

## **Chapter Five: 'Quarantines and Contested Commercial Spaces': The Struggle for Control over Krugersdorp's Retail Trade, 1903 to 1910**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the 1890s, Krugersdorp was a distinctly 'British' commercial town where white, English-speaking immigrant shopkeepers, many of whom had travelled directly from Britain and some who came from other British colonies, had established a wide range of commercial enterprises in the town. They sold their wares mainly to the white, English-speaking working-class and middle-class residents. Many of their shops were located around the Market Square in the Central Business District (CBD) and along the main streets that ran southwards from the CBD towards the mines. By the turn of the century and after the South African War, their monopoly over this prime commercial space was increasingly threatened by Indian traders who began to set up shop in the heart of the town.

A period of intense conflict followed where these 'British' shopkeepers used a wide variety of tactics to drive Indian shopkeepers out of business, including making accusations that Indians were 'diseased' and required to be 'quarantined' from the rest of Krugersdorp's community. Indians determinedly resisted these pressures and by the end of this period, they were firmly entrenched in the town's CBD as successful entrepreneurs.

It will be argued in this Chapter that this commercial rivalry shaped the commercial spaces of the town and had a profound impact upon the town's residential spaces as well, including the Indian Location, the 'Asiatic Bazaar' and Burghershoop. In this way, the conflict between the British and Indian shopkeepers helped to 'make' Krugersdorp. This Chapter will argue that the changes in the urban and social fabric that resulted from this commercial rivalry can be 'read', in terms of urban semiotics, as a series of spatial and ideological 'quarantines' and that the struggle between these two groups of entrepreneurs can usefully be conceptualised both as commercial rivalry and as an

ideological conflict fought in the realm of socio-semiotic space.<sup>1</sup>

The 'quarantine' is a term derived from medical practice where authorities decree a '...period of isolation of an infectious or suspected case, to prevent the spread of disease'.<sup>2</sup> It will be argued here that while white, English-speaking shopkeepers used a number of different approaches to remove the threat of Indian competition, a common thread running through all of these strategies was the deliberate use of the imagery of disease and the need to isolate this danger by means of quarantine.

This Chapter will draw on Swanson's notion of the 'Sanitation Syndrome'<sup>3</sup> and urban semiotics to argue that a new urban form, the Asiatic Bazaar, was proposed by the white Town Council as a 'quarantined' space designed to isolate white residents from the 'infection' of both disease (Bubonic Plague) and Indian commercial competition where the two 'threats' were increasingly and deliberately intertwined in a semiotic project. It was the intention of British shopkeepers that this Indian-occupied space to which all Indians would be confined would be 'read off', insofar as the built environment can constitute a 'text', as a diseased space where the infected Indian body would be writ large. This would lead to the commercial isolation of Indians and ultimately bankruptcy for Indian shopkeepers, driving them out of the country and reinstating the white, British commercial monopoly over the town.

This strategy was determinedly resisted and ultimately thwarted by the Indian residents who were led by Mohandas Gandhi, a young barrister. At the end of this period, the built environment of Krugersdorp had changed in a number of ways. Firstly, its prime

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos (eds.), *The City and the Sign: an Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986; K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1960; A. Rappaport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment, a Non-Verbal Communication Approach*, 1990, University of Arizona Press, Tucson and B. Hodge and G. Kress, *Social Semiotics*, Polity, Oxford, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> B. Cape and P. Dobson, *Bailliere's Nurses' Dictionary*, Eighteenth edition, Bailliere Tindall, London, 1974, p. 279. See also C. Kassner, *Communicable Diseases in the African Continent*, Drakensberg Press, Mobeni, 1981, p. 8 and A. O. Lucas and H. M. Gilles, *A Short Textbook of Preventive Medicine for the Tropics*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1981, p. 31, where quarantine is defined as 'surveillance' of 'contacts' during the maximal incubation period of the infection.

<sup>3</sup> M. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900–1909' ('Sanitation Syndrome'), *Journal of African History*, 18, 3, 1977, pp. 387–410.

commercial space around the Market Square was transformed by the penetration of a number of Indian shopkeepers. Secondly, an 'Asiatic Bazaar' was laid out but never occupied, leaving a section of empty space that 'spoke' of the success of Indian resistance. Thirdly, attempts to remove the Indians to a distant Emergency Camp and destroy the Indian Location failed and the Indian residents remained entrenched in a commercially attractive area close to the railways and white working-class residences. The high visibility of the location and its shops 'spoke' of Indian resilience and determination.

### **Indian Immigration to Krugersdorp in the Late 1800s**

Indian traders were overwhelming Gujarati-speaking Muslims who came to be known as 'passenger Indians' because they paid for their own passage to Natal from 1860 onwards. They followed in the wake of the mainly indentured Indian labourers, who were mostly Hindu and came from various parts of India, to work in the sugar-cane plantations in that colony.<sup>4</sup> At first these Indian merchants and traders focused on selling goods to the indentured labourers<sup>5</sup> but soon they diversified to sell to African customers as well. Steadily, over time, they also began to attract white customers, particularly those of a 'poorer class' who could not afford the more expensive white retailers in Natal's towns.<sup>6</sup>

When these Indians began to establish themselves commercially in the Transvaal, President Kruger became ambivalent towards them. Pillay noted that while Kruger, like

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<sup>4</sup> G. Klein, 'South Africans of Gujarati-Indian Descent: Cultural, Structural, and Ideological Dynamics within their Community', ('South Africans of Gujarati-Indian Descent'), PhD thesis, Temple University, 1987, published under University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p. 2. 95% of 'Passenger Indians' came from the state of Gujarati on the west coast of India, north of Bombay while 90% of indentured Indians were Hindu. See also Union Government (U.G.) 21, *Asiatic Inquiry Commission*, 1921, pp. 2–3.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Bhana and B. Pachai (eds.), *A Documentary History of Indian South Africans, (Indian South Africans)*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1984, p. 31, Document 23: 'Durban Merchants plead for Sunday Trading', petitions submitted on 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 1866 to allow Indian traders to keep stores open on Sundays for the benefit of 'Coolies' unable to purchase goods during the week

<sup>6</sup> Indian traders argued that they provided a service to poorer whites, for example, see Bhana and Pachai (eds.), *Indian South Africans*, p. 105, Document 42, 'Petition by Indians at the time of Union'. The petition submitted in 1909 by a number of Indian organisations noted that the 'Indian trader, by thrifty, honest and industrious habits, has proved himself a useful agent in meeting the humble wants of those who are less fortunate in their means'.

most of the white Afrikaans-speaking residents of the Trekker Republics saw Indians as an alien and inferior 'race' that could not be allowed to own land or vote in his state, he did acknowledge that they provided 'a reasonable service at reasonable prices for poor burghers'.<sup>7</sup> A compromise was, thus, struck whereby Indians could reside and trade in the Transvaal but would be confined to 'locations' as defined by Law 3 of 1885 which would be located outside but near to white residential and commercial spaces (see Chapter Three).

Indian traders in the Transvaal initially focused mainly on trading with Africans in what was known as 'kaffir truck', that is, goods that were wanted by African farm workers, town workers, and miners. In this way they served an important function for the rural notables, the Dutch-speaking white, agriculturally-based elite that dominated the Republic. According to Klein, these Indian traders constituted a 'middleman minority' as 'go-betweens' between '...elites and masses' filling 'buffer roles'.<sup>8</sup>

Klein uses status gap theory to offer an explanation for the tolerance by the Transvaal government of Indian traders: 'dominant groups do not wish to be demeaned by interacting in a face-to-face way with a subordinate majority' so 'outsiders' are recruited to fill this role.<sup>9</sup> Middlemen minorities also enabled the white Boer 'dominants' to retain their 'aura of superiority' and had the added advantage of helping to divert grievances among the black 'subordinates' towards these minorities who became 'scapegoats', protecting the Boer elite and entrenching its power.

Indian traders as 'middlemen minorities' were also valued by international mining capital on the Witwatersrand after 1886, as they were able to sell goods to workers at a lower price so that capitalists were able to reduce the wages of their workers and hence their labour costs. The mining capitalists on the Witwatersrand, suggests Klein, benefited from the presence of Indian traders near the mines as they provided a service that the mine owners themselves were reluctant to offer.

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<sup>7</sup> B. Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal*, (*British Indians in the Transvaal*), Longman, London, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Klein, 'South Africans of Gujerati-Indian descent', pp. 35–7.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

Indians also served as 'lightning conductors' for black workers' grievances as Africans tended to clash with Indian traders whenever prices increased, rather than blame the hegemonic socio-economic capitalist infrastructure. Indians, thus, became a human face and a target for exploited African workers who would accuse Indian traders of lining their pockets rather than blame the mining industry when they struggled to buy basic necessities.<sup>10</sup> Klein also suggests that manufacturing capitalists benefited from the greater competition that Indian traders offered to other, especially white, traders. This led to 'more rapid selling of capitalist class goods, owing to a greater number of sellers, their longer working hours and dispersion into rural areas'.<sup>11</sup>

Klein explains why Indians came to occupy this economic and social niche by pointing out that as members of an 'out-group', immigrant minorities faced 'societal hostility' and their prospects for 'employment in the mainstream economy were severely limited', forcing these minorities into 'easy-to-liquidate lines of business'.<sup>12</sup> Indians were not allowed to own property in the Transvaal and found it very difficult to obtain employment in the formal economy. Self-employment was the only way to make a living and, like European Jews who 'epitomise the middleman minority', trading activities drew on the benefits of social networks based on ethnic solidarity such as 'low interest loans, credit, labour assistance, and needed information'.<sup>13</sup> This enabled middleman minorities to become 'strong competitors in small business operations', particularly if values such as thriftiness and a strong work ethic were adopted, as they were by both Jewish and Indian traders in these situations. Middleman minorities, in this process,

...form a distinct community separate from the recipient community,  
through language, values and religious beliefs, cultivate a high

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40. Klein draws heavily on E. Bonacich, 'A Theory of Middleman Minorities', in *American Sociological Review*, 38, October, 1973, pp. 583–594, and E. Bonachich and J. Modell, *The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980, especially, pp. 20–1.

<sup>13</sup> Klein, p. 39.

degree of internal solidarity through kinship ties, school and religious organisations and preference for endogamy...<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately this inward focus and ethnic solidarity meant that the social hostility was deepened as the middleman minority became increasingly criticised for 'clannishness' and for a series of stereotypical traits, such as its 'economic shrewdness'. As highly visible groups that were also relatively economically successful and vulnerable, such out-groups became an 'easy target and ideal scapegoat for deeper frustration and societal problems'.<sup>15</sup> Indian traders, as will be discussed, came to be branded as 'aliens' who took money out of the country like parasites who were not committed to their host countries. White traders, who realised that Indian traders were effective competitors, exploited these prejudices in an attempt to drive Indian traders away from the Transvaal. These white shopkeepers were even prepared to use religion to isolate and destroy their Indian commercial rivals.

### **The Indian Location and Burghershoop, 1897**

In 1885, just prior to the establishment of the Rand, a petition by 'English' traders was presented to the Volksraad that declared that 'Christians' needed to combine to isolate 'Mohammedans'.<sup>16</sup> Such pressures were partly successful in undermining Indian commercial rivalry when Law 3 or the *Koelie Wet* (a derogatory phrase meaning literally 'Coolie Law') was passed in the same year, which confined Indians, 'Malays' and 'Arabs' to 'locations' that were to be established close to the urban areas of the Transvaal. The law prohibited Indians from owning property anywhere in the Transvaal.<sup>17</sup> The London Convention of 1884, however, required that the rights of Indians, as British subjects, had to be respected and this provided a crucial legal space for Indian shopkeepers that, as Chapter Three pointed out, could be exploited to their advantage.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37. Klein also draws from J. Turner and E. Bonacich, 'Towards a Composite Theory of Middleman Minorities', *Ethnicity*, 7, 1980, pp. 144–158.

<sup>15</sup> Pillay, *British Indians*, p. 39.

