Imperfect Solidarities

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On November 6, 1923, an imprisoned M. K. (Mahatma) Gandhi began to write about his South African protests for his Indian followers. In diaries that soon spawned both a history and an autobiography, he decided to explain the origins of the name of his increasingly effective method of protest: “satyagraha.” He wrote that the term, which he coined during his time living in South Africa (1896–1915), originated in a desire to differentiate his protest politics from those of other movements. Gandhi wrote from his Indian prison cell that referring to the Indian agitation as “passive resistance” had created both confusion and shame. That shame was twofold: first, it was shameful “to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name,” and second, it was shameful to allow the Indians’ struggle to be associated with that of British women agitating for the right to vote, for they had increasingly turned to the destruction of property in their protests.1 These British women, writes Gandhi, were “weak in numbers as well as in physical force,” and any association with their use of passive resistance would lead people to perceive the Indian passive resisters to be similarly weak. After all, Gandhi assures us, Indian protesters “were in a position to use [physical force] effectively,” but they chose to abstain from doing so.2

Seeking to distance himself from the weakness of women and from the verbiage of the West, Gandhi had solicited ideas for a new term
through a 1909 contest in *Indian Opinion*, his newspaper in South Africa. The winning entry was the word “sadagraha.” As Gandhi explained retrospectively in his prison writings,

I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to “satyagraha.” Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement “satyagraha,” that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance” in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it.\(^3\)

In explaining how he has “corrected” “sadagraha” to “satyagraha,” Gandhi changes *sada*, with its connotations of constancy, to *satya*, which he glosses as “truth”—a widely accepted definition. He then deviates, however, by saying that truth “implies love,” and he expands *graha*, usually defined as “holding,” to mean “firmness,” which he equates with “force.”\(^4\) In describing this expansive concept of linguistic “correction,” Gandhi’s desire for a new Indian idiom of political practice also reveals his faith in the constitutive power of linguistic description, drawing here on the word for one who offers satyagraha, a satyagrahi: “If we continue to . . . offer passive resistance, our resistance will never make us strong. . . . On the other hand if we are satyagrahis . . . we grow stronger and stronger every day.”\(^5\)

This chapter analyzes Gandhi’s print internationalism as it coalesced around his transportable concept of satyagraha. His approach was very different, as we have seen, from that of his friend, compatriot, and sometime debate partner Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore developed a practice of print internationalism to enable connections across seemingly distinct cultures and peoples. Gandhi, by contrast, designed a print internationalism that championed replicability in the service of a politics that became increasingly national in its contours. Whereas Tagore celebrated an inclusive vision of Asia that dissolved national boundaries, Gandhi imagined liberation along specifically national contours, even as he moved across nations. Whether in South Africa or in the worldwide celebrity of his later time in India, however, Gandhi’s nearly exclusive preoccupation with *Indians’* sufferings under imperial injustice has posed uncomfortable questions for those who would valorize him
today. I argue that the emphasis in Gandhi’s print internationalism on replicability facilitated his oft-deplored decision to ignore the sufferings of Africans and other colonized peoples in his political struggles. Consequently, in examining Gandhi’s print internationalism, we can presage the difficulties that mark the contemporary concept “people of color.”

A variety of hierarchies—for instance, between savage and civilized, or between the republican and the autocratic—have long been used, and typically in overlapping fashion, to rationalize and perpetuate imperialism. As Gandhi struggled with imperial politics in the early twentieth century, these hierarchical binaries were slowly being resolved into a single polarity: that between White people and everyone else. As the twentieth century’s global color line emerged, the self-nomination of one side as White required, in due course, the emergence of a name for that othered and denigrated side: “people of color.” Much as that term gains its applicability through its abstracted application to many persons, so too Gandhi’s “satyagraha” can travel. In each instance, however, these terms’ vagueness prevents a substantial articulation of the uneven terrain within various experiences of racist oppression, whether in Gandhi’s twentieth century or in our twenty-first.

While “person of color” and “colored person” appear in English-language texts as early as the eighteenth century, they were then used to refer, with no necessary political implications, to a non-White person. The term “people of color” as a collective identity seems to be a U.S. invention of the late 1980s, appearing (albeit infrequently) in the MLA bibliography from the early 1990s onward. Perhaps traceable to a translation of the French term gens de couleur libres, here the French use of the preposition “de” enables a new phrase that is laudatory—“people of color”—whereas “colored people,” by around the 1960s, was already a derogatory and vanishing term. As early as 1988, William Safire explained in the New York Times: “It strikes me, then, that people of color is a phrase often used by nonwhites to put nonwhite positively. (Why should anybody want to define himself by what he is not?) Politically, it expresses solidarity with other nonwhites, and subtly reminds whites that they are a minority.” Much as “the global Anglophone,” as we saw in the previous chapter, finds traction in literary studies as a seemingly inclusive moniker for a category primarily defined by the lack of two dominant countries (the United Kingdom and the United States), so too the term “people of color” is adapted as a positive articulation for a category again defined by the absence of the hegemonic group. But the term recognizes (albeit for antiracist purposes) a differ-
difference between White people and the rest of humanity that had first been asserted for the purposes of White supremacism. Consequently, it raises rather than resolves a fundamental conundrum: how does one recognize the common sufferings of various non-White peoples? Scholars and activists have tried to resolve this dilemma, perhaps most famously the South African leader Steve Biko, who in the 1970s proposed another possibility: separating racism’s victims according to their political dispositions. Biko proposed a divide between “non-whites”—whose “aspiration is whiteness but [whose] pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible”—and “blacks”—“those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations.”

