⁰ “New Flare-Up in Kenya Imperils Kenya Plan,” *The New York Times*, 18 April 1954; “No Confidence In Multi-Race Rule,” *The Times of India*, 6 August 1954; “New Party formed in Kenya,” *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1954.

⁶¹ “Seat in Ugandan Ministry,” *The Times of India*, 4 June 1955.

⁶² Typescript of Z.K. Mathews, “South Africa: A Land Divided Again Itself,” *Yale Review* (Summer 1953). Z.K. Mathews Papers, Historical Papers, AD1699.

a unified nation with common values and interests. In other cases, the use of the term “multi-racial” reflected a common-sense that had cohered by the early 20th century: the notion that South Africa contained four distinct groups (African, White, Indian, and Coloured). In this usage, the word had become a frequent, although by no means ubiquitous, term that referred to a social reality understood as “given.”

Even in writings that drew the race relations framework, this terminology often coexisted with language and arguments adapted from other intellectual sources, including different traditions of African nationalism, Christianity, and Marxism. The *Guardian* newspaper, largely written by members of the Communist Party, exemplified this heterogeneity (without, of course, the Christian dimension). Its articles employed “multi-national state,” “multi-racial community,” “caste society,” “non-European people,” “non-European peoples,” and “oppressed people” as well as a variety of descriptive phrases, including the language of race relations, in order to capture the country’s social complexity. The issue of racial language was not yet a site of ideological struggle. Writers for the *Guardian* and its successors, *Advance* and *New Age*, used terms like multiracial, interracial, and (more rarely) non-racial interchangeably. Rejecting the Nationalist Party’s vision of distinct national destinies, the ANC’s rhetoric centered on denouncing all forms of racial discrimination and demanding civil rights and freedoms—a rhetoric directly invoking the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The emphasis on South Africa’s multiracial society served as a rejoinder to the apartheid doctrine of separatism. The concept denoted a single entity bound together by multiple forces and experiences.

By the end of the 1952 Defiance Campaign, the ANC’s language had begun to shift in some important respects. In the campaign’s early phases, Congress leaders still insisted on the 1940s language of “co-operation” between separate national organizations that maintained “distinct identities.” They justified the alliance in the framework of race relations: the creation of “good” or “harmonious” relationships between South Africa’s separate groups. Speaking to a 1951 meeting of the Natal ANC, Luthuli advocated working with Indian and white organizations on this narrow basis: “There should be co-operation on a particular matter for a short time only.”⁶³ However, the experience of common struggle, especially in the Transvaal and Natal,

⁶³ “Wake Up, Africans! Wake up!” in Gerald Pillay, ed., *Voices of Liberation: Albert Luthuli*, second edition (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2012), 47.

introduced a new terminology into the ANC's political rhetoric. From 1952 onwards, ANC and Indian Congress leaders insisted on the unbreakable unity of the Congress movement and the indivisible nature of liberation struggle.⁶⁴ In the speeches of younger leaders like Mandela, a militant rhetoric inspired by the CPSA became increasingly prominent: "In the past we talked of the African, Indian, and Coloured struggles.... Today we talk of the struggle of the oppressed people."⁶⁵ Contrary to critics like Neville Alexander, the ANC did not formulate this new politics at the level of doctrine (the "four nations thesis").⁶⁶ ANC leaders continued to hold a wide variety of views on the national question, including liberal pluralist, African nationalist, and various Marxist positions. Rather, the ANC reconciled the political claims of national unity and racial diversity in the organization and imagery of the Congress Alliance itself. In large part constructed around the statements and persona of figures like Dadoo and Luthuli, the new pageantry of struggle drew selectively on the earlier history of the ANC, the terminology of the Communist Party, and the rhetoric of national liberation movements throughout Asia and the rest of Africa. The mixed platforms at political meetings, the four-spoke wheel representing the "sections" of the Congress Alliance, and the coverage of the different "national" organizations in congress newspapers all came to symbolize a new, inclusive South African nation in which each racial group possessed—at least symbolically—an *equal* claim to belonging. The Defiance Campaign both produced and embodied a new aesthetics of nation.

⁶⁴ Sometimes, the language of unity and race relations co-existed: "The present campaign is further strengthening the already harmonious relationship between the Indian and African peoples whose struggle against oppression is one and indivisible. Unity in action gives a death blow to the Government's attempt to create hostilities on the part of the African people against the Indian people. See "Dr. Naicker's Call to the Indian People," *Ilanga lase Natal*, 26 July 1952.

⁶⁵ "No Easy Walk to Freedom," Presidential Address to the Transvaal ANC, 21 September, 1953 in *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress*, 44.

⁶⁶ On the "four nations thesis," see Neville Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 35-7; and earlier, Neville Alexander, "Approaches to the National Question in South Africa," *Transformation* 1 (1986), 77-80. I have two main points of disagreement with Alexander's invaluable work. First, Alexander tends to write as if unchanging theoretical schemas drive political practice. I have found the opposite dynamic at work in the Congress Alliance during this period: political strategies, shared by groups espousing a variety of views, are the basis of post facto generalizations at the level of rhetoric and symbolism. Second, the evidence does not show that a single view point on the national question—whether "multi-racialism" or the "four nations thesis"—was hegemonic in the Congress Alliance during the period before 1960. Rather, a contradictory set of views were reconciled through a political aesthetics that simultaneously affirmed the unity and plurality of a South African nation.