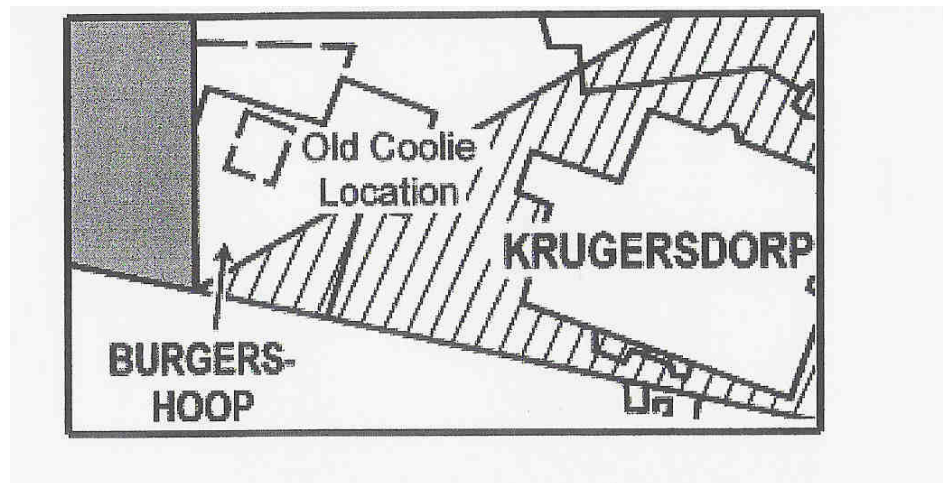
<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

A number of Locations were, thus, established close to the white towns of the Transvaal. In the case of Krugersdorp, Indians were, at first, accommodated in the African Location ('Kafir Locatie') until their numbers were sufficient to justify the expense of establishing their own location. When the Indian Location ('Koelie Locatie') was eventually established, in 1897, it was placed alongside Burghershoop (**see Map Eleven**).

Burghershoop had been laid out in the same year, as a residence for marginalised ex-'bywoners' and farmers, referred to by Kruger as 'arme burghers' ('poor citizens').<sup>18</sup> The Indian Location was not situated in a white residential or commercial area but it was, nonetheless, well-suited to commercial enterprise as it was close to the railways, in walking distance from white miners' residences in the Stand Township, middle-class housewives from Luipaardsvlei Township, and had a 'captive' market of poor burghers.

#### **Map Eleven: The Indian Location and Burghershoop**



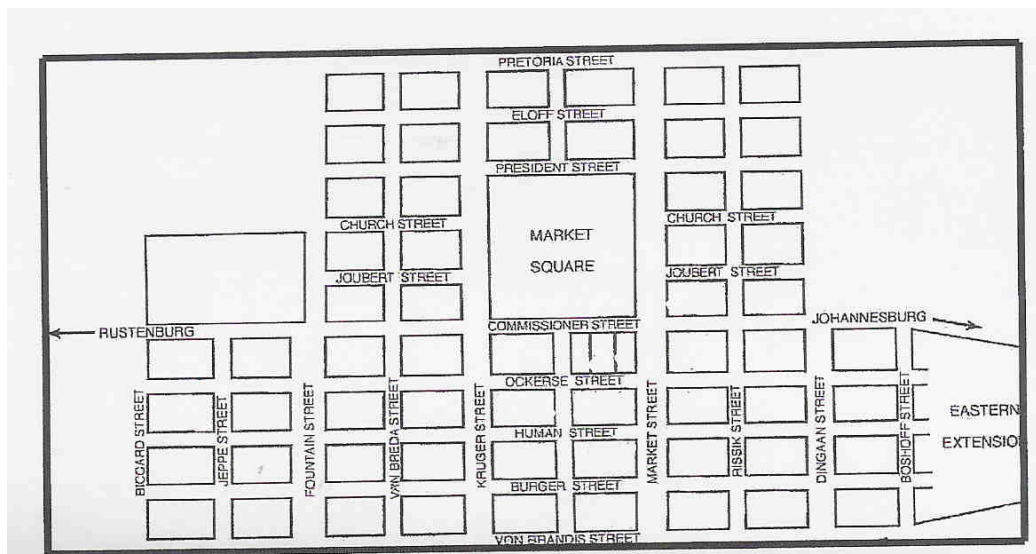
Source: U.G. 50, 1935, Report of the Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Act Commission, 1935, Appendix.

Notwithstanding this relatively advantageous commercial position, the more successful and ambitious Indian shopkeepers had their eye on the Market Square, a prime commercial space in the heart of the town. This was where the middle- and working-

<sup>18</sup> J. Henning, 'The Evolution, Land Use and Land Use Patterns of Krugersdorp', BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1963, p. 20.

class residents and the local farmers did most of their shopping, and where the real money was to be made. The Market Square was also where the banks, law courts and government offices were to be found. Shops in the vicinity thus enjoyed extensive patronage by visitors who had come to the centre of the town to pay licence fees, fines, conduct legal transactions and deposit money. This 'side trade'<sup>19</sup> brought in substantial additional income and made the Market Square particularly desirable (see Map Twelve).

**Map Twelve: The Market Square in Krugersdorp**



Source: J. Henning, 'The Evolution, Land Use and Land Use Patterns of Krugersdorp', BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1963, p. 27.

### **Indian Traders Penetrate Krugersdorp's CBD**

Krugersdorp's Indians had already penetrated into 'white' commercial space as early as 1899 when three Indian shopkeepers, all licensed general dealers, set up shop around

<sup>19</sup> For more on the importance of the location of commercial spaces in attracting 'side trade' see N. Spanoudes, 'Patterns and Processes of Cafe' Retailing in Johannesburg since 1893', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988, especially pp. 37–52.

<sup>20</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 July 1899, 'General'.

the town,<sup>20</sup> at least one of which located himself in the town's CBD. They were able to flaunt the local authorities because, as Pillay pointed out, the 1885 'Koelie Wet' had all the hallmarks of 'hastily drawn legislation'<sup>21</sup> and did not state clearly whether Indians had to be confined to locations for residential purposes only or whether they had to be restricted to these locations for trading purposes as well. The law also did not provide for any penalties for infringements.<sup>22</sup>

It is not clear how Indians acquired access to these stands but they may have taken advantage of the poorer and more desperate British white shopkeepers who sold or rented their shops to local Indians as the onset of war grew increasingly likely. This penetration of white commercial space upset the wealthier white shopkeepers and landlords and one local landowner actually offered a shop rent free to any white shopkeeper as a 'protest against the advent of the third Coolie shopkeeper' in the town.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless many white shopkeepers decided to rent out their shops and just before the outbreak of war, there were five Indians in the town, each with his own business, who held eight trading licences altogether.<sup>24</sup> All these licences were 'held by Indian traders in the name of white men'.<sup>25</sup> This figure represents one quarter of the twenty-one Indian traders who operated in the Krugersdorp District and who possessed twenty-four trading licences between them.<sup>26</sup>

This commercial advantage came to an end, however, when the South African War broke out and Indians, like their British counterparts, had to make their way to the coastal towns to wait out the war. Indians appear to have begun to drift back to Krugersdorp (or perhaps some never left), shortly after the British took over Krugersdorp, as the Location appears to have been occupied in July 1901.<sup>27</sup> There

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<sup>21</sup> Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 July 1899, 'General'.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, 'The Other Man's View', letter from a 'Representative' of the

'Indian Opinion', Johannesburg, dated 27 June 1905.

<sup>27</sup> Archives of the Colonial Secretary (CS) Vol. 124, File 0543, Report on Krugersdorp dated 1 July 1901.

appears also to have been an intriguing 'ethnic blurring' between Africans and Indians at this point. In September 1902, the Sanitary Inspector reported that most of the '...natives have been removed from the Coolie Location and the sanitation of the place is much better'.<sup>28</sup> This statement indicates that these two communities easily integrated and somewhat ambiguously seems to imply that Africans, not Indians, caused the location to be unsanitary. An Indian shopkeeper who had set up shop in the Native Location was subsequently asked to leave the site as it was not 'desirable' for an Indian to trade in an African location.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from these two incidents, Indians and Africans did not occupy one another's locations and no overt political or social relationships seem to have developed between them. Indians, instead, kept some distance from Africans and demanded greater 'privileges' as a 'higher civilisation' and as 'British subjects'. This unfortunate strategy largely prevented these subaltern groups from combining against their oppressors. As pointed out earlier, Indians may well have been the target of hostility among many Africans who would have blamed them for high prices.

It is not clear whether or not Indians still occupied shops in the town during or shortly after the war as the evidence is contradictory. For example, when Germiston's white shopkeepers took steps to remove the 'Asiatics' from the town's CBD, the *East Rand Express* pointed out, in October, 1902, that 'Krugersdorp is also taking action in the same matter'.<sup>30</sup> Yet the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce made no mention of Indian penetration of the town at its meeting in April 1903, the earliest meeting recorded after the War.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Krugersdorp Asiatic Bazaar**

In May 1903, the Chamber of Commerce gave its approval to the new legislative

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<sup>28</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 September 1902, 'Report of C. Alexander, Sanitary Inspector'.

<sup>29</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 31 December 1904, 'Public Health Committee'. The Indian shopkeeper claimed that the 'Health Board', a limited form of local government established briefly after the South African War, had given him permission to build there and that the building was worth 500 pounds.

<sup>30</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 4 October 1902, 'Notes on Current News', 'Asiatic Traders'.

<sup>31</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 April 1903, 'General Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce'.

proposals that would establish Indian 'bazaars' at some distance away from the towns yet there was still no indication that Indian shops had been recently in the town or that these had been removed.<sup>32</sup> There was some concern that the proposed law seemed to allow 'civilised' Indians to trade in the town and the Chairman felt that it could lead to abuses as it was 'difficult to decide whether an Indian was civilised or not (Hear, hear)' so it was preferred that they '...should all be put together and confined to a bazaar'.<sup>33</sup> Even at this point, no reference was made to Indians actually trading in the town although the Chamber made it clear that English-speaking shopkeepers did not want this. Rather Indians needed to be confined, for residential and commercial purposes, to a specially-designed space, the 'Asiatic Bazaar'.

The Asiatic Bazaar system was a new urban form that was introduced by the Milner Administration in an unsatisfactory compromise after it was placed under considerable pressure from opposing interests. On the one hand, Indians were British subjects and the British government had placed pressure on the Boer government before the South African War to remove any discriminatory laws and regulations against them. It had, in the process, effectively promised to treat Indians the same as whites after the war and both the Indians in South Africa and the Indian government were determined to ensure that this promise was upheld. On the other hand, the Milner Administration did not want to upset the white population, particularly the English-speaking elements, as it was its goal to attract British immigrants, and lay the foundations for a British colony in the Transvaal. Patrick Duncan, the Colonial Treasurer, explained that,

...any repeal of laws and municipal regulations which affected Indians would embitter whites [and as there was] a need for a large white population in the Transvaal... whites should be given sufficient inducement to settle.<sup>34</sup>

The compromise that was drafted by Godfrey Lagden, a member of Milner's Cabinet and Commissioner of Native Affairs, proposed that,

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<sup>32</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 May 1903, 'Lo, the Poor Indian!'

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> H. Dugmore, 'The Malay Location in the Development of Urban Segregation in Johannesburg, 1901–1922', ('Malay Location'), History Masters Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988, p. 94.

...the lower castes, that is, the majority of Indians, ought to be accommodated in special bazaars where they could trade and reside under regulations of a restrictive but beneficial character.<sup>35</sup>

The word 'bazaar' was deliberately chosen to avoid the negative connotations of the 'location' and the Milner Administration argued that their establishment would help to 'centralise business establishments and [that] buyers would be attracted in numbers'.<sup>36</sup> Indian commentators quickly made it clear that Lagden's 'bazaars' had no resemblance to the commercial spaces of the same name that existed in India. No less a person than Gandhi himself pointed out that Indians would only accept these 'bazaars' if they were placed 'within town limits in a business portion usually frequented by all sections of the community' as they were in India.<sup>37</sup> Thus the Asiatic Bazaar, as envisaged by the Milner Administration, was an urban form that was unacceptable to Indian shopkeepers.