Gandhi too sought an antiracist politics that would restructure the very terms of the debate, decentering Whiteness from its primacy as an opponent and articulating antiracist identities in positive terms instead. Yet whereas Biko, writing decades later, was able to articulate an inclusive Blackness, Gandhi turned to the resources of specifically Indian civilization for a positive term, as in his eclectic coinage of the neologism “satyagraha.” Gandhi’s coinage of “satyagraha” in Indian Opinion was, crucially, neither fully traditional nor entirely falsifiable in its Sanskrit usage. As we saw earlier, he argued that: “Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force.” Gandhi’s retrospective explanation of the term’s origin begins in a conventional fashion, by defining the first root, and then expands to associate new concepts with it. Truth, for instance, does not signal love etymologically—which would require that the word satya be a Sanskrit word meaning “love,” which it is not—but, rather, “Truth (satya) implies love” because Gandhi insists, both here and elsewhere, that truth and love are intrinsically related concepts. The insertion of satya, within parentheses, thus operates as the occasion for a recalibration of words, forcing new linkages across the global Anglophone. The Anglophone context facilitates this process, precisely because Sanskrit roots like sat serve no obvious role in the English language. Gandhi thus coins new words in an old language by writing them within another linguistic medium: he writes these Sanskritisms within his English and his Gujarati, and thereby asserts modernity and tradition at the same time.

For Gandhi, an idea proceeds its linguistic articulation, and his writings frequently recount a search for the appropriate language to name
one of his already existing innovations. In *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (henceforth *My Experiments*), for instance, he wrote:

The principle called Satyagraha came into being before that name was invented. Indeed when it was born, I myself could not say what it was. In Gujarati also we used the English phrase “passive resistance” to describe it. When in a meeting of Europeans I found that the term “passive resistance” was too narrowly construed, that it was supposed to be a weapon of the weak, that it could be characterized by hatred and that it could finally manifest itself as violence, I had to demur to all these statements and explain the real nature of the Indian movement. It was clear that a new word must be coined by the Indians to designate their struggle.\(^{10}\)

The English phrase worked smoothly among Gujarati audiences, yet it failed to be clearly understood at “a meeting of Europeans.” The irony here is considerable: a concept borrowed, word for word, from a European language cannot be transferred back into a European conversation without a significant loss of meaning. A specifically Indian idiom is here designed in response to a problem of comprehension that originates in the global Anglophone.

Across the body of Gandhi’s texts, the presence of an untranslated word indicates both authenticity and cosmopolitanism: it both marks something culturally specific and signals the opportunity for cross-cultural creativity. Much as Gandhi abandons an English phrase for a Sanskritic one in order to speak to Anglophone European audiences, so too he coins a momentous English phrase in an entirely non-Anglophone Indian context. In 1919, Gandhi spoke to an audience in Delhi “in such broken Hindi as I could command.” On that occasion, he recounted in *My Experiments*, Gandhi described his upcoming political agitation “by the word ‘non co-operation,’” since he “could not hit upon a suitable Hindi or Urdu word for the new idea.”\(^{11}\) He launched this “non-cooperation movement” while “still busy devising suitable Hindi, Gujarati and Urdu phraseology for non-co-operation,” seeking in particular words that might be appropriate for “purely Moslem audiences.”\(^{12}\) As his account of the need for a religiously specific terminology suggests, Gandhi’s ultimate interest in language was essentially theological. For example, he described how the *Bhagavad Gita*, by far his most favored religious treatise, had served as his “dictionary of conduct,”
with specific words like *aparigraha* and *samabhava* that “gripped” him during his “troubles and trials.”

Gandhi’s politics thus embraced linguistic specificity: even when addressing both Hindus and Muslims with the same message of Indian nationalism, he wished to design separate terminology for each group precisely to unite them. (For a contemporary analogy, we might contrast the itemized solidarity of the U.K. category, “Black, Asian, and minority ethnic” to the generalizing inclusivity of the U.S.’s “people of color.”) The closest analogue to inclusivity, I argue, is in the nominalism “satyagraha,” for becoming a satyagrahi—an agent of satyagraha—is, as I discuss later in this chapter, a transformative process: one that shapes lived experience into a liberatory political consciousness. Within British imperialism, England was explicitly positioned as a model, and an ostensible tutor, for colonies as diverse and varied as India, South Africa, and Ireland; however, the relations among these colonies, while an occasional topic of metropolitan discussion, was mostly left to the colonized themselves. In the previous chapter, we witnessed how in the explicitly literary portion of the global Anglophone, this intercolonial geography came to be charted through interconnections of translating, prefacing, and publishing: the Irish W. B. Yeats and the Chinese Liang Qichao for different volumes by the Bengali Tagore, and then Tagore in turn for the Singaporean Lim Boon Keng. In the explicitly political portion of the global Anglophone, similar dynamics applied, but with a key difference: whereas the literary conduits of Yeats, Tagore, and Lim invested in the possibilities of translation, those mapped by anticolonial activists frequently insisted on exact lexemic transfer, dramatizing untranslated words in the process.