In the 1954-5 campaign for the Freedom Charter, two important developments occurred in the ANC's political discourse. First, ANC leaders began to use the word "multi-racial" to refer to an essential characteristic of a South African nation. In describing the Congress of the People, Luthuli explained that "people from all walks of life in our multiracial nation will have the opportunity to write into this great Charter of Freedom their aspirations for freedom."⁶⁷ The terminology used to describe the elements of this nation remained enormously inconsistent.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Congress Alliance statements began to emphasize that racial or national groups belonged to an *existing* multiracial nation and these groups collectively defined South Africa's character. This vision of a multiracial nation was developed most fully in the speeches and writings of Luthuli. This idea—a plural entity with common values and political interests—challenged the fundamental premise of the multiracial society: the competition between racial groups could only be resolved through separate representation in the state. As Luthuli understood, his position entailed a fundamental critique of liberal theories of democracy and their foundation in an unitary or homogenous nation.⁶⁹ While Luthuli's position was inchoate and in some ways contradictory, the idea of a multiracial nation raised the possibility of a political subject constituted through difference—something like Antonio Negri's concept of multitude. As he emphasized repeatedly, Luthuli was attempting to rethink the very nature of democracy. Unlike the later proponents of pluralism or liberal multiculturalism, Luthuli did not argue that self-government presupposed bourgeois institutions and their idealization within public culture. He derived nationhood from a collective *desire* for freedom, given by God, and expressed in a vision of Africa. Significantly, Luthuli described the "philosophical basis of our freedom

⁶⁷ Albert Luthuli, "Resist Apartheid!—July 11, 1954" in *Voices of Liberation*, vol. 1, 73.

⁶⁸ In April 1954, the SACP member Lionel Forman published an editorial in the newspaper *Advance* that sharply criticized the paper's—and implicitly the Congress's—use of the language of race "the terminology of the oppressors." It was not enough, Forman emphasized, to replace "race" by the "nation" since the concept of nation remained completely undefined within the self-described "national liberation struggle." This editorial gave rise to the well known 1954 debate on the national question at the Cape Town Forum club. Significantly, Yosuf Dadoo (then the President of the Transvaal Indian Congress and Chairman of the underground SACP) wrote a response to Forman's editorial. While acknowledging the language of race and racial harmony were theoretically indefensible, he advocated their use on the basis of their "definite meaning and a connotation understood by all." He also disparaged the idea that *Advance* should discuss such "theoretical" issues rather than focusing on struggles against the regime. See *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, eds. Sadie Forman and Andre Odendall (London: Zed Books, 1992).

⁶⁹ See Luthuli, "Our Vision is a Democratic Society" in *Voices of Liberation*, second edition, 116; "Luthuli Sends Message to Nyerere," *New Age* (November 3, 1960).

struggle” as a “broad” or “inclusive” *African* nationalism: a future South Africa would include everyone who gave Africa their “complete loyalty and allegiance.”⁷⁰ The unifying element of this nation was not race or civil society, but shared ideals.⁷¹

Second, Congress Leaders asserted that the Freedom Charter embodied the collective will of South Africans and therefore provided a new foundation for the nation itself. In this context, the otherwise unremarkable singular in “Congress of *the* People” was an extraordinary statement. In a major editorial published before the Kliptown gathering, the *New Age* compared the charter with the Declaration of Independence, the Magna Carta, and the Soviet constitution.⁷² Describing the campaign as a major event in “our national life,” the editorial claimed that the charter would provide South Africans with a common ethics and mode of life—in other words, a shared national culture—absent from South Africa’s “caste society.” The resulting ethical framework would simultaneously include South Africa’s diverse national groups and create a common identity that transcended race. In effect, the Freedom Charter attempted to translate the political aesthetics of the Defiance Campaign into the language of civic nationalism. In 1955 his speech on the Congress’s significance, Mandela quoted the following remarks made by Luthuli:

Why will this assembly be significant and unique? Its size, I hope, will make it unique. But above all its multi-racial nature and its noble objectives will make it unique, because it will be the first time in the history of our multi-racial nation that its people from all walks of life will meet as equals, irrespective of race, colour, and creed to formulate a freedom charter for all people in the country.⁷³

Echoing the American constitution, the first incantatory lines of the charter declared: “We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: That South Africa

⁷⁰ Luthuli “African National Congress in Recent Years” in *Voices of Liberation*, second edition, 86.

⁷¹ Whatever the differences between competing Marxist positions on the national question, Marxist intellectuals posed the problem of national liberation in terms of the liberation of the working class and oppressed—and therefore the eventual goal of socialism. It is worth underlining the difference between this framework, which could justify majority rule in terms of a future society, and the philosophical problem confronted by nationalist intellectuals operating within a tradition where the legitimacy of self-rule was based on the principle of popular sovereignty. In contesting the legitimacy of minority rule, African nationalists had to assert the capacity of the majority to become a democratic subject in a context where this capacity was identified with assimilation into bourgeois civil society. This problem space generated a different temporality of claims than Marxism: the nationalist claim must emanate from the present and invoke an alternate, and *existing*, criteria of nationhood.

⁷² “Three Weeks to Go,” *New Age* (9 June 1955).

⁷³ Quoted in Nelson Mandela, “Freedom in Our Life Time,” in Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, ed. Ruth First (London: Heinemann, 1965), 55.

belongs to all that live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people.” Despite later claims that the Freedom Charter enunciated the doctrine of “multi-racialism,” the document did not include the term multiracial or describe South Africa’s social composition. Even the term “African” only appeared in the form of “South African”—the problem of the indigenous, the Native Question, was simply dissolved into the nation state. The emphasis was on the single, national will: “we, *the* people.” Reflecting an international discourse of human rights, the charter denounced institutions of minority rule and stipulated that equality of rights “regardless of race, colour, or sex.” At this level, the charter built on a political tradition that began with the ANC’s call for direct representation in the 1943 document, *African Claims*.

Yet the Freedom Charter also left a number of central questions ambiguous or unanswered: what would be the constitutional status of minorities in a new state? Would a single ethno-cultural identity develop out of South Africa’s diverse society? Despite its presentation as the inaugural covenant of a nation, the charter addressed the questions of race and culture in a negative mode: groups would be protected from insults to their “national pride” and would have equal rights to develop their language and culture. Notoriously, critics of the charter argued that its recognition of “equal status” in the state for all “national groups and races” entailed a form of collective representation equivalent to multiracial democracy—a suspicion reinforced by Luthuli’s language of the “multiracial nation.”⁷⁴ The charter’s failure to distinguish between immediate demands and its historic vision of nationhood reinforced critics’ impression that it not only advocated the preservation of racial identities, it granted collective rights to racial groups. Significantly, the texts generally referred to the rights of “people” and, with one notable exception, avoided the liberal discourse of individual liberties.⁷⁵ Whatever the framers’ intentions, the resulting document allowed for multiple, contradictory interpretations.