Unlike other locations of other Asiatic Bazaars in other parts of the Rand, the Kugersdorp Asiatic Bazaar was placed in a surprisingly favourable position that was better suited for commercial purposes than the existing Indian Location. It was closer to the railway station and the white working-class residents in the southern part of the Stand Township than the Indian Location. The site was selected by Krugersdorp's Resident Magistrate, the Assistant Engineer of the Public Works Department and Johannesburg's Superintendent of Asiatics. The Health Board approved the site that was placed 'closer to the town than the old location, and [was] situated between the village of Burghershoop and Krugersdorp proper'.<sup>38</sup>

It was positioned on both sides of a major road that ran through Burghershoop and would have attracted a fair amount of trade from visitors to the Charge Office and Police Station that were situated on either side of the Asiatic Bazaar. The Mayor reported that the Town Council objected to the site on the grounds that the Health Board was an undemocratic body that consisted of nominated members and tried as a 'last resort' to

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<sup>35</sup> Pillay, *British Indians in South Africa*, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 143.

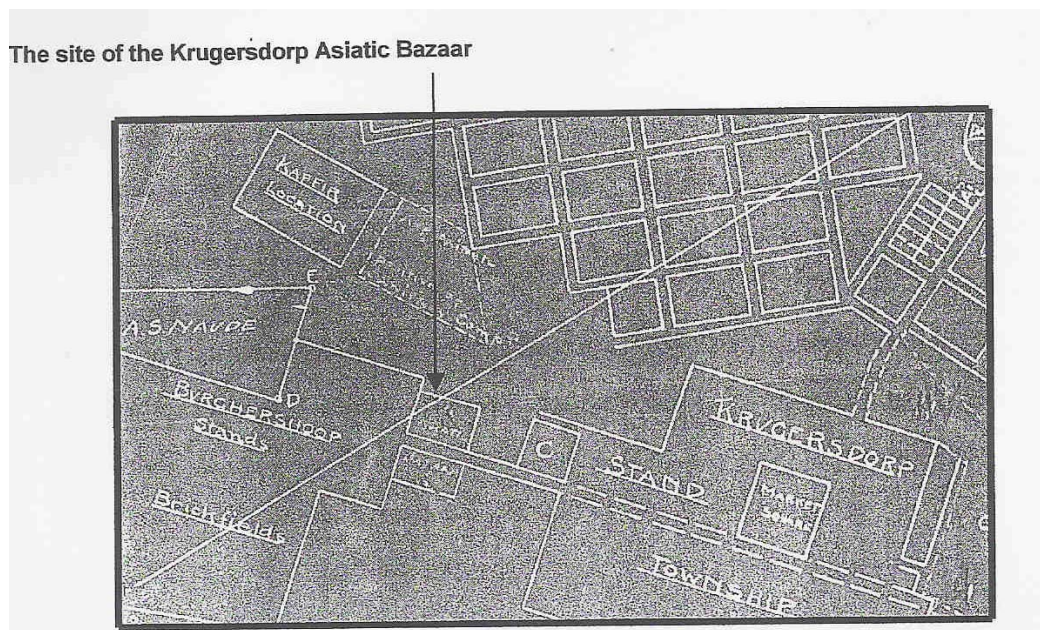
<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Krugersdorp Public Library (KPL), *Mayor's Minute*, (*Mayor's Minute*) 1903–4, Mayor's Report,

have the site declared a 'business bazaar only' so that no Indians could live there, but its efforts were unsuccessful.<sup>39</sup>

The residents of Burghershoop complained about its proximity to their homes but the government's Public Works Department (PWD) claimed that it was the only available site<sup>40</sup> (**see Map Thirteen**). However, this was not really the case because the Assistant Colonial Secretary later wrote that a site further away had originally been chosen but 'owing to the enactments of Government Notice no. 356 of 1903, which compelled Asiatics to trade as well as reside in Bazaars, the site decided upon was too far away from the town [and] [A]nother site was then selected'.<sup>41</sup>

### Map Thirteen: Burghershoop and the Asiatic Bazaar.



p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13 June 1903, 'The Asiatic Bazaar'.

<sup>41</sup> CS Vol. 322, File no 6206/03, letter ACS to Lieutenant-Governor's Office, 6 July 1903.

Source: CAD, TPB 550, TA 1439, Krugersdorp Municipality, Old Native Location.

Some Indian residents appear to have been attracted to the Asiatic Bazaar probably because of its favourable position and paid licences for 'a few stands [for] few months only'.<sup>42</sup> However, no houses or shops were built on these stands and the Asiatic Bazaar remained entirely unoccupied. The Indian community never clearly explained at the time why they rejected the Asiatic Bazaar, but it seems likely that they saw that their confinement to a demarcated area – even a commercially favourable one – could have serious repercussions in the future. Indians seem to have objected in principle to being relegated to a specific space for both residential and business purposes. They effectively boycotted the Asiatic Bazaar as they apparently saw it as a means to isolate them from the wider community and thought that it might perhaps even lead to their eventual repatriation to India.

The local Indian community would have been alarmed by a report in *The Standard, Krugersdorp* in June 1903 that announced that the 'complete segregation of the coolie will soon be an accomplished fact'<sup>43</sup> as all Indians would be confined to the new 'Bazaar' that had just been established. The reaction of Krugersdorp Indians was swift and determined: they approached the offices of 'Abdool Gani' (sic) of the British Indian Association in Johannesburg and, using its letterhead, gathered sixty signatures from Krugersdorp's Indian residents, to

...respectfully protest against the establishment of a Bazaar for Asiatics in Krugersdorp while the whole Indian question is still pending and under consideration of His Majesty's Government.<sup>44</sup>

The petitioners' protest was played down by the Lieutenant-Governor's Office in a letter to the Colonial Secretary pointing out that 'Abdool Gani has been distinctly informed by Lord Milner that the law of the country embodies the principle of Bazaars...[and] will be

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<sup>42</sup> CAD, TPB 542, TA 1408, Report of the Krugersdorp Asiatic Locations Committee of Enquiry, Krugersdorp, 11 April 1910, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13th June 1903, 'The Asiatic Bazaar'.

<sup>44</sup> CS, Vol. 332, File no. 6206/03, Letter from 'Abdool Gani', British Indian Association, to the Colonial Secretary, 17 June 1903, with petition attached.

enforced in every council'.<sup>45</sup> The letter went on to point out, rather defensively, that 'ample time' had been provided for the 'removal of traders' and, disingenuously, that the Administration was acting in the best 'interests of British Indians'.<sup>46</sup> The local newspaper also seemed hurt and surprised at the Indians' reaction and bitterly remarked, in the first hints of disease metaphor,

...That the denizens of the Coolie Location prefer to stew in their own juice, ... [because] they have denounced the sanitary reforms and condemned the Health Board as tyrants of the deepest dye [and this] has resulted in the engagement of a leading attorney to plead their cause... even the kafirs consider themselves speckled lilies compared to the disreputable Indian.<sup>47</sup>

### The 'Sanitation Syndrome'

The Chief Sanitary Inspector, James Munsie,<sup>48</sup> then opportunely presented an astonishingly damning report on the Indian Location. His lurid language exemplifies Swanson's 'Sanitation Syndrome', that is, '... a rationale for economic jealousy – the unemployment fears of white artisans and the trading rivalry of white shopkeepers.'<sup>49</sup> Munsie described the Indian Location as follows in July 1903:

...The habits of these people appear to me to be hopelessly and incurably filthy and their dwellings at night would not be a healthy roost for *aasvogels* [vultures]. I feel sure that the next epidemic which may unhappily occur in this place, will find a rich breeding-ground there, and a focus point for infecting the whole, surrounding area.... In my experience, I have never before visited such a museum of filth and garbage, nor smelt a more appalling aggregation of stenches as I found there.<sup>50</sup>

Swanson argued that many white residents and white officials actually 'internalised' this

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, letter, Lieutenant-Governor's Office to Assistant Colonial Secretary, 14 July 1903.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 July 1903, 'Street Whispers'.

<sup>48</sup> Munsie was a popular member of the middle-class Caledonian Society in the town to which some shopkeepers and Town Councillors also belonged (see Appendix Two).

<sup>49</sup> Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome' p. 390.

<sup>50</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 2 July 1903, 'The Krugersdorp Location Report'.

<sup>51</sup> Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome', pp. 387 and 390.

'Sanitation Syndrome' so that they came to conceive of Indians 'in the imagery of infection and epidemic disease'.<sup>51</sup> This belief became a 'force in its own right' with causative power rather than a mere cynical tool used to advance the interest of British shopkeepers. This may well have been the case for James Munsie who was a person of considerable integrity (the African residents of 'Munsieville', established a few years later, actually requested that the location be named after him) and who seems to have been unlikely to have cynically abused his position for such a purpose.

It appears, however, that at least some Indians living in Krugersdorp's Location provided grist for the mill of Munsie's accusations through their unsanitary lifestyle. Munsie had, for example, found tinned foods stored in an outbuilding that served as both a bath and as a urinal. In another case, a room was used as a 'bedroom, kitchen, stable, store, dog-kennel and fowl-house'.<sup>52</sup>

Poverty was, of course, responsible for many of the conditions described by Munsie. There were three hundred Indians living in the location, and they were packed into just fifty wood-and-iron houses. These houses were, thus, likely to be small, cramped and overcrowded with storage space at a premium. This sort of overcrowding would have deeply concerned officials like Munsie who had been influenced by Edwardian medical writings on the harmful effects of 'polluted air' in sleeping areas that did not allow for the circulation of air.<sup>53</sup>

Munsie would have found it appalling that vegetables were kept in the vicinity of sleeping Indians separated only by a 'flimsy' partition, as if somehow noxious vapours would emanate from these Indians and penetrate into the produce that would later be sold to white customers. White readers, who were also influenced by these beliefs, would have been horrified at these descriptions of the Indian location since Krugersdorp's white residents, officials and shopkeepers had similar views about Indian residents and Indian traders to their counterparts in other Rand and Transvaal towns. It

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<sup>52</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 2 July 1903, 'The Krugersdorp Location Report'.

<sup>53</sup> See E. Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895–1919*, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1986. See also, for example, *Mayor's Minute*, 1908–9, Report of the Medical Officer of Health,

will be useful, at this point, to consider developments in some of these towns for comparative purposes.

### **Reactions to Indian Commercial Penetration in Select Transvaal Towns**

Boksburg, a town roughly the same size as Krugersdorp had a similar experience to Krugersdorp concerning Indian commercial penetration of the town and its local authorities reacted in a broadly similar way. The Boksburg Health Board wanted its Indian residents to move to the site for an Asiatic Bazaar called 'One Tree Hill' about a mile and a half from its Market Square. As in Krugersdorp's case, local officials claimed that the site was located in a 'lofty and healthy spot' but unlike Krugersdorp, this site was too far off to allow the Asiatics to obtain their 'fair share of the trade of the town'.<sup>54</sup> Under pressure from Indian shopkeepers the Colonial Secretary recommended the existing Indian location be turned into an Asiatic Bazaar. A new Health Board was formed out of more accommodating nominated members that supported the Colonial Secretary's views.

The East Rand Vigilance Association (ERVA), composed mostly of white shopkeepers, opposed this decision. Although it became a leading anti-Indian body, this organisation was originally formed in 1902 to address concerns over the Milner Administration's favouring of Johannesburg's interests over the rest of the Rand on a number of commercial issues.<sup>55</sup> The Health Board ignored these demands and declared that the existing location must be converted into a 'permanent Asiatic Bazaar'.<sup>56</sup> This site was near a middle-class suburb of Vogelfontein and a mere 'stone's throw from the town'.<sup>57</sup> The ERVA raised arguments about the 'insanitary' Indians that were very similar to those put forward by the Chief Sanitary Inspector in Krugersdorp:

Why Boksburg should have thrust on it against its will a location of uncleanly Indians right against a fashionable residential suburb passes knowledge. Their presence will breed disease among the

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for the year ending the 30 October 1909, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 16 July 1903, 'Boksburg's Asiatic Bazaar'.