Gandhi arrived in South Africa in 1893, when it comprised four colonies under White rule. At the time, however, White people in South Africa were bitterly divided along linguistic and national lines: between the Afrikaners (in his language, Boers)—who spoke Afrikaans, a Dutch-based creole spoken in South Africa and Namibia—and the British—who, like Gandhi himself, spoke English. By the time he left, in 1915, the four colonies had been reconstituted into the Union of South Africa: a state founded in 1910 that consolidated the Boer and British colonies through an explicit enshrinement of White supremacy (and, accordingly, Whites-only governance). From the Anglo-Boer Wars of the turn of the century, in which Gandhi played a supporting role, to the Act of Union of 1910, whose racist laws he protested, Gandhi witnessed a battle along linguistic contours—English versus Afrikaans—
and national ones—the British government versus the Boer colonies. These linguistic and national divides were resolved through the unifying magic of White supremacism. Because of this concatenation of linguistic identity and racial ideology, early twentieth-century South Africa is thus particularly useful for thinking about the global Anglophone. Its politics, which were formative of Gandhi’s own, provide a violent demonstration of how the dividing line of English is not identical to the divide of racial privilege. Most British colonies dramatized the global reach and ostensible superiority of English against the backdrop of languages that were disparaged as primitive, parochial, and inferior, and which also had almost exclusively non-White speakers. Early twentieth-century South Africa, however, presaged the dominance of the global Anglophone over its European rivals by placing English in competition with a White language—Afrikaans. Despite this Dutch-based creole’s European origins and proudly White speakers, English colonists nonetheless disparaged Afrikaans much as they did other African tongues. Thanks to their shared European descent, British and Boer may have been cultural or racial “cousins,” as Gandhi terms them in 1928, but they were nonetheless divided.

As Gandhi became the author of a new Indian nation outside empire, his texts began to insist on often untranslated and conspicuously Indian (because Sanskritic) terminology. Along with the neologism “satyagraha,” Gandhi invested heavily in two other little-known (but already extant) Sanskrit words: “ahimsa” and “swaraj.” The word “ahimsa,” as Leela Gandhi has shown, became a capacious concept of nonviolence that could apply to interpersonal relations as well as epistemological ones; the word “swaraj,” as Ajay Skaria has argued, came to demonstrate a rule of the self at once indicative of political autonomy and yet more expansive than its Western theorizations. I focus on “satyagraha” because, unlike “ahimsa” or “swaraj,” it is a neologism, a coinage created by Gandhi in South Africa that nonetheless flaunted its ancient Indic roots. The trajectory of the word “satyagraha” mimics those of his clothing choices, which became less significant for their class indications and more prominent as testaments of one’s race. As Gandhi began writing, on November 26, 1923, of his experiences in South Africa, he sat in Yeravda Prison in western India—but he might have been anywhere in the British Empire. The carceral structures that shaped Gandhi’s political existence, in South Africa as in India, were part of an extensively and explicitly replicated set of British institutions, intended to instill law and order within a single space. From this inter-
changeable place of imperial incarceration, Gandhi kept a diary that on his release would be transformed into two books—*Satyagraha in South Africa* and *My Experiments with Truth*—each of which would be serialized and then published in book form.¹⁷

As this chapter demonstrates, for Gandhi, it was replicability, not interchangeability, that implied true equality. Commonality was created by the replication of practices like reading and hand-spinning across both time and space, and this replication would render swaraj possible. It is this emphasis on equality without interchangeability, I suggest, that has led to our repeated problems in valorizing him ever since: this is the basic way in which Gandhi, for better and worse, is not a liberal person. In generic terms, his interest in replicability rather than interchangeability manifests in a pronounced interest in the form of the parable. A long-established and frequently didactic form, the parable genre central to Gandhi’s print internationalism can be compared to the genre that is central to Anderson’s theorization of print nationalism: the novel. The novel produces a sense of human interchangeability that can, via Anderson, become the national “meanwhile.” The parable, by contrast, encourages emulation without asserting similarity: it is the genre that demonstrates replicability without equivalence. Consequently, the parable, as I will demonstrate, becomes particularly useful as Gandhi transports his politics from South Africa to South Asia. This point about literary form is also one, crucially, about political limitations. Gandhi’s use of the parable to narrate his South African experiences to an Indian readership renders his writing about South Africans woefully inadequate through its tendentious representations. Black South Africans become, in Gandhi’s writings for Indian readers, merely figures for what can be and what must be done in India, holding little autonomous significance in Gandhi’s didactic narratives of South Africa.

**ENGAGING INDIAN OPINION**

Gandhi’s writing career itself began in an international frame: during his legal training in England. By the time of his arrival in South Africa in 1893, he was a seasoned journalist, one whose major writings, like his higher education, had been in the English language.¹⁸ As he transformed from lawyer to activist, he became, as well, a savvy publisher and editor. In this section I narrate Gandhi’s changing approach to print internationalism, attending not only to his writings while in South Africa,
which mainly took the form of periodicals and pamphlets, but also to the book-length recollections of that time he penned later from India. The early Gandhi, as many have noted, was more reformist than revolutionary. This was famously clear in his political positions, as for instance in his repeated assertion of his loyalty to the British Crown. It also manifested itself, as I demonstrate, in the strategies of his printed works, which were very different from his later writings not only in their expressed opinions but also in their uses of language and layout. Instead of mobilizing ostentatiously Indian words, the early Gandhi tried to correct and contain the parameters of existing terms in the English language; instead of writing in the parable forms of his later volumes, he wrote in the anecdotal arguments beloved of liberal realism.