To a certain degree, the Freedom Charter’s ambiguities represented differences of opinion among congress leaders and a consensus that certain questions should remain open. There was a strong belief among its leaders that the ANC was a national movement, not a political party, and therefore should contain multiple political tendencies and ideologies. But

⁷⁴ Ufford Khoruha and Kwame Lekwame [Peter Raboroko and Robert Sobukwe?], “The Kliptown Charter,” *The Africanist* 11, 4 (June/July 1958).

⁷⁵ The exception is “Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and stand as candidate for all bodies which make laws”.

these equivocations may have also reflected a calculated strategy. During the 1950s, the ANC downplayed the demand for African majority rule (although it remained the ANC's stated policy) and used language that left open the possibility of a power sharing agreement and guarantees for minorities. Since the ANC rejected the revolutionary overthrow of the state, it had to appeal to the consciousness of the white electorate and leave open the policy of working with the United Party in some form—the situation did not provide a direct path to power.⁷⁶ This represented a major dilemma for the ANC during this period. From a strategic perspective, the party sought to assert African political leadership while finding ways to assuage powerful fears among minorities of black “domination.” The formulations of ANC leaders often allowed for the possibility of two interpretations: an African majority government and some form of shared power among racial groups. Luthuli, for example, stated that democracy would reach its “highest watermark” if African participated as “*equal partners* in all 10 legislative organs of the state—local, provincial, and national.”⁷⁷ Articles in ANC-allied publications suggest that some Congress intellectuals saw the possibility of a multiracial democracy as a strategically acceptable stage in the struggle—not as a final or just resolution of the “national question.” For example, *New Age* celebrated Julius Nyerere's 1958 assumption of leadership over a government based on a multi-racial parliament. At the same time, it emphasized that this victory was only the first stage in a much longer struggle.⁷⁸

Tom Mboya and the Critique of Multi-Racialism

The Lyttelton constitution soon came under attack from multiple sides. Within less than a year, the American consulate in Nairobi recommended that government documents avoid the word “multi-racialism” because it had become a red flag to Kenya's white settlers, who mobilized against the prospect of elected African representatives, and African political opinion in Uganda.⁷⁹ Another source of opposition was a small group of colonial liberals centered in central Africa, led by Colonel David Stirling, called the Capricorn Africa Society. In July 1955, the

⁷⁶ For a clear statement of the need to convince the white electorate to reject the Nationalist Party and the pro-Congress left's preference for a United Party government, see “Search Light on the Congresses,” *Liberation* (February 1958).

⁷⁷ Albert Luthuli, “The Challenge of Our Time,” in *Voices of Liberation*, second edition, 77. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ “African Prime Minister for Tanganyika,” *New Age*, 14 December 1959.

⁷⁹ Dispatch from the Consulate General at Nairobi to the Department of State, Nairobi, September 15, 1955 in John P. Glennon and Stanely Shaloff, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 18 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office., 1989), 188-89.

society launched a campaign for the abolition of the color bar and the creation of a common, qualified franchise (based on property, education, and character). In the words of Stirling, they sought the realization of Rhode's ideal: "equal rights for all civilized men."⁸⁰ The Capricorn speakers handbook stated that its goal was an "organically non-racial" administration.⁸¹ Although the society never attracted large numbers, its views received a hearing in the British colonial office and influenced the government's shift from a "multi-racial" to a "non-racial" policy after 1957.⁸² (Harold Macmillan used the term "non-racial" to express British Policy in the famous Winds of Change speech.) Even more significant was the campaign launched by a young Kenyan trade union leader named Tom Mboya. While studying at Ruskin College in 1956, Mboya held a news conference, organized by the British Labour Party, declaring his opposition to the Lyttelton constitution. Returning to the country later in the year, he ran an electoral campaign for the legislative council based on his rejection of multi-racialism. After his victory, Mboya was the main force in organizing a boycott of the new cabinet by African ministers. When the government eventually fell in 1957, the Secretary of State for the colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, had little choice but to abandon the constitution altogether. Mboya became internationally famous as the man who defeated multi-racialism in Kenya.⁸³

Mboya enumerated his critique of multi-racial democracy at length in a pamphlet published by the Fabian Colonial Bureau, *The Kenyan Question: An African Answer*.⁸⁴ Drawing on the vocabulary of classic utilitarianism, Mboya began his discussion of Kenyan politics by invoking the fundamental equality of individuals and the role of society in allowing persons to participate in an effort to create a common good: "This means that I reject any concept of race superiority, that I reject any concept of racial group rights or duties within the state... I believe that each individual must have an equal opportunity to develop himself and his potentialities."⁸⁵ This insistence on *individual* freedom shifted the terrain of argument regarding African self-rule so that the defenders of colonialism, rather than African nationalists, would emerge as proponents

⁸⁰ "Ending Colour Bar in East Africa," *The Times of India* (27 July 1955).

⁸¹ *The Capricorn Africa Society Handbook for Speakers* (Salisbury: Capricorn Africa, 1955), 29.

⁸² Ritchie Owendale,, "Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957-1960," *Historical Journal* 38 (1995): 455-455.

⁸³ David Goldworthy, *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (New York: Africana Publishers, 1982), chapters 5 and 6.

⁸⁴ Tom Mboya, *The Kenyan Question: An African Answer*, introduction by Margery Perham, Fabian Tract 302 (Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1956).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

of racial ideology. In this light, the settler colonialist appeared as the enemy not only of universal democratic values, but also core elements of the British liberal tradition such as fairness and the rule of law. Mboya then proceeded to elaborate this argument through an analysis of Kenyan history: colonial exploitation engineered a society composed of three racial groups, which fundamentally corresponded to class, and this order led to the perversion of the state into an instrument of settler dominance. In such a context, the assertion of collective rights based on the existing racial groups would only prolong white domination. Mboya's disaggregation of the settler lobby, the colonial state, and the British government served the rhetorical purpose of appealing to ostensible principles European and Christian civilization against settler predation. It also allowed him to treat government as race neutral in principle: African majority rule would simply entail the constitutional triumph of personal liberty.