<sup>55</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 11 October 1902, 'Vigilance Association'.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

white inhabitants, and also depreciate in value every stand to the west of the Lake.<sup>58</sup>

The ERVA and the Boksburg Chamber of Commerce were able to force a suspension of the laying out of an Asiatic Bazaar on the location site until the Colonial Secretary himself came to visit the town. A compromise solution was put forward that a new site at a similar distance, would be found to the south of the town. The Colonial Secretary visited the town and proposed that the matter stand over until a Town Council was elected.<sup>59</sup>

The promulgation of Asiatic Bazaars was, thus, bitterly contested by Indian shopkeepers and white shopkeepers on both sides of the Rand. Similar protests arose in a number of Transvaal towns. The Indian Committee in Heidelberg secured the services of an attorney who pointed out that the Asiatic Bazaar was situated a mile and a half from the Market Square and was 'not likely to attract any white trade'.<sup>60</sup> Klerksdorp's Indian Association reported that the site chosen for their bazaar was 'not suitable for trading purposes' as the only nearby residents were 'a few poor Dutch inhabitants'.<sup>61</sup> Pietersburg's bazaar was no less than two miles away from the Market Square and was furthermore in an insanitary location.<sup>62</sup>

Krugersdorp's Asiatic Bazaar was not placed far from white residential areas unlike these examples from Boksburg and Heidelberg so it would be more useful, for comparative purposes, to consider towns where the bazaars were located at sites similar to Krugersdorp. Rustenburg, Carolina, Belfast and Lichtenburg all had bazaars that were much closer to white areas but Indians objected, with rich irony given the accusations of the alleged 'uncleanliness of Indians, to the insanitary conditions of these sites. In Potchefstroom, where Indians were already well entrenched in the Market Square since before the South African war, the local Indian Association adopted a more

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<sup>58</sup> *East Rand Express*, 5 September 1903, 'Boksburg Asiatic Bazaar'.

<sup>59</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 26 November 1903, 'Boksburg Indian Bazaar, A Further Step'.

<sup>60</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 19 November 1903, 'Report on Locations in the Transvaal'.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

principled objection and condemned proposals to 'segregate Asiatic traders' as 'unjust'.<sup>63</sup>

The Colonial Secretary, Sir Patrick Duncan, may have been responding to these protests by Indians in Transvaal towns when he proposed an amendment to Proclamation 356 of 1903 (the Asiatic Bazaar Bill) and the Government Notice no. 356 of 8 April 1903 that, between them, provided the legislative basis for Asiatic Bazaars. He suggested that these laws should be amended to allow 'Asiatic Traders' who were

...*bona fide* carrying on trade at or immediately before the commencement of hostilities, and in places not specifically set apart by the Government, even though such traders may not have held the licences required by law for such trading.<sup>64</sup>

This proposal provoked a strong reaction from white mercantile interests across the Rand as Indian shopkeepers had penetrated most towns in the Transvaal on a small scale, and white traders believed that allowing them to continue to do so would constitute the thin edge of the wedge that could lead ultimately to a full-scale Indian 'invasion' of their commercial spaces. It would be difficult, to say the least, to characterise Indians as sources of contagion who should be forced to keep their business and homes in an Asiatic Bazaar, if some of their number were allowed to trade in the heart of white commercial districts of Transvaal towns. On the East Rand, the ERVA held an emergency meeting to condemn the amendment and warned that the proposal would be 'seriously detrimental to the interests of white traders, and a menace to the whole European population'.<sup>65</sup>

A White League in Fordsburg passed a resolution that the 'Administration be... urged to carry out laws excluding Asiatics, and more particularly to deal with Asiatics who have been and are carrying on business contrary to the laws of the country'.<sup>66</sup> Krugersdorp's

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<sup>63</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 6 August 1903, 'Potchefstroom Indians Protest Against Segregation'.

<sup>64</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 5 December 1903, 'Another Tussle'.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Transvaal Leader*, 6 November 1903, 'The White League'.

Chamber of Commerce commented that Indians had obtained and were still obtaining stands from 'white agents' in the town and that 'if this sort of thing goes on, one shall be having a coolie shop in every centre and a Chinaman's shop on every corner'.<sup>67</sup>

At a Municipal Congress held in late February, to which Krugersdorp sent a number of representatives, delegates voted nearly unanimously to force Indians out of the Transvaal towns but also agreed to offer 'fair compensation' to all those Indians who traded outside the locations under licences issued by the Transvaal government.<sup>68</sup> Under this pressure, the Colonial Secretary agreed to appoint a public commission to investigate the matter further in February 1904.<sup>69</sup>

### **Bubonic Plague, 1904**

The outbreak of Bubonic Plague in Johannesburg's Indian Location, on 19 March 1904, enabled the white shopkeepers on the Rand to move from tentative associations of Indians with disease to a full-bodied identification of Indians as plague carriers who posed a real threat to white residents. In the process, language associated with disease became much more dense and frequent in all the Rand's newspapers.

The Johannesburg Town Council immediately removed the Indians from the Indian location to a site some eighteen miles from the town and burnt the location to the ground.<sup>70</sup> The use of fire as a cleansing force to destroy Indian homes, shops, furniture, goods, and memories, was saturated with the medieval hysteria of witch-burning. This fire marked a profound change in how Indians were seen by the wider white public.

The Krugersdorp Town Council could not have failed to be impressed by the speed and

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<sup>67</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 September 1903, 'Chamber of Commerce'.

<sup>68</sup> *Indian Opinion*, 25 February 1904, 'The Municipal Conference and the Indian Trader'.

<sup>69</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 February 1904, 'Asiatic Traders'.

<sup>70</sup> Dugmore, 'Becoming Coloured', pp. 101–2.

simplicity with which Johannesburg had solved its 'Indian Problem'. It wasted no time in placing its own sweeping health by-laws into 'full force and effect' to effectively quarantine Indians from white residents.<sup>71</sup> They did this by physically driving allegedly 'unclean' Indian bodies into a confined, isolated space away from 'clean' white bodies.

All Indians from other towns were prohibited from entering the municipality and instructions were given to stationmasters from Johannesburg to Randfontein to put this prohibition into immediate effect.<sup>72</sup> All Indians living outside the Indian Location were ordered into the location unless they held trading licences.<sup>73</sup> The local newspaper called on the Town Council to request the government to grant it the power to 'stop the coolies from hawking their vegetables about'.<sup>74</sup>

The Indians in the location were then subjected to the rigours of Edwardian medical 'science' with all of its obsessions with light and air as they were forced to 'expose all their furniture to the sun's rays' and 'whitewash' their houses.<sup>75</sup> The residents were also subjected to 'midnight inspections' in a dramatic and medically gratuitous touch.<sup>76</sup> Similar actions were taken in Germiston,<sup>77</sup> Boksburg and Springs<sup>78</sup> as hysteria over the Plague grew to fever pitch.

The local Indians complied fully with these measures because resistance would have been futile and because they were as anxious as anyone else to prevent disease from breaking out in the location. The quarantine seriously endangered Indian lives as they were now trapped in a confined space where disease would spread quickly, bringing numerous deaths in its wake. The white shopkeepers were likely to have been delighted by these developments as they promised the economic ruin of their economic rivals. Perhaps, to make sure, the white commercial elite used their control over the

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<sup>71</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 26 March 1904, Municipal Notice no. 30, 'Plague Notice', section 7 of Chapter 3 of the Public Health Bye-laws.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 'The Plague Scare'.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, untitled.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 'The Plague Scare'.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *East Rand Express*, 26 March 1904, 'Plague Outbreak'.

<sup>78</sup> *East Rand Express*, 26 March 1904, 'The Bubonic Plague'.

local Town Council and the opportunity presented to them, to plan the destruction of the location and the forcible expulsion of its residents to a site distant from the town.

To prepare the ground for such drastic action, a public meeting was held in Burghershoop that was addressed by two Councillors who were, probably not coincidentally, also members of the local commercial elite.<sup>79</sup> The Councillors worked up the Burghershoop residents to such a pitch that they threatened that if the Town Council did not remove the Indians from the location, they would do so themselves. The Town Council then claimed it had to move Indians out in order to keep the public peace.<sup>80</sup>

Indians in the location refused to leave, however, and an angry crowd of 300 Indians surrounded the Chief Sanitary Inspector and shouted him down when he tried to announce the Town Council's plans to close the location.<sup>81</sup> Police had to be called in and twelve Indian 'ringleaders' were isolated and arrested. They were charged before the local magistrate who found them guilty of disobeying a lawful order given by the Town Council. The magistrate allowed the men to go free provided that they addressed the Indians who had gathered around the court and persuaded them that they had to leave the location. He warned them that if they failed to do as he suggested, he would be 'very severe with them.'<sup>82</sup> The Indians complied and made their way to a 'Plague Emergency Camp Site' far to the northwest of the town where they were housed in tents.

Other Rand towns took a much less aggressive approach. Germiston's Town Council, for example, set up a 'contact camp' but only Indians 'suspected' of having contracted the Plague were housed there, and by early April the camp had only twenty-one inmates. Some tenements in the town had been demolished and the Town Council was prepared to offer compensation.<sup>83</sup> Boksburg and Springs do not seem to have taken

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<sup>79</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 26 March 1904, untitled.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 April 1904, 'The Coolie Question'.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 9 April 1904, 'The Plague Outbreak'.

<sup>84</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 26 March 1904, 'The Bubonic Plague: Boksburg's Precautions'. See also *The East Rand Express*, 2 April 1904, 'Springs Urban District Council'.

even these limited steps and merely required the disinfection of the Indian residences and shops in their respective locations.<sup>84</sup>

No other town, apart from Johannesburg, in the Transvaal actually moved Indian residents *en masse* out of Indian locations and into a 'Plague' camp as Krugersdorp had done. There was a deliberate attempt to isolate and quarantine Krugersdorp's Indians not because they had actually contracted Bubonic Plague – for they patently had not – but because they posed a clear and present commercial danger for Krugersdorp's embattled white shopkeepers. The action had no medical justification and was cynical in the extreme.

The relative militancy of Krugersdorp's white shopkeepers can be explained in economic terms: the town was worse off than its counterparts to its east because its mining operations were less profitable due to geological reasons, as is discussed in Chapter One. At the same time, Krugersdorp also had one of the largest Indian populations in the Transvaal after Johannesburg and Pretoria.<sup>85</sup> The white shopkeepers felt more vulnerable to Indian competition than their counterparts elsewhere in the Rand and were more determined to use the 'opportunity' presented by the Plague to eliminate Indian shopkeepers for once and for all. They banked on the disgust that the spectacle of the quarantine would evoke in the minds of white residents. They also gambled that white residents would resolve never again to allow Indians to reside near their homes, and never to patronise Indian shopkeepers in the future.

Initially, the white shopkeepers of Krugersdorp must have felt that they had achieved their goals: Indian hawkers could no longer trade within the municipality, Indians could not buy from the Market and no Indians could move across the municipal boundaries. The Indian Location was due to be burnt down at any moment and the Indians were confined to a motley tent town at some distance from the town. In semiotic terms, the

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<sup>85</sup> U.G.32-12, Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911, Report and Annexures, The Government Printing and Stationery Office, Pretoria, 1913, pp. 38–41.

Indian Emergency Camp was itself a sign of the Plague in the eyes of onlookers even though not a single Indian had actually contracted the disease. It was an astonishing and, by all appearances, a complete and utter victory for the white commercial elite. The white shopkeepers' silver clouds had some dark linings, however. The Indian residents refused to accept the Town Council's valuation of their houses and shops in the location and, instead, their lawyer, Mohandas Gandhi hired an independent valuator who set a figure that was twice the Municipality's estimate.<sup>86</sup> The Town Council was strapped for money at that time and could not afford to pay either the Indian's demands for compensation nor could it afford expensive legal fees required to challenge the Indians' valuation in the courts. This led to a stalemate and the location was saved, at least temporarily, from destruction.

The Town Council nonetheless declared that Indians could not return to the location without its permission and insisted that an Asiatic Bazaar be established at the site of the Plague Emergency Camp instead.<sup>87</sup> This would force Indians to live and run businesses in an area at some distance from the town, in a place that was now inextricably associated with disease. Future white customers would shun the place as the 'Plague Camp'. In this way, the white shopkeepers would keep their competitors 'quarantined' from white residents in commercial terms. The location would presumably remain a whitewashed, empty shell, an enforced 'ghost town', until the Council could afford to pay compensation and then it would be destroyed.

Gandhi, however, was not prepared to accede to these plans and advised the location residents to return to their homes and shops. He correctly pointed out that the Council had no right to prevent them from re-occupying the location. This act of defiance anticipated the passive resistance campaigns that were to dominate the Transvaal after 1907, and can be seen a dress rehearsal for these later campaigns. The Town Council was dumbfounded and did nothing as these proud and dignified men, women and children marched silently back to their homes and shops in the location. The local

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<sup>86</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 April 1904, untitled. The Indians' valuation was 1 118 pounds while the Town Council's valuation was 529 pounds.