Decades before coining “satyagraha,” Gandhi was already emphasizing the proper use of Indian-associated terms. For example, in an 1896 pamphlet, which he framed as “an appeal to the Indian public,” Gandhi complained repeatedly that the restrictions placed on the indentured Indian were being applied, along with the epithet “coolie,” to wealthy Indians as well. In this early writing, titled *The Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa* (also known as the *Green Pamphlet*), Gandhi does not dispute the debasement of the Indian indentured laborer; his objection, rather, is to the expansion of a class-based category into a racial designation. In his reasoning, the word “coolie,” when used for an indentured laborer, is not a slur, but “coolie trader” is.19 Using “Indian,” “Arab,” and “Asiatic” interchangeably, the 1896 pamphlet emphasizes the incommensurability of race and class: “coolie,” for instance, is part of a “black laboring class,” even as Indians are not described as “black.”20 In a text that combines consistent English with inconsistent terminology and erratic punctuation, Gandhi bemoans that

The Press almost unanimously refuses to call the Indian by his proper name. He is “Ramsamy.” He is Mr. “Samy,” “He is Mr. Coolie” “He is the black man.” And these offensive epithets have become so common that they at any rate—one of them—Coolie are used even in the sacred precincts of the Courts, as if the Coolie were the legal and proper name to give to any and every Indian.21

Gandhi here bemoans the absence of the “proper name,” and while he identifies a racial problem, he seeks an individualizing solution, in keeping with the values of liberalism. Advancement is signaled here
in respectable individuation: his complaint prioritizes the problem of melding together before it even mentions the “offensive epithets.” This strategy would shift, however, once he left South Africa for South Asia. In contrast to the South Africa–based Gandhi of 1896, who condemned the absence of the Indian’s proper name for that of “Samy,” the South Asia–based Gandhi of the 1927 first volume of My Experiments uses that epithet as the occasion for some subversive wordplay. Noting that the Tamil suffix -sami is “nothing else than the Sanskrit Swami, meaning a master,” Gandhi explains that Indians used to rebuke the insult by invoking its etymology: “Some Englishmen would wince at this, while others would get angry, swear at the Indian and if there was a chance, would even belabor him; for ‘sami’ to him was nothing better than a term of contempt. To interpret it to mean a master amounted to an insult!”

Here etymology has become a resource for colonial subversion: as this small but crucial shift suggests, Gandhi’s politics became ever more anticolonial as he began to use Sanskrit as an anticolonial implement within the global Anglophone. Gandhi explains, early on in My Experiments, the difference between the word “coolie” in India, where it “means only a porter or carrier,” and in South Africa, where it “has a contemptuous connotation.” Gandhi was called a “coolie barrister,” he recollects, only because White South Africans were ignorant of “the original meaning of the word ‘coolie.’” Instead of the “unanimous refus[al]” of Indians’ individuality that the South Africa–based Gandhi once saw in these usages, the South Asia–based Gandhi here finds not White obstinacy but White ignorance.

The shifting nature of Gandhi’s statements on the “coolie” status of Indians in South Africa over this thirty-year period is further indicated in the pages of his key South African publication, the periodical Indian Opinion. Published weekly from 1903 onward, Indian Opinion was a multilingual periodical of varying length that had 3,500 subscribers at its peak; while it initially ran advertisements, Gandhi soon shifted to a subscription-only model, abstaining from paid advertising in the final product as well as from paid labor in the periodical’s production. It was most popular in the British colony of the Transvaal (now the South African Province of Gauteng), reaching 3,500 subscribers at its peak. Embracing both a sensibility and a constituency, the periodical orchestrated and documented the movement that would come to be known as satyagraha. Gandhi established Indian Opinion with sections in Gujarati, Hindi, English, and Tamil. In doing so, he carefully considered the demographics of the Indian South African populace, whose linguis-
tic divides echoed those of class, caste, and religion. Gujarati and, to a lesser extent, Hindi were the languages of the Muslim trader elites in the Transvaal region, who were also the main source of Gandhi’s early support. Tamil and, to a lesser extent, Telegu were the languages of the indentured Indian laboring classes in the Natal region, who were likely to be Christian or Hindu. The English language connected the settler colonies of the Natal and the Transvaal to a wider world of English-speaking colonies, and this connectivity was often beneficial for non-White persons, whether by connecting Black South Africans to what was then British West Africa (now Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia) or by connecting Indian South Africans (who did not always speak Indian languages) to the Indian subcontinent. For this early Gandhi, though, English alone did not meet his textual goals.