Working within this framework, Mboya emphasized that multi-racialism required the perpetuation of groups whose existence was inseparable from the development of colonial society: "Multi-racialism is used to define the working together of members of various racial groups either in the formation of an organization or a government."⁸⁶ The point was at once obvious and quite powerful. In effect, he refused an understanding of "multi-racialism" which, in employing the term as merely descriptive, would abstract race from its material basis in white domination. Mboya concluded that every policy of collective representation demanded the institutionalization of racial categories that existed *solely* due to settler economic and political power. Moving from the domain of principle to practice, Mboya observed that the Lyttelton Reforms encouraged racial groups to define their interests in mutually oppositional terms, thereby equating universal enfranchisement with "African domination."⁸⁷ As a result, minorities insisted on parity with the majority in order to defend their legally enshrined collective interests. This self-perpetuating cycle foreclosed the creation of a society dedicated to the promotion of individual development.

As Mboya realized, this argument implicitly challenged the civilizational basis of the liberal subject as it functioned within colonial discourse. His summary rejection of the Capricorn Societies' proposal for a qualified franchise—he dismissed its "non-racial" pretensions in

⁸⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 32.

passing—made this conclusion explicit.⁸⁸ In effect, this position rejected the idea that democracy presupposed the existence of bourgeoisie civil society—the very institutions which secured the superiority of “European civilization” over “the Native” in the context of settler colonialism. Mboya defended the extension of the franchise to all Kenyans on the basis of the fundamental right of individuals to take part in government on an equal basis with other individuals. Drawing on 19th century arguments in favor of working class franchise, Mboya argued that it was only through participating in the electoral process that the African majority would develop political responsibility. By disassociating the educative function of elections from the existence of “European standards,” Mboya thus created the intellectual space to conceive of a democratic project that was simultaneously African (since it would develop on the basis of the African majority’s languages, customs, and social practices) and fully inclusive (since the state, and therefore politics as a whole, would recognize individuals rather than groups). On a rhetorical level, Mboya was therefore able to sidestep the questions of inclusion and exclusion generated by collective political claims, including the demand for self-determination, while insisting on the African character of Kenya’s future under majority rule. As *The Times of India* noted in its enthusiastic review: “Mr. Mboya is the first Kenya African to declare that ‘Kenya is an African country.’”⁸⁹

Following the 1958 Accra Conference, Mboya reframed this position in the language of African nationalism, Kenyan independence, and Pan-African socialism.⁹⁰ But his stance remained unchanged. Mboya believed that the settler could become an African, but only by abandoning colonial power and privilege, especially landownership. In turn, this act would require dismantling the political economy of racial domination and, by implication, the social ontology that defined white Kenyans as a group. “Then the European will be faced with a choice,” Mboya announced, “either he agrees to be treated as an equal with his African and Asian neighbours, or there is no place for him in Kenya.”⁹¹ Significantly, Mboya’s emphasis was on economic, rather than cultural, assimilation. In a fashion not dissimilar to the ANC Youth League of the 1940s, Mboya’s argumentation presupposed the existence of something like indigenous

⁸⁸ See also his later account of these debates in “National Mobilization 2,” in *Freedom and After*, 106.

⁸⁹ “Voice of the Voiceless,” *The Times of India* (August 30, 1956).

⁹⁰ See Tom Mboya, “Tom Mboya Says: ‘This Decade Will See the End to African Subjection,’” *The Times of India*, May 1, 1960.

⁹¹ Mboya, *The Kenyan Question*, 37.

African culture, but he nevertheless left the content of this idea open. This silence arose from a dilemma common to other anticolonial thinkers of his generation. It would, for example, characterize the PAC's views on culture. Mboya was convinced that independence would generate the conditions for a profound social, intellectual, and artistic awakening. At the same time, the elaboration of a national culture on the basis of particular practices or beliefs risked the specter of tribalism. As a result, culture therefore became a cipher in much nationalist thinking: it marked a conceptual space that remained unelaborated. Mboya's reasoning presumed an African basis for postcolonial democracy. The meaning of the term "African," however, was left in abeyance.

A Non-Racial Future

"It has become clear that our country only has one future," Patrick Duncan wrote in inaugural issue of the journal *Africa South*, "a non-racial future."⁹² Duncan declared that white supremacy was doomed because it stood against irresistible moral and economic forces. Invoking Gandhi's book *Satyagraha in South Africa*, he argued that the country's fate would be decided by the question of violence: recourse to arms by either the government or the black opposition threatened to transform South Africa into "Haiti." Only non-violent resistance could dismantle the color bar and create a democracy where "people have forgotten about race." The son of South Africa's first Governor General, Duncan became famous as one of the earliest white volunteers arrested during the 1952 Defiance Campaign. Despite deeply-felt loyalties to the Congress movement (he applied for membership in the ANC), Duncan joined the Liberal Party in reaction to communist influence in the ANC and a desire to be part of an "all races" organization. A devout believer in the sanctity of individual, he clashed with the older generation of party leadership over its endorsement of universal franchise "when conditions permitted," a position that heavily compromised the organization in the eyes of many Africans.⁹³ Duncan rejected the Cape's tradition of qualified franchise unequivocally: "Any such qualifications have but one purpose in our country—to preserve effectual white control under a cloak of non-racialism."⁹⁴ In a 1954 letter, he described the Communist Party as the only organization in the country's history that "consistently followed a non-racial line"--a statement of powerful irony from an avowed

⁹² Patrick Duncan, "Passive Resistance," *Africa South* 1.1 (October-December 1956).

⁹³ C.J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1980), 120-45.