<sup>87</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 28 May 1904, 'Krugersdorp'.

newspaper was amazed and turned on the Town Council in anger,

condemning it for producing a 'quixotic muddle'.<sup>88</sup> The Town Council's actions were, indeed, *ultra vires* and it had not counted on the spirited resistance of Indian residents who refused to be bullied any longer. They had misunderstood and had underestimated their enemy. As a result, the quarantine had been broken.

Just as Krugersdorp's white shopkeepers were trying to absorb this reversal, more bad news arrived. The Rand Plague Committee, a body that was set up to assist local authorities with the financial costs incurred due to the plague, refused to give the Krugersdorp Town Council any money as no case of Bubonic Plague had been identified in the municipality.<sup>89</sup>

The Committee was prepared to meet half the costs incurred in Germiston because four cases of Plague had occurred there and two people had died.<sup>90</sup> The Committee implied that Krugersdorp's actions were rash in comparison, and so no money was dispensed to the town (although much later, in September 1905, it did provide some money to Krugersdorp's Town Council).<sup>91</sup> The Town Council was then informed by the government that they had acted beyond their powers when they had prohibited Indians from entering the municipality and preventing Indians from attending the local market or from hawking within the municipality. The Town Council had to desist immediately from taking these actions and had to accept the reprimand from the central state.

Another blow came in May 1904, when the Transvaal Supreme Court handed down a decision that seriously undermined the white shopkeepers' attempts to quarantine Indian shopkeepers in Krugersdorp. The case of *Habib Motam v Rex* concerned the right of an Indian shopkeeper in Johannesburg to trade outside a location. The judge held the opinion that if Indians were compelled to trade only in those places 'in which

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<sup>88</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 18 June 1904, untitled.

<sup>89</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 November 1904, untitled. These costs amounted to 342 pounds, a considerable sum of money.

<sup>90</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 9 April 1904, 'The Plague Outbreak'.

they lived and peopled only by people of [their] own race, then [they] might for practical purposes, not trade at all'.<sup>92</sup>

As a result, the judge held that Indians could not be restricted to locations or bazaars for trading purposes, and gave Indians the green light to move into the 'white' towns, a decision that *The Indian Opinion* called 'luminous'.<sup>93</sup> The white commercial elite at Krugersdorp, like their counterparts in the rest of the Transvaal<sup>94</sup>, viewed the judge's decision 'with alarm' and warned that,

...unrestricted trading by Asiatics is against the interests of this country in general, and of the commercial community in particular.<sup>95</sup>

Buffeted by so many reverses, the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce and the Town Council had already resolved, in the previous week, to send delegates to a huge 'Anti-Asiatic Convention' to be held in Pretoria in November 1904, which aimed to protest against the court decision and to put pressure on the Milner Administration to pass new legislation that could prevent Indians from trading in the towns. No less than thirty different towns sent delegates and, with the notable exception of Johannesburg (where influential wholesalers and other wealthy commercial interests benefited from the Indian retailers), passed resolutions condemning any attempt to allow Indian shopkeepers to trade in 'white towns' in the Transvaal.<sup>96</sup>

A representative from Johannesburg defended Indian traders but his protests were drowned out by the rest of the delegates. *The East Rand Express* noted with

<sup>91</sup> *East Rand Express*, 16 September 1905, 'Plague Expenditure'.

<sup>92</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 20 May 1904, untitled.

<sup>93</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 21 May 1904, 'The Test Case'.

<sup>94</sup> The Germiston Chamber of Commerce, for example, stated that it saw the decision as posing a 'serious menace to the white trading community', see *The East Rand Express*, 14 May 1904, 'The Asiatic Decision', 'Germiston Decision'.

<sup>95</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 July 1904, untitled.

<sup>96</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 9 November 1904, untitled.

satisfaction that the 'smaller towns and districts of the Transvaal' had defeated this metropolis on the 'Indian Question' and commented that 'if Johannesburg is the dog and the East Rand the tail, the tail wagged the dog badly'.<sup>97</sup> This was a sentiment that Krugersdorp's white shopkeepers supported wholeheartedly. Their commercial rivalry with Indian shopkeepers took place against a background of an unrelenting recession caused partly by a serious labour shortage on the Witwatersrand that the importation of Chinese indentured labourers was supposed to alleviate. Krugersdorp was probably most severely affected by this recession, as the local mining industry remained far behind the rest of the Rand on most indices (see Chapter One).

### **The Boycott of Indian Shops in Krugersdorp**

The white shopkeepers in Krugersdorp had, by now, grown disillusioned with the legal process. The formal avenues of power, the Town Council's by-laws and the health authorities, had all been invoked to come to the aid of the white commercial elite and had been found wanting. At some point in late 1904, a decision was taken to adopt more informal, 'street fighting' approach to the 'Indian Question'. Their decision was probably inspired by the aggressive action taken in Boksburg by a gathering of white shopkeepers and their supporters that swore to use 'moral suasion' and to 'resist by every possible means' Indian penetration of the town.<sup>98</sup>

White shopkeepers broadened their target to include those white stand holders who leased their stands to Indian shopkeepers in Krugersdorp. A newspaper article remarked that in the 'last few weeks' some 'grasping individuals' have begun to let their premises to Indian shopkeepers in the 'very heart' of the white shopkeeper's 'commercial preserve',<sup>99</sup> and warned that the 'recent acute troubles at Boksburg and Potchefstroom' had now spread to Krugersdorp.<sup>100</sup> White shopkeepers had become so

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<sup>97</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 12 November 1904, 'National Convention'.

<sup>98</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 30 July 1904, 'The Boksburg Vigilantes'.

<sup>99</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 April 1905, 'The Asiatic Invasion'.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

angry at these men that at a public meeting, it was seriously proposed that their names should be written on a blackboard to be carried around the town, 'by a black man with a bell'.<sup>101</sup> The vivid symbolic association with diseases such as leprosy was remarkable as it was now applied to white men who had become the white shopkeepers' enemies.

In June 1905, the white commercial interests in the town formed the Krugersdorp Vigilance Association (KVA) following the example of the East Rand Vigilance Association. Its stated aim was to persuade all whites in the town to refuse 'to deal with, or in any way support the Asiatic'.<sup>102</sup> It made good on the earlier threat and collected the names of all the whites that had leased stands to Indians. These names were published in the local newspaper as an example to other white stand holders (**see Table Five**).<sup>103</sup> The following table, based on this list, illustrates that Indians had penetrated white commercial space on a considerable scale in Krugersdorp and Burghershoop.

So many Indian shopkeepers, artisans, service providers and hawkers, had penetrated the town and suburbs of Krugersdorp that the KVA's actions may have amounted to closing the stable door after the horse had already bolted. The ERVA in Boksburg, by contrast, a year before, had threatened violence against any white person who leased shops to Indians and threatened Indians themselves with an 'accident' should they tried to set up shop in the town.<sup>104</sup> Boksburg was able to persuade the only 'Asiatic' to have obtained a trading licence, a Chinese shopkeeper in Driefontein, to leave, making Boksburg, 'Clean' as the local newspaper put it.<sup>105</sup>

This table also demonstrates a commercial 'pecking order' among Indians where the hawkers seem to be more concentrated in stands on the periphery of the town. Their

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<sup>101</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 May 1905, untitled.

<sup>102</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 24 June, 1905, untitled.

<sup>103</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, untitled.

<sup>104</sup> *East Rand Express*, 23 July 1904, 'The Asiatic Danger'.

<sup>105</sup> *East Rand Express*, 23 July 1904, 'Boksburg Municipality Clean'.

marginal position required them to occupy these stands in large numbers as they could not otherwise afford the rent.

**Table Five: Indian Shopkeepers, Krugersdorp Municipality, 1905**

Name of Indian Shopkeeper	Nature of Business	Area Stand No.	No. on Stand	Name of White Standholder
<b>KRUGERSDORP</b>				
Side, Mohamed, Laloo, L. Koga, V	General Dealer (GD) GD Bootmaker	354	5	Cunningham, W.
Dindi, N.	GD	413	2	Estate Bodenstein
Sullimman	GD	368	3	Pretorius, M.
Saley, J	GD	417	4	Prinsloo, H.
Chatabad, R.	GD	375	4	Smit, J.
Cayee, J.	GD	306	3	du Plessis, D.
Suliman, Ezak	GD	177	1	Jennings, J.
Temol, M.	GD	175	3	Bailie, J.
Suliman, A.	GD	80	3	Curnow, R.
Bilman	GD	-	3	Lombard, E.
Esmail, E.	GD	erf 298	2	v.d. Merwe, J.
Burghershooop				
Mahomed, H. Amod etc. Rantoola, T.	GD hawkers' barber	-	7	Naudé, A.
Mahomed, etc. Charlie, etc.	Hawkers' laundry	-	7	Laguoisie, M.
Bulla, A.	GD	5	2	Cornelius, J.
Hassim, S. Lala	GD barber	37	4	Friedland, L.
Vanim, Mohamed	GD	120	3	Human, J.
Bora, A.	GD	90	2	Robson and Holton
<b>RANDFONTEIN</b>				
not provided	hawkers	-	3	Lazorowitz, J.
not provided	hawkers	-	8	Goldblatt, S.
<b>LUIPAARDSVLEI</b>				
Naidoo, L.	GD	-	2	De Wet
Ramsammy	GD	-	2	Wickham

Sabaya	Laundry	-	2	De Wet
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Source: *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, untitled.

Most of the white stand holders, judging by their surnames, were either Afrikaans/Dutch-speaking or Jewish. Only the builders Robson and Holton were prominent in the town and the rest were obscure individuals who occupied no position of leadership whether in the Town Council, Chamber of Commerce or any other local body. It would be a fair assumption that these white stand holders were economically marginal and may well have been struggling to survive when they leased their stands to local Indians, braving the social stigma and ostracism that they must have anticipated. They would have been able to secure higher rents from Indians than from white tenants and, during a recession, this would have been especially tempting.

Some of the white stand holders defended themselves in exactly these terms. For example, Thompson, who described himself as a 'builder' wrote a letter to the local newspaper where he pointed out that he had not leased his stands to Indians but was tempted to do so because he was

...building with a view to a reasonable return on my money and not for ornamental purposes only... [and] unless some enterprising European thinks it is worth his while to rent the place, I will have to treat applications from others with more consideration.<sup>106</sup>

The KVA was not sympathetic to such pleas and continued to put pressure on white stand holders to dissuade them from leasing to Indian shopkeepers. Their strategy was to hit these white stand holders in their pockets by instituting a boycott of Indian shopkeepers in the town that would make it impossible for these Indians to pay rents to the white stand holders. The KVA tried to persuade white working-class residents to support the boycott by playing up the threat that Indians posed to all whites, not just to shopkeepers, as future competitors for their jobs. The local newspaper published an extract from a Natal newspaper where the writer noted how Indians had penetrated a number of occupations that had previously been held by whites:

...not only is agricultural work wrested from [whites] except on

<sup>106</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 April 1905, untitled.

a large scale, but shops and stores... [and] minor government billets are filled with Indians, vegetables, fruit and eggs [are] ... hawked by them, they are tailors, ... domestic servants, gardeners, grooms and builders.<sup>107</sup>

The KVA, the Chamber of Commerce and the local newspaper constantly harped upon this theme, apparently temporarily abandoning metaphors of disease that had served them less effectively than they had hoped. Instead, economic arguments were used to urge white workers to boycott Indian shopkeepers in order to keep Krugersdorp a 'white town' and the Transvaal a 'White Man's Country'. Their calls to ensure the 'economic survival' of whites nonetheless were still presented in apocalyptic terms and in a sense of a mortal threat that required the isolation of the Indian shopkeeper. A 'boycott' is, after all, a form of economic 'quarantine' as it isolates shopkeepers from their customers.

The KVA must have been encouraged by the successful boycott that took place in Potchefstroom where, as pointed out above, Indian shopkeepers had also penetrated the centre of the town before the South African War. By 1905 Indians '...occupied the whole of one of their best streets' in Potchefstroom and to drive them out, an active campaign of intimidation and boycott was launched. On one Saturday night, a torchlight procession accompanied by a brass band marched down the main street to the Market Square in Potchefstroom where it halted opposite a number of Indian shops. A 'tremendous crowd' soon gathered which included a 'number of ladies' and the 'Dutch were also present in large numbers'.<sup>108</sup> The heterogenous nature of the trade boycott in Potchefstroom, which included all sections of the white community, must have heartened the white commercial community in Krugersdorp and persuaded them that it could be replicated in their own town.