Gandhi’s South African periodical articulated its constituency in its inaugural issue, on June 4, 1903: *Indian Opinion* is for “British Indians” residing in South Africa, who are “members of a mighty empire.” We are then given a sense of its imagined readership, through the description of the advantages accruing from the journal to both “the Indian community” and “the European community,” and the specification of subscription rates both inside and outside “the Colony.” Writing at the start of the twentieth century as a “British Indian,” Gandhi demanded not the dissolution but the improvement of the British Empire. In this 1903 issue of *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi advocates a mode of representation that considers Indians and Europeans in an equal, simultaneous, and proximate fashion, both in their cultures and in their persons. The pages of his periodical perform that agenda in content and in form, with linguistic differences serving as metonyms of cultural complementarity. Declaring that the paper would work “to bring about a proper understanding between the two communities whom Providence has brought together under one flag,” the page places Indian languages next to English, but without a symmetrical logic of exact translation. In the journal’s second issue, published on June 11, 1903, a full-page advertisement (fig. 2) explained its method: *Indian Opinion* is published, the advertisement declares, “in FOUR languages,” and those languages then descend proudly across the page in a diagonal procession: “English, Gujarati, Tamil, and Hindi.” The purpose of this multilingualism is attested at the bottom of the page: “In the interest of the Indians in South Africa.” Gandhi knew no Tamil, and disavowed expertise in Hindi; nevertheless, he chose these languages as the languages of the plurality of “the Indians of South Africa.” These were not the Indians who were reading
Indian Opinion, much less subscribing to it, yet by incorporating their languages Gandhi interpellated them as readers.27

Gandhi’s seemingly minor choice of preposition—“in,” not “of,” South Africa—is further indicative of his early politics: he writes for the Indians in South Africa, not the Indians of South Africa. These Indians, like Indians elsewhere, are first and foremost “of” the British Empire, making their demands within the remit of what Sukanya Bannerjee has termed the “hybrid citizenship” forms of early twentieth-century Britain.28 Because British citizenship devolved from the British Crown, the distinction between a citizen and a subject remained undefined until the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, consequently, Gandhi and many of his Indian contemporaries grounded their rights to reside in British-controlled Africa within their claims to British imperial citizenship. As
Indian laws, administrators, and persons moved within the imperial axis into settler colonies in Africa, Indian leaders frequently proclaimed their imperial loyalties, hoping thereby to advance their claims to land rights and trading privileges that were denied to these African colonies’ African inhabitants.29

We can approach Gandhi’s strategies of print internationalism by closely examining Indian Opinion’s second issue. Its first page (fig. 3) is a mélange of content and advertising (though Gandhi would soon move to an advertisement-free, exclusively subscription model). The third of six columns, and the only one to run uninterrupted down the entire length of the page, describes the services of Gandhi’s International Printing Press. Each trade is articulated in terms of its human actors: the press consists of “book binders, machine rulers, and makers of rubber stamps,” who offer printing in an eclectic list of eleven languages that descends diagonally: “Gujarati, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Sanskrit, French, Dutch, Zulu, &c, &c.” This list was likely aspirational, for there is little evidence that the International Printing Press went substantially beyond the four languages printed in Indian Opinion, and even this early issue advertises for Tamil and Hindi compositors, which the press continually lacked.30 Within a few years of its inception, Indian Opinion would come to be published exclusively in the languages that Gandhi knew well, English and Gujarati. By choosing multiple languages, though, Indian Opinion signals its desire to convene multiple communities, not a single amalgamation of those communities. This is an interpretive community whose members know how to approach the multilingual pages according to each person’s individual competencies, but it is not an imagined community, whose readers imagine that others are reading the paper just as they are.

Whereas Indian Opinion signaled a multiplicity of readers, the replicability that is crucial to Gandhi’s print internationalism is prominent in what is now the best-known of Gandhi’s South African writings: a 1909 pamphlet, Hind Swaraj, first published in English translation under the title Indian Home Rule in 1910. One of many pamphlets issued by his International Printing Press, Hind Swaraj was the only one composed of original writing. Written after Gandhi’s failed mission to London in June 1909—where he sought to secure protections for Indians in South Africa based on their status as British subjects—the story of the pamphlet’s creation is the stuff of Mahatma legend. As his admirers frequently recount, Gandhi wrote continuously for ten days on the ship Kildonan Castle, writing with his left hand when his right grew tired. Hind Swaraj consists
of a philosophical dialogue that compares ancient and modern civilization. Once this historical comparison has been established, civilization’s poles are then mapped as Eastern and Western, as Indian and English, and, finally, as the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

_Hind Swaraj_ stages a dialogue between a “Reader” and an “Editor,” modeling what Gandhi in later texts described as his desired function for a periodical: “establishing an intimate and clean bond between the
editor and the readers.” This dialogue unfolds in an unspecified space, through an ambiguous address to a placeholder addressee. Its address has been variously read as Indian radicals in Britain or as Indian elites in South Africa, and the indecipherability of the recipient is crucial to its moral import. Rather than arbitrate these divergent accounts of Hind Swaraj’s imagined “ideal reader,” I want to suggest that, in keeping with his emphasis on nonequivalence, Gandhi’s text may solicit different kinds of reading across widely divergent readers: that is to say, Hind Swaraj envisions not one ideal readership but several. This ambiguity is built into the persona of the Reader within the dialogue. At once a character within the written text and the name for the person who interprets that text, the Reader signals the instability of the ideal reader of Hind Swaraj, even as it underlines the importance of reading. By this method, Hind Swaraj accomplishes through genre (through its version of a Socratic dialogue) what Indian Opinion instituted through language (by publishing in Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, and English).