⁹⁴ Duncan, "Passive Resistance," 80.

liberal and opponent of Marxism.⁹⁵ Duncan's use of the term "non-racial" removed the word from its earlier legal and organizational contexts: it became a descriptor for a national destiny. No longer merely negative ("without regards to"), the term "non-racial" had begun to develop a positive sense as both a political philosophy and way of life.

The term non-racial was absent from the Liberal Party's 1955 statement of policy.⁹⁶ Duncan was part of a new generation of activists, including John Didcott and Violaine Junod, who rejected core elements of the Cape tradition, especially the qualified franchise and the exclusive emphasis on parliamentary means. In advocating universal suffrage, these thinkers emphasized a postwar discourse of human rights over and against an understanding of democratic capacity based on civilization. They envisioned a "non-racial democracy" as a society based on universal citizenship where individual personality would be promoted: racial distinctions would not disappear, but they would lose their political relevance. However, they also believed that liberals bore a special responsibility for preventing the South Africa's conflict from escalating into a race war. Cooperation between the Liberal Party and the ANC would undercut the country's polarization into black and white, and therefore help secure a place for the white minority in a non-racial future.⁹⁷ To a certain degree, this scenario reflected a type of missionary attitude. Initiated by liberals, interracial contact—*Contact* was also the name of a liberal newspaper edited by Duncan—would break down prejudices among Africans, preventing the rise of a black racism. In effect, the language of non-racial democracy allowed liberals to endorse majority rule while avoiding the question of the white minority's status within an African society: liberal institutions and individual rights, not a nationalism articulated in terms of culture, would define South Africa's character as a political community.⁹⁸ In this version of the non-racial project, democracy served as the instrument for ultimate extension of Western institutions and values (i.e. bourgeois civil society). It thus reiterated a form of "anti-blackness."⁹⁹ By the late 1950s, the concept of a non-racial democracy had become widely accepted in liberal circles. In

⁹⁵ Patrick Duncan to Oden Meeker, 25 June 1954 quoted in *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁶ *The Policies of the Liberal Party of South Africa* (N.D. [1955]).

⁹⁷ Violaine Junod, "Last Chance for Whites," *Africa Today* 4.6 (1957): 39.

⁹⁸ Duncan, it should be noted, let the liberal party after the Sharpeville Massacre, rejecting its continued adherence to non-violence, and joined the PAC (which hanged ints membership policies in the early 1960s). Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 221.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of assimilation and anti-blackness, see Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

his 1958 book *Hope for South Africa*, the author and liberal politician Alan Paton used the phrase five times alongside formulations like “non-racial society.”¹⁰⁰

Outside liberal publications, the term non-racial appeared rarely in oppositional writing and speeches during the 1950s. Newspapers sometimes employed the word in a technical sense to describe an organization’s membership policy, although multiracial, interracial, and “all race” were used more commonly. *New Age*, for example, alternated between these different terms in describing methods of trade union organization. In other cases, the word simply denoted that something was “racially inclusive.” In a 1953 article published in *The Nation*, Z.K. Mathews described the Defiance Campaign as “peaceful, disciplined, and non-racial.”¹⁰¹ Two years later, Jordan Ngubane, who was then a member of the ANC, used “non-racial” to characterize the campaign in a *DRUM* magazine subheading.¹⁰² In 1958, Luthuli and Monty Naicker announced that a demonstration would be “non-racial”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, these instances were exceptional. The term was generally absent from ANC speeches, publications, and statements of policy before 1959. Nor does the term appear in the major theoretical debate between CP and Trotskyist intellectuals held at the Forum Club in 1954.¹⁰⁴ In December 1957, representatives of the Congress Alliance, the Liberal Party, and other oppositional groups convened a “Multi-Racial Conference” at the University of the Witwatersrand. The gathering endorsed the goal of universal suffrage and the transition from “white supremacy to a non-racial democracy in which these franchise rights can be exercised.”¹⁰⁵ Congress Alliance publications reproduced the conference motions and praised this sentiment—without, notably, adopting the language of non-racial democracy. When ANC leaders expressed their vision of a future South Africa, they usually invoked the Freedom Charter.¹⁰⁶

The opposition between “multi” and “non-racial” first emerged in Non-European Unity Movement publications during the mid-1950s. In an article on the launch of *Africa South*, a

¹⁰⁰ Alan Paton, *Hope for South Africa* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1958).

¹⁰¹ Harry S. Warner [Z.K. Mathews], “South Africa: Who Provoked the Riots?” *The Nation* (21 February 1953).

¹⁰² Jordan Ngubane, “Congress has Something Up its Sleeve!” *Drum* (December 1955).

¹⁰³ “Joint statement by Albert Luthuli with Dr. G. M. Naicker concerning stay-at-home during week of general election 16 April 1959,” at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4704> accessed 14 March 2014.

¹⁰⁴ This debate is reproduced in Allison Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition: 1943-1964*, vol. 2. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ “Conference Findings,” *New Age* (12 December 1957).

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Moses Kotane, “How to Build a United Front,” *New Age* (9 May 1957).

writer for *The Torch* decried the idea of a multi-racial democracy: “note: not a *non*-racial but a multi-racial democracy—a contradiction in terms since democracy implies the rejection of the very concept of ‘race’.”¹⁰⁷ After the 1957 Multi-Racial Conference, the incompatibility of multiracialism and democracy became a regular theme. Rejecting any discussion of race as a mirror image of apartheid ideology, *The Torch* attacked the conference for endorsing a liberal race relations framework built around a false and dangerous idea.¹⁰⁸ In February 1958, *The Torch* described the policy of the Congress Alliance as “multi-racialism, which means racism multiplied.”¹⁰⁹ *The Torch* sometimes expressed its program as a “non-racial democracy.” However, the NEUM’s emphasis during this period was on non-European Unity and universal citizenship rights: a stance which prevented a generalization from organizational form to national identity. As its critics observed, Unity Movement statements wavered between celebrating non-European and South African nationalisms.¹¹⁰ For the most part, the ANC simply ignored this critique and dismissed the NEUM as sectarian.¹¹¹ *The Torch*’s arguments did, however, influence intellectuals associated with the Africanist opposition inside of the ANC, most importantly Sobukwe. After the Africanist faction’s break from the ANC in 1958, Sobukwe and his co-thinkers were at pains to articulate their version of nationalism in terms that undermined the widespread accusation of anti-minority racism. Echoing the rhetoric of the Unity Movement and Mboya, Sobukwe told the *Golden City Post* that “We reject multi-racialism in favour of a non-racial democracy because multi-racialism suggests a maintenance of racial groups.”¹¹² Sobukwe concluded by emphasizing the need to educate Africans not to use nationalism as a “symbol of racialism.” The term “multi-racialism” entered into South African political discourse through Unity Movement and Africanist polemics against the Congress Alliance.