Krugersdorp's white commercial elite did not, at first, adopt such aggressive tactics, however, but attempted to persuade the white community to boycott Indian shopkeepers and buy from them instead. For example, members of the KVA wrote letters to the local newspaper, trying to defend themselves against accusations that

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<sup>107</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13 May 1905, untitled.

they were expensive or inconsiderate to white customers. One letter suggested that Indians sold goods of an inferior quality. Another pointed out that prices were not the point because if,

...we all were... to patronise Asiatic stores for the purpose of saving every ticky possible what would become of the thousands of white employees who are now employed in the white stores ?...When the Asiatic got things in his own hands would he still sell at what to the white people are starvation prices? I think not!<sup>109</sup>

The white shopkeepers often made the point that they hired white shop assistants which provided work for white residents and which was an expensive practice (see also Chapter Eight). They claimed that Indian shopkeepers accepted a standard of living that whites would find intolerable. One white shopkeeper declared that Indians could live on 'a bowl of rice a day',<sup>110</sup> while others complained that Indians sent money out of the country back to their families in India and contributed nothing to the economy.<sup>111</sup> The intention was to portray Indians as parasites draining the life-blood of the country, an image that blended well with metaphors of disease and filth of the 'Sanitation Syndrome'.

Indians also wrote to the local newspaper or to the Natal-based *The Indian Opinion*, which Gandhi started in 1903. *The Standard, Krugersdorp* often printed such letters and also excerpts from the latter Indian newspaper, perhaps in the spirit of 'fairplay' or perhaps because it made good copy and sold newspapers. Whatever the reason, it provided a 'dialogue' between white and Indian shopkeepers that was completely lacking in the town itself.

A remarkable example of such a letter was one from a representative of *The Indian Opinion* already cited earlier, which was given an entire page in *The Standard, Krugersdorp* to mount a systematic and thorough defence of the Krugersdorp Indians' position in economic terms. The writer began by pointing out that there were just 100

<sup>108</sup> *The Indian Opinion*, 18 March 1905, 'The Potchefstroom Demonstration'.

<sup>109</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 September 1905, untitled.

<sup>110</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 15 April, 1905, untitled: 'These Asiatics can live where it is impossible for ordinary white men to exist, and their competition was cut-throat.'

000 Indians in the whole of Southern Africa, most of whom lived in Natal. Collectively these sent 500 000 pounds annually to their families in India which worked out to a mere five pounds per head per annum. At the same time mining companies and other foreign-owned institutions and individuals sent out at least four million pounds a year to 'England, British colonies, Germany and other countries'. The writer further pointed out that Indians would not send money out of the country if they were allowed to buy property and that in the Cape, where they could own property, Indians 'believed in spending money where [they] made it.'<sup>112</sup>

The writer – who may or may not have been an Indian – also rejected the argument that Indians did not contribute to the local economy. He claimed that the average Indian,

... imported goods, he pays railway rates, customs dues, postage and telegraph rates, ... he pays his municipal rates and taxes, he pays his rent, he pays for water and where electric light is used, ... he pays for light. All this money is taken from him and is circulated amongst the community as a whole.<sup>113</sup>

It is difficult to gauge what effects such letters had on the white readers of the newspaper but they may have influenced at least some whites to ignore the boycott against Indian shopkeepers. However, such letters could also have had the opposite effect. For example, the same letter writer, pointed out that,

Jesus Christ was probably a coloured man. I say probably. At any rate, he was sprung from a very mixed race of Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs, and Galileans, whose skins are usually much darker than ours. Would then the people of Krugersdorp, refer Jesus Christ politely to a location?<sup>114</sup>

Such statements must have deeply offended many of Krugersdorp's racist white readers and may explain why *The Standard, Krugersdorp* printed these letters as they were perhaps confident that they would backfire on the letter writers and antagonise the

<sup>111</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, untitled.

<sup>112</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, untitled.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

white readers against Indian shopkeepers. Thus the editor could use the mask of 'fairplay' to give coverage to Indian's letters but then use them selectively so that they could be used to support the boycott. The letter did, however, raise the issue of Indian economic interests in Krugersdorp, suggesting that it was far more modest than the English-speaking shopkeepers claimed it to be. The following section will evaluate both claims in detail to ascertain what the actual position was.

### **Indian Economic Interests in Krugersdorp, 1902–1906**

It would be useful to start with an evaluation of how much of the total retail trade was in the hands of Indian shopkeepers and whether the agitation of Krugersdorp's white shopkeepers was justified in speaking of an Indian 'invasion' of the commercial spaces of the town. The evidence suggests that this was not the case.

Firstly, the total Indian population in the Transvaal had fallen from 15 000 before the South African War to just over 12 000 after the War. Secondly, the number of trading licences held by Indians, while large, were much less than those held by white shopkeepers. Pillay studied the number of trade permits in the Transvaal issued between January and October 1903 and found that 23 000 permits were issued to 'Europeans'. In the slightly shorter period of December 1902 to June 1903, he found that 8 016 permits were issued to Indian traders. Although the periods are not directly comparable, a very rough estimate indicates that whites with trading permits outnumbered Indians by a ratio of 3.5 to 1.<sup>115</sup>

The vast majority of trading permits that were taken out by Indians were by hawkers who mostly directed their activities at Africans and poorer whites on the margins of the towns. More will be said about this subgroup later. It is more useful to compare the trading permits that were issued to shopkeepers in the Indian locations, Asiatic bazaars or in white residential and business districts, to see whether these constituted a threat to white commercial interests. By December 1904, Indian shopkeepers in the Transvaal

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<sup>115</sup> Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal*, p. 162.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

had 581 trading licences compared to white shopkeepers' 4 533, thereby outnumbering the Indian shopkeepers by a ratio of more than eight to one.<sup>116</sup>

When reference was made to the gross monthly turnover of these respective groups of shopkeepers, it quickly becomes clear that the 'Asiatic Menace' of commercial competition was even more exaggerated. In 1904, white shopkeepers had a monthly turnover of £19 606 433 while Indian shopkeepers had to wring a profit out of a meagre turnover of just over a million pounds (£1 040 542 to be exact). The ratio in favour of white shopkeepers to Indian shopkeepers in monthly turnover was thus nineteen to one. All this suggests that Indians hardly constituted an 'invasion' at all and that the white commercial elite's criticism of Indian shopkeepers was greatly exaggerated.

Indians did, however, account for a considerable proportion of the commercial turnover of individual towns and this could explain the hostility that they engendered. Although accounting for just 5.91% of the gross turnover in the Transvaal, Indians accounted for 10% of Pretoria's turnover, 13% of Klerksdorp's turnover, 16% of Standerton's turnover and 18% of Potchefstroom's turnover. On the East Rand, the 'threat' of Indian commercial rivalry was clearly exaggerated as Indians accounted for just 1.3% of Boksburg's gross monthly turnover while Indians accounted for just 0.5% of Germiston's gross monthly turnover.<sup>117</sup>

The figures for Krugersdorp were just 8% and the representative of the *Indian Observer* mentioned earlier pointed out that by July 1905 there were just eleven Indian 'traders' in the town, growing from five before the South African War. There were twenty-one traders in the whole district before the War and this had grown to thirty-two traders thereafter, a total increase of only eleven traders for the entire district. He remarked that it was a

...pitiful thing to see a whole district of many thousands of white men shout in terror because in six months 11 new Indian traders have appeared on the scene, and have spread themselves over

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<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

an area of many hundreds of square miles.<sup>118</sup>

These comments, while broadly accurate, were rather disingenuous in the case of Krugersdorp. The reference to ‘traders’ may refer to ‘general dealers’, in which case the figures seem more or less accurate – according to table above there were twelve such Indian general dealers operating in Krugersdorp proper – but there were an additional seven Indian general dealers in Luipaardsvlei and Burghershoop, adding up to twenty-one general dealers in all. Furthermore, they were hardly spread over a district of many hundreds of square miles but were concentrated into a relatively small urban environment, probably a little over a mile across (see Table Six).

**Table Six: The Total Number of Indians, Divided into Male, Female and Children, and their Distribution across Krugersdorp, 1906.**

Section	Male	Female	Children	Total
Stand Township	44	3	4	51
Luipaardsvlei Township	2	-	-	2
District Township	2	-	-	2
Burghershoop	7	-	1	8
Randfontein	12	-	-	12
Luipaardsvlei	10	3	1	14
Other	14	2	5	21
Subtotal	91	8	11	110
Indian Location	122	8	18	148
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>258</b>

Source: Krugersdorp Public Library, *Mayor's Minute*, 1906–7, *Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector*, p. 52.

In addition many hawkers also lived and operated from stands in the town and these

<sup>118</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, ‘The Other Man's View’.

were concentrated around the Market Square and the most desirable commercial spaces, where many white residents would see them. The white shopkeepers and white residents of Krugersdorp would probably, then, have had grounds for claiming an Indian 'invasion' of their commercial spaces. After all, there were no less than fifteen Indian

shops in one of the chief streets of Krugersdorp.<sup>119</sup> The table above makes it clear that Indians had penetrated the formerly white urban residential and commercial space in considerable numbers.

A further dimension of the perceived threat posed by Indian traders was that they preferred to sell large quantities of cheap goods to secure a reasonable income at a modest profit level. While white shopkeepers preferred mainly to sell smaller quantities of 'luxury' items at high prices and higher profit margins and so, in theory, they were not competitors. Nonetheless, white shopkeepers also sold many of the same articles and Indian shopkeepers regularly undercut their prices. For example, a 1904 Commission estimated that the average turnover of 106 businesses owned by Indian and Chinese traders on the Rand before the South African War was 142 pounds monthly, of which nine pounds was profit.<sup>120</sup> After the war, the average turnover of these businesses had increased slightly to 148 pounds monthly but this was partly due to inflation and profits had declined to just six pounds a month.<sup>121</sup> This was a very modest income indeed, and could only support a family at a very low standard of living.

The higher profits of white shopkeepers came from the higher prices they charged their white customers from among working-class miners and artisans, the marginalised whites of Burghershoop, local farmers and middle-class housewives. All of these groups, at varying standards of living, struggled to make ends meet and they felt, at best, ambivalent when called to boycott Indian shopkeepers in favour of wealthy, white middle-class shopkeepers.

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<sup>119</sup> *East Rand Express*, 1 July 1905, 'Notes on Current News', 'Krugersdorp's Plight'.

<sup>120</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 August 1904, untitled.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

In late 1905, a white customer wrote a letter to the local newspaper that sparked a great deal of controversy. The letter writer, who wished to remain anonymous, pointed out that he had found an article priced at five pounds in a white shopkeeper's premises and then, later, having continued his shopping, came upon the exact same article in an Indian shop at a much cheaper price. He asked,

... does any sane business man expect the public to boycott Asiatic traders at the enormous increases of 50 to 100 percent ? <sup>122</sup>

The writer warned that unless the white shopkeepers 'drop sentiment and show some sort of competition', Indian traders would not only remain in the town, they would multiply. The President of the Chamber of Commerce felt that the letter needed his personal reply. He wrote that there were different grades of goods and the price paid depended upon the grade of the item that was purchased. The Indian shopkeeper, he asserted, sold goods of inferior quality.<sup>123</sup> This hoary myth was not going to convince the cash-strapped white residents of Krugersdorp and another correspondent, or perhaps the original writer, having adopted the *nom de plume* of 'Jef', rejected this claim. The writer said that the public was not so ill-informed as to believe that factories manufactured goods of varying quality and prepared poor quality goods especially for sale to Indians.<sup>124</sup>

### **[Ab]using the Law to Isolate Indian Traders, 1904–1906**

Faced with criticism like this, the white shopkeepers appeared to back off from their strategy of isolating Indian shopkeepers through a boycott and again started to focus on employing the formal powers of the Town Council, to weaken their Indian competitors. A mild recovery in the mining economy had resulted from the influx of large numbers of Chinese mineworkers and all the shopkeepers, white and Indian alike, benefited from the ten percent increase in the total population of the Krugersdorp Municipality from 19

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<sup>122</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 August 1905, untitled.