Likewise, the function of the Editor of Hind Swaraj is akin to that of a periodical: an instrument of expression that produces interchange, seeking both to regulate and to encourage circulation. “These views,” Gandhi explains in his foreword to Hind Swaraj, “are mine and not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. . . . But, yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality.” To substantiate this claim, Gandhi places a list of supplementary readings in an appendix, titled “Some Authorities,” with an opening note: “The following books are recommended for perusal to follow up the study of the foregoing.” The reader of Hind Swaraj (unlike the Reader in Hind Swaraj) thus reads Gandhi’s “study” so that he can peruse Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, and even Plato, among others. Divorcing writing from originality, and even from authorship, Gandhi operates here much like his International Printing Press: he is not the origin of the views expressed, but the instrument of their expression.

Scribbling furiously as his ship traverses the equator, Gandhi’s construction of an ahistorical, unlocalizable Reader mimics his construction of a timeless, transportable East and West. In writing Hind Swaraj in transit for a presumably global readership, Gandhi used a different strategy than that of his 1896 pamphlet The Grievances of the British Indians. Whereas that pamphlet had objected to the use of a derogatory descriptor, “coolie,” for all Indians and demanded that each individual’s “proper name” be used instead, in Hind Swaraj he shifted to deploying “Indian” as itself a kind of proper name. In doing so, he reinvents
“Indian” as a civilizational and spiritual principle, rather than a racial marker, and he deploys the untranslated term “Swaraj”—a synonym for “self-rule”—to accomplish this reorganization. Gandhi writes of Indian civilization (god-fearing and virtuous) and English civilization (godless, materialistic, and immoral), but his use of these terms is more metaphorical than referential. In *Hind Swaraj* he repeatedly claims that it is not the English people, but modern civilization, that is ruling India, and he dismisses demands for Indian control of the existing state apparatus as desires for “English rule without the Englishman.” Insisting on radical transformation, Gandhi articulates British rule in India as an epic battle on the boundaries of civilizations: as the locus of cultural contact and the potential locus of revitalization.

The Reader in *Hind Swaraj* bemoans India’s condition in his questions, and the Editor patiently responds, frequently turning the question around on the Reader. Much as, according to Gandhi, “the community thought audibly through this correspondence” with him as the editor of *Indian Opinion*, so too the readers of *Hind Swaraj*, placed alongside the Reader in *Hind Swaraj*, find themselves in a conversation with this Editor: thoughts made audible, so far as print allows. The dialogue here between their viewpoints, moreover, models that between civilizations, proving the didactive power of the initially incompatible pairing. We are not the Reader, but a reader: the person who is being addressed within the text is not a placeholder for the imagined community, but one (of many) members of the interpretive community, each of whom must learn *Hind Swaraj*’s interpretive protocols for the world.

*Hind Swaraj* argues that nonviolent resistance—which Gandhi at that time called soul-force or truth-force, rather than satyagraha—is the most powerful agent of historical change. When the Reader asks for evidence of soul-force’s success, the Editor explains that the historical record cannot provide it. At this early stage in Gandhi’s career, he defines history as the record of the interruptions of soul-force: what is understood as a historical event is precisely not the successes of soul-force but, rather, its failure. As he explains:

Thousands, indeed tens of thousands, depend for their existence on a very active working of this force. Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of this force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not, and cannot, take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. Two brothers quarrel; one
of them repents and re-awakens the love that was lying dormant in him; the two again begin to live in peace; nobody takes note of this. But, if the two brothers, through the intervention of solicitors or some other reason, take up arms or go to law—which is another form of the exhibition of brute force—their doings would be immediately noticed in the press, they would be the talk of their neighbours, and would probably go down to history. And what is true of families and communities is true of nations. There is no reason to believe that there is one law for families and another for nations. History, then, is a record of an interruption of the course of nature. Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history.36

Gandhi makes his argument for this force not only through an argument about history but also through one about scale. Jumping from thousands to millions to hundreds, all in the first three sentences, Gandhi renders individuals, families, and nations interchangeable, and all governed by “one law.” Jumping then to critique the category of history, Gandhi turns to the educational possibilities of the parable. The story of the two brothers’ quarrel is not factual but apocryphal, and its purported insignificance can illuminate the historical record. Gandhi makes his political argument through a rhetoric of the example—here, the apocryphal anecdote—which he asserts can be replicated in different sites and on varying scales: “What is true for families and communities is also true for nations.”37

Whereas the liberal nation-state mimics the family by laying claim to the public and allocating it to the private, Gandhi’s nations can replicate families by eliminating the distinction between the political and the domestic. This refusal of the liberal conception of the political and the public, moreover, had generic consequences for Gandhi’s print practices. In his time, after all, the formal writing of history was predicated on that very distinction, relegating the stuff of mere personal recollection outside the historical field that Gandhi so memorably invoked in the above passage. Yet history-writing, in the broad sense of telling compelling stories about the past, has long been a pressing concern for marginalized peoples, Gandhi included. As a consequence, despite his disavowal of the ability of history-writing to inscribe the successes of satyagraha, Gandhi remained concerned with producing historical evidence.