¹⁰⁷ “Africa South,” *The Torch* (17 July 1956).

¹⁰⁸ “Multi-racialism v. Democracy,” *The Torch* (28 November 1957). See also “Multi-Racialists and Other Racialists,” *The Torch* (21 October 1958)

¹⁰⁹ “‘Undented Racialists,’” *The Torch* (4 February 1958).

¹¹⁰ See Mohamed Adhikari, “Fiercely Non-Racial? Discourses and Politics of Race in the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943–70,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 403–418.*

¹¹¹ In a letter to *New Age*, Philip Madlokwana dismissed the Unity Movement “non-racialists” by arguing that *The Torch*’s denunciation African culture production as “racialist” reflected the chauvinistic embrace of Western civilization by “Cape Coloured intellectuals.” See “The Torch and African Culture,” *New Age* (31 October 1957). Mostly, ANC papers simply ignored the Unity Movement’s critiques or focused on the question of boycotts.

¹¹² “3 Africanists Tipped for New ‘Presidency,’” *Golden City Post* (9 November 1958).

The December 1958 Pan-African Congress in Accra, chaired by Mboya, lent considerable authority to Sobukwe's arguments. Attended by Duncan, Ngubane, and a few other South Africans, the conference affirmed pan-African socialism and the African personality while characterizing the white populations of settler regimes, including South Africa and Kenya, as "foreigners who have settled permanently in Africa and who regard the position of Africa under their sway as belonging more to them than to the African."¹¹³ The same resolution stipulated the foundational claim of Africans to land: "the rights of indigenous Africans to the fullest use of their lands be respected and preserved."¹¹⁴ Conference speakers, such as Kenya's Julius Kiano, denounced concepts like multi-racialism, apartheid, and Bantustans in single breadth. Mboya's critique of multi-racialism had circulated in South Africa before the Accra conference.¹¹⁵ But it had not been imported into local debates. Significantly, *New Age* and *Contact* covered Kenya—as well as Central Africa and Tanganyika—extensively, but these articles avoided the terms multi-racial and multiracialism. There seems to have been an editorial awareness that these words possessed a different meaning in common South African usage: a direct transcription would generate confusion. As letter to *Contact* observed: "For the past thirty years or so the term 'multi-racial' has been used for organizations which wish to bring the members of different racial groups together."¹¹⁶

For the first time, the Accra Conference forced the Congress Alliance to consider how its language and policies would translate into other African contexts. At the conference itself, Ezekiel Mphahlele (who represented the ANC) misread the Kenyan critique of multi-racialism as "anti-white" while recognizing the difficulties that the ANC would have in explaining the Freedom Charter and multi-racial nationalism to the liberation movements in "colonial Africa."¹¹⁷ On returning from Ghana, Duncan wrote a sharp critique of the call for a "multi-racial society" that invoked Kiano and Mboya¹¹⁸ In response, Alf Wannenburg published a letter in *New Age* that cited Luthuli's use of the phrase, which he argued was unambiguous in

¹¹³ "Conference Resolution on Imperialism and Colonialism," in Colin Legum, *Pan Africanism: A Short Political Guide* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1976), 228.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Basil Davidson's account in "The Kenya Crisis," *Africa South* 1.3 (April-June 1957): 68-73.

¹¹⁶ "Multi-or Non-Racial," *Contact* (13 June 1959).

¹¹⁷ Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Accra Conference Diary," *Fighting Talk* (1959).

¹¹⁸ See *Contact* (27 December 1958).

context.¹¹⁹ This reply did not resolve the question. In its next issue, *New Age* ran an article on Tanganyika with the subheading: “‘Multi-racialism’ has a Different Meaning There.”¹²⁰ In its statements during this period, the ANC strongly endorsed the Accra conference and Pan-Africanism. At the same time, *New Age* drew a close parallel between the Congress Alliance and Nyerere’s strategic use of multi-racial elections in order to achieve state power and then dismantle the colonial system of reservations. After a date was set for Tanganyika’s independence, Luthuli sent a telegram to Nyerere in which he voiced his strong sense of accord with the East African’s leaders statements. “Who knows,” Luthuli remarked, “but that destiny has preserved for Africa the task of building such a democracy in which all races participate.”¹²¹ Underlining the many challenges faced by the newly independent states, Luthuli emphasized the task of steering African nationalism along “constructive lines” internally and externally. Through these gestures of solidarity, the ANC was able to demonstrate its commitment to Pan-Africanism while upholding a multi-racial image of African nationalism. In the pages of *New Age*, Nyerere served as the counterpoint to the Africanist’s invocation of Mboya and Nkrumah.¹²²

“Racialism Multiplied”

Throughout 1958, the Africanist split from the ANC generated enormous publicity in black and liberal newspapers at a time when the organization was in disarray. Initially, the ANC dismissed the oppositionist as frustrated careerists and black fascists. However, Sobukwe’s reframing of the debate in terms of “non-racial democracy” versus “multi-racialism” forced a broader discussion over the question of minorities in the ANC’s understanding of nation. Did the Freedom Charter’s statement that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white” not uphold a social reality created through the violence of colonial domination? The logic of the Africanist argument was straightforward. Rejecting a biological understanding of race, they insisted that racial groups were the product of a political economy founded on settler colonialism. In their eyes, the ANC’s multi-racial nationalism entailed the continuation of colonialism’s inequalities. To guarantee the status of minorities as races, rather than as individuals, meant to perpetuate the conditions that produced distinct social groups: African expropriation. The ANC’s

¹¹⁹ “Both ANC and COD Stand for Multi-Racial S. Africa,” *New Age* (22 January 1959)

¹²⁰ “Tanganyika Freedom Movement Has Backing of Europeans and Asiatics,” *New Age* (12 February 1959).