<sup>123</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 September 1905, untitled.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

483 in 1903–4<sup>125</sup> to 21 000 in 1905–6.<sup>126</sup> This improved economic climate may have blunted the militancy of the white commercial elite and inclined them to return to more orthodox tactics, where they could try to use their influence over the Town Council against their Indian competitors.

The white shopkeepers and their allies continued to dominate the Town Council and J. Seehoff, a local shopkeeper (of 'Meyer and Seehoff', General Dealers), was elected as Mayor for 1906. This, too, could have influenced the adoption of more legalistic tactics. The white commercial elite was by no means intent on softening their attack on Indians, however, and merely shifted their approach. The clear intention was still to remove all of Krugersdorp's Indians to a bazaar or to drive them out of the town altogether.

Krugersdorp's white shopkeepers looked with envy on their East Rand counterparts where in January 1906, it was noted that '[N]either Boksburg, Springs nor Benoni has a single coolie trader, while Germiston is now dealing with its last couple of Chinese trading on stands in Georgetown.'<sup>127</sup> Inspired by this success, the white shopkeepers used their influence in Krugersdorp's Town Council to find ways to put pressure on Indians in the town and those whites that supported them.

In June the Town Council passed a resolution, that was a modification of the 'quarantine' represented by the trade boycott, by announcing that no municipal tender for work or supplies should be accepted from any person or company that leased or hired businesses premises to Indians. It furthermore appealed to the Transvaal Municipal Association to press for legislation that would place the allocation of trading licences to Asiatics firmly under the control of local authorities. The Council pointedly asked for the support of Germiston, Boksburg and Springs Town Councils in this regard and praised the 'example of Boksburg [as] one to be copied'.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, 1903–4, Mayor's Report, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, 1905–6, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, p. 32.

<sup>126</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, 1905–6, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, p. 32.

<sup>127</sup> *East Rand Express*, 10 January 1906, 'Notes on Current News', 'Trading Licences'.

<sup>128</sup> *East Rand Express*, 4 July 1906, 'Notes on Current News', 'Asiatics'.

<sup>129</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 14 July 1906, untitled.

In July, 1906, the Krugersdorp Town Council saw an opportunity to revive its attempts to 'quarantine' Indian shopkeepers as, once again, a petition was accepted from some Burghershoop residents who pointed out that it was,

... undesirable that such a large body of coloured people of most unsanitary habits should reside so close to the suburb of Burghershoop.<sup>129</sup>

The Town Council utilised this petition to revive 'sanitation syndrome' fears in the opening salvo of this new campaign. The Mayor, in his annual report, commented on the 'most unfavourable conditions' in the location and urged that it be moved to a 'more suitable site'.<sup>130</sup> The Public Health Committee was sent to inspect not only the location, but, more ominously, also the Indian-owned shops in the town.

The report vainly tried to portray these Indians in a poor light but on rather slender findings. All the Committee was able to report was that Indian shopkeepers 'habitually obscure light and ventilation in their shops which rendered them unhealthy'. They also complained that upon entering one Indian shop, they found 'three or four Indian men lounging around and expectorating freely'.<sup>131</sup> If anything, these very modest criticisms must have demonstrated the bankruptcy of the 'sanitation syndrome' type argument but this did not stop the Town Council from using this approach.

Later that year the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce demanded tighter immigration laws to prevent the relations of those Indians already resident in the Transvaal from joining their male breadwinners. They claimed that this was aimed at preventing future outbreaks of Bubonic Plague. Their real intention was not only to slow down the increase of Indians in the Transvaal, but possibly to reverse it by driving Indians out of the Transvaal altogether.

Various Bills were tabled to tighten up immigration controls during the Milner and Selborne Administrations, but Indians strongly resisted these. Pressure from the British

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<sup>130</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 12 August 1905, untitled.

<sup>131</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 July 1905, untitled.

government also prevented these laws from being passed by the Transvaal government. The Selborne Administration wished to protect its Chinese indentured labour scheme and believed that, in any case, it would be better to leave such decisions to an elected government, once self-government was granted in 1907.

Confronted by delays in implementing this strategy, the white shopkeepers then switched their point of attack and attempted to use the Town Council to target the hawkers who were the weaker members of the Indian shopkeepers' commercial community. They may have thought that Indian hawkers might be the soft underbelly of the 'Asiatic Menace'. Indian shopkeepers were, in many cases, the sponsors of these hawkers and benefited from this trade which helped them to undersell white shopkeepers.

By tightening up controls over hawking, the turnover of these hawkers would be reduced and this would feed through to the Indian shopkeepers and weaken their ability to compete with white shopkeepers. Hawkers were often deeply indebted to wealthier Indian shopkeepers and the loss of their ability to pay off these debts could be crippling to the Indian shopkeepers. Hawkers also formed the majority of Indian traders in Krugersdorp (**see Table Seven**) and their removal from the commercial loop might have been sufficient to drive the remaining Indians away from the location and out of Krugersdorp altogether.

While Indian hawkers traded mostly with Africans, particularly miners, rather than with white customers, they did knock on the doors of white middle-class and working-class residential homes and attempted to sell their wares to housewives, from time to time. Thus, they posed a commercial threat to white shopkeepers in their own right as they siphoned off considerable amounts of trade from the white shopkeepers due to their low overheads and their mobility.<sup>132</sup> The Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce was

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<sup>132</sup> This argument is made by Tomaselli, R. 'The Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1983, p. 83.

particularly concerned to stop the widespread unlicensed hawking, that was prevalent at the time. For all these reasons, Indian hawkers were deemed to be an appropriate target by the white, commercial elite.

**Table Seven: Categorisation of Indians in Krugersdorp According to Occupation, 1906.**

OCCUPATION	NUMBER OF INDIANS
HAWKERS	125
GENERAL DEALERS AND ASSISTANTS	55
DOMESTIC	14
LAUNDRYMEN	17
HOTEL WAITERS AND COOKS	4
PUMPMEN AND FOREMEN	3
TAILORS	3
PRIESTS	2
MINERAL WATER FACTORY WORKERS	2
GARDENER	1
POST OFFICE WORKER	1
BOOTMAKER	1
BARBER	1
WATCHMAKER	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>230</b>

Source: Krugersdorp Public Library, *Mayor's Minute*, 1906–7, Report of the Chief Sanitary Inspector, p. 52.

What the above table demonstrates is that Indian hawkers made up more than half of the occupations or 125 out of 230 adult Indians (there were a further 28 Indian children in Krugersdorp or a total of 258 Indians). Attacking Indian hawkers thus had the potential of halving Krugersdorp's Indian population. As pointed out earlier, Indian

traders enjoyed a patron–client relationship with hawkers so the white shopkeepers could indirectly weaken their true rivals at the same time. This would leave only a handful of Indians in various occupations for which they posed no serious threat to white residents.

The Chamber drew up draft regulations to curb hawkers and pedlars and passed these onto the Town Council. The guidelines were adopted virtually unchanged by the Town Council, powerfully demonstrating the extent of the white commercial elite's influence over it.<sup>133</sup> The new by-laws stipulated that hawkers had to pay seven pounds for a licence to trade while pedlars had to pay five pounds for a licence. Hawkers and pedlars could remain in one spot for just twenty minutes at a time (the Town Council's limitation was slightly more generous than that of the Chamber of Commerce which recommended only fifteen minutes) to prevent hawkers and pedlars from competing in prime sites for prolonged amounts of time.<sup>134</sup>

Hawkers and pedlars were also prohibited from returning to any site within twenty-four hours. The penalties were harsh: any contravention of the regulations resulted in a ten-pound fine while no less than twenty pounds would have to be paid as a penalty by anyone who was caught hawking without a licence.<sup>135</sup> These regulations amounted to a 'quarantine' over the mobility and direction of movement, of Indian hawkers, constraining them to follow specific 'paths' within certain times. This imposed a colonial 'grid' on the time and space of these itinerant traders. By 'herding' Indian hawkers into specific spaces according to particular times, the white shopkeepers would rob them of most of their commercial advantages. This amounted to an economic quarantine similar to the trade boycott but focus on control over Indian bodies moving through space and time rather than attempting to prevent white bodies from travelling to Indian vendors.

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<sup>133</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 October 1904, untitled.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 20 January 1906, untitled.

## White Storekeepers and the White Commercial Elite Unite

The restrictions imposed on hawkers were supported by white 'storekeepers', as they called themselves, of the West Rand Storekeepers Association who mostly sold to African customers and who operated on Krugersdorp's periphery near the mines. The leadership and probably most of the membership of this body consisted of Jews who seem to have been relatively undercapitalised compared to the 'British' shopkeepers in the town. The Hawkers and Pedlars by-law marks a turning-point in the relationship between these two different groups, which enabled them to combine in order to tackle Indian shopkeepers and Indian hawkers at the same time.

The relations between the white shopkeepers and storekeepers had been hostile before this as the Town Council, which was dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian shopkeepers appeared to have engaged in an economic pogrom against the Jewish, often Lithuanian storekeepers and eating house keepers for alleged infringements of municipal health regulations and trading by-laws. For example, the Town Council had passed a regulation that prevented the owner of a 'kaffir eating house' from running a separate but adjoining 'native trading store' as part of the same structure with a door placed into the partition. The Town Council claimed that this allowed eating house owners to violate the Sunday trading laws by selling goods from the trading store sections (via the door in the partition) to eating house customers on a Sunday. At the time the eating house keepers complained that if they were forced to nail up the partition door, they would be forced to incur unaffordable expenses as they would have to hire an assistant to run one of the sections during the rest of the week.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the grievances that the Jewish storekeepers harboured against their wealthier Anglo-Saxon counterparts, some earlier signs showed the two groups growing closer together. In 1905, a number of white storekeepers approached the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce and appealed for its assistance in dealing with a local mine manager who prohibited indentured Chinese mineworkers from leaving the mine

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<sup>136</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13 March 1906, untitled.

<sup>137</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 February 1905, untitled.

compounds except to buy goods from a Chinese storekeeper who had set up his store just 100 yards from the compound gates. This arrangement hurt these white storekeepers who depended on the Chinese miners for their business. The Chamber of Commerce responded favourably and wrote to the mine manager concerned.<sup>137</sup> This *rapprochement* may have been aided by the experience that the white commercial elite had a few months earlier when it attempted to use the Town Council to harass the improbably named 'Dutchman Naidoo' who ran a tea and coffee room on the outskirts of the town.

The Town Council cancelled Naidoo's licence on the ground that his premises were partially situated on a claim and trading was prohibited on mining ground but they were defeated upon appeal.<sup>138</sup> The Town Council then tried to charge Naidoo for operating an eating house without a licence because he sold bread as well as tea to his black customers, and only whites were allowed to run an eating house.<sup>139</sup> The ubiquitous M. K. Gandhi took up the matter as Naidoo's lawyer, and he advised his client to sell to Chinese miners only because, under the existing by-laws, 'no licence is required for a Chinese Tea Room or an Eating House'.<sup>140</sup>

The Town Council immediately issued by-laws to close this loophole but with the usual bureaucratic delays it took five months to stop the intrepid Naidoo.<sup>141</sup> Clearly it was in the interests of the white shopkeepers to look for allies among the white eating house keepers and storekeepers in order to keep such challenges in check. Indian hawkers challenged both groups and it made sense for the shopkeepers in Krugersdorp commercial centre to co-operate with storekeepers on Krugersdorp's commercial periphery.

### **Gandhi's 1907 *Satyagraha* Campaign**

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<sup>138</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 April 1905, untitled.

<sup>139</sup> CAD, TPB 59, TA 172, letter from the Town Clerk, Krugersdorp Town Council to the Undersecretary, Division II, Pretoria, 28 July 1905.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, letter from M.K. Gandhi to the Town Clerk, Krugersdorp Town Council, 5 June 1905.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, Memo, Assistant Colonial Secretary, 13 February 1906, see also *The Standard, Krugersdorp* 8 November 1905 untitled.