Gandhi himself translated Hind Swaraj into English, and he initially translated the title as well: an English-language version, titled Indian Home Rule, appeared in 1910 from his International Printing Press. Yet after his 1915 arrival in India, the title was left untranslated for its
subsequent English-language editions. Much as Tagore’s *Gitanjali*, as explored in the previous chapter, only gained in the global Anglophone by deploying an untranslated title, so too the circulation of Gandhi’s English-language *Hind Swaraj* under its untranslated name seems only to have added to its prestige as it traversed the global Anglophone. As he worked on his translation of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi seems to have wavered on the translatability of “swaraj” even within the body of the text. As Tridip Suhrud tells us, of the fifty-six uses of “swaraj” in the Gujarati text, Gandhi translated exactly half of them into “Home Rule” for his English version, leaving the remainder as simply “swaraj.” This variation is indicative of Gandhi’s shifting views. While he was initially inspired by the Irish Home Rule movement, which would be emulated in India particularly during the First World War, Gandhi became increasingly convinced that Home Rule, an explicitly political concept, was not actually equivalent to swaraj, which he understood as emphasizing both official politics and individual conduct. This shift further reflects a larger trend in Gandhi’s writings, for Gandhi increasingly wished to separate his politics from other movements, whether those with similar strategies (such as the movement for women’s suffrage in Britain), or those with similar aims (such as the aspiration for Home Rule in Ireland). In this trajectory, the untranslated word became crucial: “satyagraha” announces its nonequivalence to the “passive resistance” championed by others, while “Hind Swaraj” renders Home Rule uniquely Indian. In untranslating the title, then, Gandhi moves from creating an Indian version of a still globally comprehensible politics—an Indian version of Home Rule—to declaring his politics nonequivalent to all existing agitations. Crucially, his words are “untranslated” in the sense of a reversal after translation. This is a reversion to the original language, not a preservation within it nor a condition of being untranslatable.

One of Gandhi’s last South African publications was a special commemorative “Golden Number” of *Indian Opinion*. Already beginning to present his work in South Africa as completed, Gandhi published this special issue, titled *Souvenir of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa, 1906–1914*, in a cloth-bound codex format with multiple glossy photographs. This “Golden Number” of 1914 provided an overview of the movement, with thirty pages of English text, an additional twenty-four in Gujarati, and a final six-page section in Tamil. It still referred to “Passive Resistance” in its title, though less frequently in its pages: Gandhi by this point mostly avoided that term. An essay titled “The Great Central Figure,” written by Gandhi’s close collaborator
Henry Polak (under his pen name, A. Chessel Piquet), was accompanied by a full-page illustration. Attesting to “soul-force’s success,” the image presents a before-and-after narrative in visual form (fig. 4). On the left, in the medium distance, Gandhi poses as an imperial citizen, looking

Fig. 4. Photographs of Gandhi (printed broadside) in the 1914 “Golden Number” commemorative issue of Indian Opinion, published separately as Souvenir of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa.
directly into the camera but with his arms crossed, in suit and tie. On the right, in a long shot, Gandhi stands looking directly at us, dressed as the most Indian of Indians, in clothing associated with indentured Indians and with traveling Hindu mendicants. Despite photography’s oft-noted claims to indexical representation, and its seeming ability to solidify historical detail, these images instead suggest malleability and even artifice. Here posing for the camera as an imperial citizen serves only to belie its falsity: it is a pose easily undone by the powers of satyagraha.

The backdrop of the 1906 portrait—a nondescript photography studio—has been eliminated in the 1914 portrait, which is taken outside in front of what appears to be a shed. The 1914 body, moreover, is active and open in its posture, unlike the conventionally clothed body of 1906, which leans casually on a table. As readers, moreover, we have moved farther from our “central figure”: Gandhi is not only less familiar in his physical presentation but also physically farther away, and smaller, in the 1914 photograph. The narrative of transformation visualized here on the body of Gandhi is central to what becomes the Gandhian form of anticolonialism: an insistence that decolonization, like colonization, must transform not just the state but also the self. These paired photographs serve as a complete narrative, one shorn of the potential confusions of linguistic explanation. Whereas Hind Swaraj in 1909 insisted that soul-force could not be recorded in history, Gandhi in 1914 presents the image of his body’s transformation as the evidence of soul-force’s success.40 India now seems not an abstract civilizational principle, but an embodied reality that can travel—much as Gandhi does himself.

Gandhi’s South Africa

Gandhi returned permanently to India in 1915, and he led the all-India satyagraha known as the noncooperation movement from 1920 to 1922, leveraging both the outrage resulting from the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the enthusiasm generated by the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement. He was then imprisoned from 1922 to 1924, a period bookended, as we saw in the first chapter, by vociferous debates with Rabindranath Tagore. During his imprisonment, Gandhi wrote extensively of his experiences in South Africa, intending these recollections for readers in India, not in South Africa. The diaries from this period would yield two published narratives, both published initially in Gujarati (serialized in the journal Navjivan) and then in book form and
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in English translation. *Satyagraha in South Africa* appeared in English in 1928; *My Experiments* was published in two volumes in 1927 and 1928, with concurrent English serialization in his journal *Young India*. *My Experiments*, Gandhi’s best-selling work, has become central to his legendary persona, and it subordinates the South African context of his political and historical “experiments” to the story of his own transformation. *My Experiments* explicitly exhorts comparative reading: by keeping *Satyagraha in South Africa* at hand, *My Experiments* explains, the reader will become capable of understanding the correspondences between the books and hence the connections across the chapters of *My Experiments* itself. Yet when read together as instructed, these texts prove decidedly different.