¹²¹ “Lutuli Sends Message to Nyerere,” *New Age* (November 3, 1960).

¹²² Mboya and Nyerere’s policies on race were widely (if mistakenly) juxtaposed in the press in the late 1950s.

multiracial nationalism was therefore not a true nationalism, since colonial domination made a common patriotism impossible. In this respect, the Africanist position followed Mboya closely, especially in incorporating elements of radicalized liberalism. Individual rights and democratic institutions would create a community of interests: a future African government would grant citizenship to “foreigners” as individuals within a transformed society. After their break from the ANC, the Africanists transformed the phrase “multi-racialism means racialism multiplied” into a polemical slogan. Observers derided this expression as gibberish that confused South African and East African debates.¹²³ For the Africanists, it expressed a truism grounded in experience. Unlike interactions between individuals, social relationships between racial groups could never be equal.

In his inaugural address to the first congress of the Pan Africanist Congress, Sobukwe rejected the concept of race on scientific and ethical grounds: “there is only one race to which we all belong, and that is the human race.”¹²⁴ To accept the idea of separate racial groups, Sobukwe concluded, would be to develop a political project on the same philosophical basis as apartheid, even if this system assumed a more “democratic” form. In contrast, Sobukwe argued that South Africa was composed of three national groups defined by geographical origin and historical experience: Africans, Indians, and whites. (The Africanists rejected the idea that “so-called Coloureds” were not Africans).¹²⁵ The African majority, united by a common history of expropriation and oppression, was the driving force in the battle against white supremacy, but only the idea of African nationalism could bind this heterogeneous group together as a self-aware political force. Sobukwe’s analysis derived the subject of African nationalism from the shared material conditions of exploitation: the freedom struggle only assumed a racial form because of the racist structure of South African society.¹²⁶ While emphasizing that white individuals could be citizens of an African state, he argued against their membership in the PAC on the grounds that the material interests of minority groups led them to seek guarantees that undermined African nationalism.

¹²³ Peter Rodda, “Africanist Cut Loose,” *Africa South* 3.4 (July-September 1959).

¹²⁴ Mangaliso Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe from 1949-1959 and other Documents of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania* (New York: PAC of Azania, N.D. [1979?]), 17.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of the PAC and the Indian question, see Jon Soske, “Wash Me Black Again”: African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944–1960,” (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2009), 254-9.

¹²⁶ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe*, 23.

Observers sympathetic to the Africanists soon queried this exclusion. In perhaps the first article to juxtapose “multi-racialism” and “non-racialism” as political philosophies, Ngubane—who had become Vice President of the Liberal Party—suggested that the PAC contained two distinct factions, the non-racialist majority and an anti-white minority.¹²⁷ It was not enough, Ngubane urged, to advocate non-racialism in the abstract. Ngubane’s piece articulated a widely-shared assumption in the debate over the Congress Alliance: organizational form prefigured post-apartheid constitutional structure and a future national identity. Sobukwe, however, rejected this framework. Following Luthuli and the Accra conference, the PAC defined an African as “everybody who owes his loyalty only to Africa and accepts the democratic rule of an African majority.”¹²⁸ In the PAC’s analysis, this definition of the African only had purchase *after* the dismantling of the white population’s economic and political control. At that point, all citizens could participate in a continental project to develop an African culture—and thus located the problem of identity in the future. In other words, Sobukwe distinguished between the racialized subject of anti-colonial nationalism and the individual subject of post-colonial politics.¹²⁹

At least some Congress Alliance leaders saw the debate between “multi-racialism” and “non-racialism” as little more than terminological confusion.¹³⁰ Multi-racial was a commonly understood word denoting “including all races.” Non-racial was a more recondite and technical term that signified “without distinction with regards to race.” ANC statements, including the *Freedom Charter*, had repeatedly stated that the Congress Alliance championed equal rights “without distinction of colour, race, sex, or belief.” In the course of mass political struggle and state repression, Congress leaders may well have seen this debate as hinging on a distinction without a difference. By the middle of 1959, ANC activists began to employ the term “non-racial democracy” in articles and speeches. In May of that year, the Youth League of the Transvaal Indian Congress came out for a “non-racial” youth association, initiating an extensive debate within the Congress Alliance over the conditions for merging into a single party. This piece

¹²⁷ Jordan K. Ngubane, “Pan-Africanism and the ANC,” *Opinion* (17 April 1959).

¹²⁸ “Inaugural Address,” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe*, 24.

¹²⁹ The PAC manifesto distinguished between African nationalism, “which upholds the material, intellectual, and spiritual interests of the oppressed peoples,” and Africanism, “a social force that upholds the material, intellectual, and spiritual interests of the individual.” See “The 1959 Pan-Africanist Congress Manifesto, in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe*, 44.

¹³⁰ Karis and Gerhart attribute this position to Joe Mathews and it seems to have been widely shared in the early 1960s.

was published on the front page of the *New Age*.¹³¹ In October, *New Age* published an article announcing a mobilization by the ANC, Natal Indian Congress, and South African Congress of Trade Unions under the slogan: “Build Congress for a Non-Racial Democracy.”¹³²

It may be significant that several early adoptions of the term “non-racial” occurred in Natal, where the ANC collaborated closely with the Liberal Party and the organizations shared prominent members. In August 1960, Luthuli introduced a phrase that would become a standard formulation for expressing Congress’s position during this period: the ANC stood for “multi-racial society and non-racial democracy.”¹³³ Luthuli’s 1961 Nobel acceptance speech projected this vocabulary back to the founding of the ANC.¹³⁴ The following year, he voiced his opposition to group rights in terms almost identical to Sobukwe: “The question of reserving rights for minorities in a non-racial democracy should not arise. It will be sufficient if human rights are entrenched in the constitution.”¹³⁵ Luthuli’s statements suggest that he and other Congress leaders adopted the term non-racial in a technical or constitutional sense in order to clarify the ANC’s position on minority protections. The pairing of non-racial democracy and multi-racial society captured the two contradictory strands of the Freedom Charter’s ideology quite aptly. The ANC’s broad nationalism envisioned a diverse, African country in which the law would be applied without regards to race, gender, or belief. If anything, the expression of “non-racial democracy” narrowed the complexity of this vision by privileging race over gender and religion.