Their chance came when Responsible Government was extended to the Transvaal in 1907. The Het Volk Party won the elections and almost immediately passed a law that required all Indians in the Transvaal to be 'registered', to be fingerprinted and to be forced to carry a 'registration certificate' that they had to produce on demand to the police. These registration certificates were like the passes that Africans had to carry and threatened to place Indians on a par with Africans, a status that had been long demanded by white shopkeepers on the Rand. Indians felt that they would lose their right to trade in the towns and various other concessions that they enjoyed by virtue of their claim to be 'British subjects' and their 'higher civilisation'.<sup>142</sup>

Under Gandhi's leadership 'passive resistance' was launched where Indians would deliberately court arrest in an effort to clog the jails and force the government to back down in the face of massive civil disobedience and moral pressure from India and Britain. When the deadline for registration had passed in October, only a handful of Indians had complied and the government was forced to extend the deadline to the end of the year. Even then, only five hundred and forty-five out of the seven thousand Indians then in the Transvaal, had registered.<sup>143</sup>

To punish these *satyagraha* adherents (those who support passive resistance, literally 'truth force'), the Transvaal government declared that Town Councils would only issue trade licences to those Indians who had registered. The Krugersdorp Town Council decided to use this opportunity to crush the Indian hawkers and pedlars by denying licences to a 'large number of Chinese and Indian hawkers' because 'virtually none had the required papers'.<sup>144</sup> The intimate connection between Indian hawkers and shopkeepers was demonstrated when, on 14 January 1908, the Indian shopkeepers in Krugersdorp closed down their shops for one day to protest against the Town Council's

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<sup>142</sup> Gandhi himself made such claims, see Swan, M., *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 115–7, 143, 167–9.

<sup>144</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 January 1908, untitled.

<sup>145</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 February 1908, untitled.

actions and to support Gandhi's passive resistance.<sup>145</sup>

During the following week, a number of Indian hawkers in Krugersdorp were arrested and jailed for trading without a licence. Two Indian hawkers were subsequently deported which led to an angry meeting of Indians in the Market Square, in the heart of

Krugersdorp.<sup>146</sup> Eventually the hardships of jail, deportation, loss of income and harassment experienced by Indians ended their resistance as it did throughout the Transvaal. Gandhi conceded to an agreement with Smuts whereby Indians would take out registration certificates and, in return, the government would repeal the Act. Indians took out these certificates and regained their trade licences.

### **The White Hawkers' Association**

The Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce had, in the meantime, plotted along new lines by planning to form a White Hawkers' Association and by appealing to white residents to support this group at a public meeting in February 1908.<sup>147</sup> The Chamber particularly targeted white housewives this time, and announced that the 'balcony was to be reserved for the ladies and no smoking was to be allowed in any part of the hall',<sup>148</sup> an unusual prohibition in a time when smoking was a common practice in this male-dominated region of tobacco farmers. The meeting was chaired by Mr Crawford of the Chamber of Commerce who warned the 'white hawkers', a motley group of unemployed whites, that they could only expect the 'public's support' if the 'took the whole initiative themselves [and] supplied a cheap article and provided it systematically'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 February 1905, untitled. Krugersdorp District produced 202 555 pounds

worth of tobacco in that year.

<sup>147</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 11 January 1908, untitled.

<sup>148</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 January 1908, untitled.

<sup>149</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 15 February 1908, untitled.

This ambiguous blessing characterised white shopkeepers' attitudes to their own creation. It quickly became clear that the white shopkeepers were reticent and concerned about how their latest plan would develop and soon afterwards these reservations began to surface. A letter to the local newspaper by 'little shopkeeper' complained that the white hawkers were being 'mollycoddled by the white public' and should prove their worth without 'all this reliance on public meetings to make [their] work

pay'.<sup>150</sup> Much was made of the propensity of the 'white hawkers' to offer credit. This was criticised as a risky business practice that should be discontinued. The President of the White Hawkers' Association defended his members by pointing out that they had, on average, only fifteen pounds of sales 'on the book' and that they were forced to sell on credit because that is what their white customers demanded and got from Indian hawkers.<sup>151</sup>

The white hawkers soon ran into trouble as they could not, in turn, buy goods from the white shopkeepers on credit, as Indian hawkers often did from Indian shopkeepers, and were soon 'financially low'. More seriously, a large part of their potential customers, the 'poor burghers' of Burghershoop and farmers of the surrounding areas, did not give much support to the white hawkers, preferring instead, to support the Indian hawkers. One white hawker complained bitterly

...that the Indian hawker relies exclusively on the Dutch farmer and the greater proportion of the Dutch population for his existence ... they must do their share in assisting in the general struggle of white [versus] Asiatic in trading matters.<sup>152</sup>

Without this support and without credit, the white hawkers struggled to compete with the more experienced and entrenched Indian hawkers. At some point in 1908 they gave up

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<sup>150</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 March 1908, untitled.

<sup>151</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 14 March 1909, untitled.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, Mayor's Report, 1907–8, p. 20.

<sup>154</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 30 July 1910, untitled. See also *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 22 July 1911, untitled. Tomaselli included this law under discriminatory legislation affecting Indians, see Tomaselli, 'Indian Flower Sellers in Johannesburg', p. 221.

the unequal struggle and their Association died 'a natural death'.<sup>153</sup> Some white hawkers may have continued on the margins, but they were no longer a significant commercial force and the Chamber's plan to break the Indian hawkers and, indirectly, strike at the Indian shopkeepers, was in tatters.

The white shopkeepers had further weapons up their sleeves, however, and the Gold Law of 1908,<sup>154</sup> that prohibited trading on 'proclaimed ground', was used to harass Indian and 'Assyrian' hawkers during that year. This law was preferred because the by-laws only provided for a minor fine whereas the Gold Law ensured 'exemplary punishment' and nipped in the bud a potential new competitor to white shopkeepers and storekeepers.<sup>155</sup>

The white shopkeepers also finally managed to launch Krugersdorp's own 'White League' (long after other Rand and country towns) in September, 1908 to 'protect the European from extreme Asiatic competition'.<sup>156</sup> Like its predecessor, the Krugersdorp Vigilance Association, the White League planned to 'prepare a list of all persons having any dealings with Asiatics', including white customers who bought from Indian shops and white standholders who rented stands to Indians.<sup>157</sup> The League would then send letters to the employers of these whites and to all the members of the League in what was meant to be an act of intimidation. What exactly would happen to such whites at this point was not made clear but the threat was clear.

The local newspaper openly supported the League and shed light on how it operated by highlighting an incident in which the League's President, Mr James, approached a local farmer at the Market and asked him to support the League and refrain from buying from Indian shopkeepers. The farmer had apparently been offended and declared that he would 'defy the League and all of its ways'.<sup>158</sup> When the farmer's forage came up for auction at the market it only fetched 2 shillings a bundle instead of the expected 3

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<sup>155</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 22 July 1911, untitled.

<sup>156</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 September 1908, untitled.

<sup>157</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 10 October 1908, 'Krugersdorp White League'.

shillings a bundle and the buyer was from Johannesburg and not a local man. The newspaper commented that the farmer was

... somewhat surprised at the result of his first round with the League and now understands that it means business.<sup>159</sup>

Little was heard about the League, however, over the following eighteen months until, rather dramatically, in June 1910, the local newspaper described how Mr James was seen buying fruit from an Indian hawker. He defended himself by saying that he wanted to buy some fruit and that there were no white traders in the vicinity selling fruit. He asked plaintively, 'what was I to do?' to which the newspaper's editor replied that he should have 'done without!'<sup>160</sup> Eight months later the League declined from an independent body to a sub-committee of the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce.<sup>161</sup> It seemed to have had no impact upon white shopping practices during its short life.

## Conclusion

This Chapter, thus, ends with the Indian shopkeepers very much in the ascendant, apparently firmly entrenched in the town despite nearly a decade of nearly constant manoeuvring by the local white shopkeepers to drive their Indian rivals into a Bazaar, to restrict Indian immigration, to curb the activities of Indian hawkers and to launch boycotts of both the Indian shopkeepers and hawkers through proxy bodies like the Krugersdorp Vigilance Association and the White League.

The Indian residents had to endure their forcible removal to a Plague Emergency Camp and constant threats to destroy their location and force them to live in an Asiatic Bazaar. The Indian community, both Muslim and Hindu, endured accusations that they were filthy and disease-ridden, with considerable dignity and calmness. There was never, at any time, any actual violence perpetrated by Indians against their tormentors and their

<sup>158</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 17 October 1910, untitled.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 June 1910, untitled.

<sup>161</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 18 February 1911, untitled.

example may well have served to inspire the later *satyagraha* movements in the Transvaal.

Far from being driven into bankruptcy and out of Krugersdorp, Indians actually successfully penetrated the town's commercial spaces to an unprecedented degree. The white commercial elite on the Town Council and in the Chamber of Commerce had to resort to new tactics that emphasised a legalistic approach to the challenge of Indian competitors, denying trade licences to Indian shopkeepers and using the courts to restrict Indian competition, particularly in the form of limited liability companies (see Chapter Eight).

There seems to be a number of possible reasons that can explain why the white commercial elite's efforts to 'quarantine' and ruin Indian shopkeepers and hawkers were so singularly unsuccessful. The main reason seems to be the sheer gritty determination of Indians who resisted every single tactic applied against them, whether in the form of a municipal by-law or an informal boycott of their businesses.

Economic factors seem to have played an overwhelmingly important role as white residents struggled during harsh times to make ends meet and preferred to patronise Indian shopkeepers and hawkers because they were cheaper and extended credit. Indians were less likely to use the courts to pursue white debtors and treated even the poorest white customers with respect and dignity, and so earned the genuine gratitude of many hard-pressed whites who became their loyal customers.

There was more to it than this, however, and some of the explanation for the Indian community's survival in Krugersdorp must be rooted in the divisions that existed among the town's white residents. A key, enduring division that existed within the white community was that between the English-speaking and Dutch-speaking residents that was analysed in Chapters Three and Four. While it was argued that a degree of reconciliation and *rapprochement* was achieved by 1904–5, a measure of tension, nonetheless, remained between the 'British' shopkeepers, on one hand, and the 'Boer' residents of the surrounding farms and the poor residents of Burghershoop, on the

other hand.

Furthermore, Indians also offered the newly arrived white middle- and working-class women in the town the convenience of credit, door-to-door visits by hawkers, and a range of goods at a cheaper rate than white shopkeepers, helping them to balance the all-important household budget (see Chapter Seven). By exploiting gender, ethnic and class divisions within the white community, the Indian residents were able to survive and even prosper in a hostile environment where the white commercial elite controlled the Town Council, ran the local newspaper and dominated a range of local institutions, clubs, societies and movements. This was a remarkable achievement.

This Chapter has explored not only this struggle within the social fabric of Krugersdorp's diverse community but also examined an ideological conflict that was fought at the level of symbols. In terms of urban semiotics, Indians successfully resisted a very determined and powerful campaign by the white commercial elite to associate them irrevocably with infectious disease. This was supposed to have been achieved by driving Indian bodies physically into demarcated areas – firstly, the Plague Emergency Camp and secondly the Asiatic Bazaar – where they would be confined and isolated from white bodies in ways that would inextricably associate Indians with disease. This action was described in this Chapter as a 'quarantine', a medical term that describes the isolation of an infected body that is aimed at protecting healthy bodies in the vicinity.

Although the white commercial elite never explicitly referred to the concept of a 'quarantine', it is clear that it wished to isolate Indian traders from white customers. The imagery used by the white shopkeepers was heavily laden with medical terminology associated with disease and infection. Even when referring to the economic dangers that Indians posed to white workers and professionals, the white commercial elite consistently employed the metaphors of disease to the point that it developed into a trope in the dominant discourse relating to Indians used by the Town Council, the local newspaper and by a variety of white organisations.

Yet, it is argued in this Chapter, this semiotic project failed as Indians breached spatial

barriers and boundaries imposed upon their community and scattered throughout the 'white' town, particularly in the prime commercial space around the Market Square. In the process, Indians undermined the 'message' of 'infection' and inverted it so that Indians' commercial success and insertion into the heart of the town and along its main arteries conveyed a message of an organic health. At the same time, it was the white English-speaking shopkeepers whose businesses lost money as white customers openly preferred Indian traders and rejected their call for a boycott of Indian shops. Ironically, the white shopkeepers' plans backfired and they became isolated from their own white customer base, almost as if they had inadvertently 'quarantined' their own businesses, in commercial and ideological terms.