The terminological shift within the Congress Alliance was uneven and somewhat chaotic. In late 1960, *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* were still releasing statements that called for a “multi-racial democracy.”¹³⁶ The Congress Alliance appears to have adopted the language of “non-racial democracy” reactively and without a thorough discussion of its implications. The ANC simply replaced one word with another.

Conclusion

¹³¹ “Non-Racial Youth Organization Proposed,” *New Age* (7 May 1959).

¹³² “Build Congress for a Non-Racial Democracy,” *New Age* (8 October 1959).

¹³³ Albert Luthuli, “Face the Future” foreword to pamphlet published by the South African Congress of Democrats (8 August 1960) at <http://www.anc.org.za/shou.php?id=4726> accessed 14 March 2014. _

¹³⁴ Albert Luthuli, “Africa and Freedom,” in *The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross* (London: The Publicity and Information Bureau, African National Congress, N.D.), 66.

¹³⁵ “What I Would Do if I were Prime Minister,” reprinted from *Ebony*, February 1962 in *The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross*, 77.

¹³⁶ “COD Call on Referendum,” *New Age* (September 22, 1960). “Time for Multi-Racial Government,” *New Age* (October 27, 1960)

What is at stake in this reconstruction? By utilizing terms like “multi” and “non-racial” anachronistically, historians have tended to overwrite the political discourse of earlier periods and, as a result, create an inadvertent teleology at the level of narration. The result simplifies the range and nature of intellectual debates that characterized African politics in the first half of the 20th century, while obscuring the problem space—the political and intellectual context within which a question acquires urgency—that generated the first conceptualizations of South Africa as a nation.¹³⁷ If the script of the ANC’s nationalism is always known in advance (the triumph of “non-racialism” over “Africanism”), there is little reason to read figures like Lembede, Luthuli, Sobukwe, and Fatima Meer—to name but a few—as political thinkers whose work is relevant beyond their role in the predetermined course of liberation history. However, if the word “non-racial” obtained its historic centrality by virtue of an accident, and its meaning is irresolvable, then it becomes important to reconstruct the political and discursive conditions that initially framed the problematic of nation.

Under the rubric of the “multi-racial society,” African intellectuals like Mboya, Mathews, and Luthuli participated in a major debate over the relationship between democracy and the Native Question, framed as the problem of civilizational difference. In this form, the Native Question presupposed bourgeois civil society as the foundation for democratic self-governance—that is, for the exercise of political reason. When they came to challenge this framework, African intellectuals confronted a fundamental philosophical dilemma. On what basis could they demand universal suffrage and self-government given the absence of shared culture, values, and institutions—the attributes of a national subject in the liberal tradition? Both civic and ethnic theories of European nationalism (the alternative traditions to a British liberalism based in common law) grounded democratic legitimacy in popular sovereignty, the will of a people, and therefore a singular national subject. Anti-colonial thinkers required an alternative legitimating discourse. The Indian independence struggle and the birth of the UN created the possibility for a claim to African enfranchisement based on universal human rights. Recasting the South African situation as a problem of racial discrimination, the ANC could negate the framework of the Native Question by appealing for equality in terms recognized by international law and global

¹³⁷ For a discussion of the idea of problem space see David Scott *Conscripts of Modernity: the Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

opinion. The 1943 *African Claims* manifesto embodied this strategy, as did the Congress Alliance's frequent comparisons between the National Party and Hitler. However, this strategy did not fully resolve the problem of *who* was asserting the claim to popular sovereignty. Indeed, it may have complicated the matter by placing the question of racial difference at the center of South African political thought. As a result, a set of competing discourses on the nature of the African political subject developed at the intersection of two unstable terms: race and nation.

Luthuli refused to formulate this conjunction in terms of a tragic dichotomy. Race did not necessarily mark the site of democracy's failure. Instead, he accepted South Africa's multiplicity as a catalyst to rethink the problem of political community named by the word "nation." Working within and against a tradition of colonial liberalism, Luthuli's decision reflected his profound debt to African nationalism and its struggle for a "non-tribalism" that would create the space for the growth, elaboration, and eventual confluence of African cultures. Much like Lembede and Sobukwe, Luthuli believed that the historical experiences of the continent's oppressed majority would provide the basis for a political project united through a dynamic and changing idea of Africa. Rejecting the segregationist quest to preserve a separate domain of the "traditional" (a project that has survived into the post-apartheid), Luthuli believed that African nationalism would assimilate Western civilization, resolving the native question through an internal critique and elaboration of civil society. Both Luthuli and Sobukwe also stipulated that the oppressed majority's agency, indeed its generosity, was required for the transformation of the foreign into the African. Unlike Sobukwe, Luthuli did not hold that this process required the dissolution of collective social identities: nationalism could reconfigure the colonial foundations of the multiracial society. In this respect, Sobukwe's Africanism came much closer to the assimilationist dystopias of 19th and 20th century Europe than the ANC's chimeric vision. As a practical and concrete thinker, Luthuli's writings suggest an understanding of the "multiracial nation" that resembles an ethical process far more than a site of political arrival: living with and across differences would necessitate the continuous elaboration of new forms of unity—intellectual, political, cultural. Unquestionably, this position underestimated race's implication in the constitutive violence of bourgeois civil society. Nevertheless, it represented a powerful refusal of two forms of injustice so often perpetrated under the aegis of nationalism: the reification and the erasure of subjectivities.