Gandhi explains that he wrote *Satyagraha in South Africa* to demonstrate the significance of what he terms his “complete victory in South Africa,” in a preface that was published in the first Gujarati serialization in 1925 but excluded from the English translation issued three years thereafter. Whereas his detractors, Gandhi writes, suggest that all his efforts “meant only that the Indians maintained their *status quo*” in South Africa, these skeptics are “ignorant” of his work’s international significance. Gandhi demands that his South African protests be read within a larger global geography: “Had the battle in South Africa not been fought today Indians would have been driven out not only from South Africa, but also from all other British colonies and no one would have even taken notice of it.” The South African “battle” is thus a victory for all British colonies, a victory evidenced through the invocation of some imagined outside observer—much like, perhaps, the geographically unspecified Reader of *Hind Swaraj*. This insistence that South Africa must be understood within an international framework forms the essential conceit of *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Just as in *Hind Swaraj* the peaceful resolution of familial conflicts can be scaled up to resolve global disputes, so here one British colony can be rescaled to suit the needs of a more populous colony, elsewhere. *My Experiments*, by contrast, is iterative but not scalable, for it is saturated with personable advice for the individual reader. Taken together, then, these texts model replicability without equivalence, for their divergent accounts of the same material nevertheless advance the same moral.

Because *My Experiments* follows Gandhi’s travels, it shifts smoothly across locations, describing each incident as it occurs and emphasizing temporal, and not geographical, parameters. Whereas Gandhi started writing *Satyagraha in South Africa* to provide a record of the past for
his followers, he commences writing *My Experiments*, he explains, without any “definite plan.”*44* *My Experiments* is episodic, both in composition and in content: it is “written from week to week . . . just as the Spirit moves me at the time of writing.”*45* The periodicity of *My Experiments* is compounded by its reliance on itemization: each protest has a victory and every peril has a moral, and their organization is meaningfully sequential, often signaled in the phrase “as we shall see later.” For example, whereas political stakes are articulated in spatial terms in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, in *My Experiments* they are explained in terms of time: “Had the community [in South Africa] given up the struggle, . . . the hated impost [tax] would have continued to be levied from the indentured Indians until this day, to the eternal shame of the Indians in South Africa and of the whole of India.”*46* This feared hypothetical is shaped by three commas of deferral and one practical possibility, all culminating in “the eternal shame of the Indians in South Africa and of the whole of India.” The temporal emphasis of Gandhi’s autobiography provides the ethical assurances for what he terms *My Experiments with Truth*: what matters is the future and the past, not the present. In the more publicly political *Satyagraha in South Africa*, by contrast, geographical comparisons in the present offer consolations for Indian followers. Writing from his prison cell, in the Gujarati preface that he originally excluded from his English translation, Gandhi confidently declares: “I see that there is nothing in our present position which I had not encountered in South Africa on a smaller scale. . . . I expect the repetition here of the experience I had of the final phase in South Africa.”*47* As this passage suggests, Gandhi insists repeatedly that the difference between South Africa and India is iterative in nature, placing these regions in a primarily geographical relation to each other.

The English title of *Satyagraha in South Africa* dropped the allusion to history (*itihas*) which is present in the Gujarati title, *Dakshina Africana Satyagrabanamu Itibhas*. Ranajit Guha has demonstrated the complex history of the term, which he glosses as “a traditional account relayed from generation to generation.”*48* While *itihas* had long included the mythological corpus of Hindu epics, British officials seeking to situate Indian history within the remit of world history decreed the word “history” to be translatable as *itihas*—thereby suiting, as well, the desires of a Hindu elite that perceived, in this regime of translation, a validation of Hindu mythology.*49* Perhaps Gandhi, in his translation of *Dakshina Africana Satyagrabanamu Itibhas* as *Satyagraha in South Africa*, felt that *itihas* simply could not be translated; or perhaps, like
Tagore in Guha’s analysis, Gandhi felt that *itihas* was best understood as the failings of history to record the private and the personal, rather than as history itself. In his brief forward to the translation, Gandhi writes that *Satyagraha in South Africa* is not a “regular detailed history”—for which, he asserts, he had “neither the time nor the inclination”—but “a guide to any regular historian who may arise in the future” and which might be “helpful in our present struggle” to liberate India. If Gandhi was not writing a history—despite the *itihas* of the Gujarati text’s title—what was he writing? He provided history-specific details—like the exact years for various legislative changes—but then he also claimed that the Black inhabitants of South Africa were the descendants of escaped slaves from America—a fantastical assertion for which he provided no evidence. Between praise of Boer bravery and condemnation of British hypocrisy, Gandhi states: “The reader will note South African parallels for all our experiences in the present struggle to date. He will also see from this history that there is so far no ground whatever for despair in the fight that is going on.” *Satyagraha in South Africa* thus exercises what Leon de Kock has described as a key rhetorical move in missionary narratives of Africa, wherein writers claim to be merely recording facts even as they write of heroic quests, denying their authorial roles through frequent proclamations of their more serious, and nonliterary, preoccupations. *Satyagraha in South Africa*’s strategic deployment of missionary modes that were already well established in the global Anglophone enables it to be both travelogue and pedagogue: a repository of African details and of Indian political hopes.

Gandhi concludes his foreword to the English translation by claiming that “those who are following the weekly chapters of *My Experiments with Truth* cannot afford to miss these chapters on satyagraha, if they would follow in all its detail the working out of the search after Truth.” This reference, combined with *My Experiments*’ reference to *Satyagraha in South Africa*, has led some commentators to read both texts together as an extended exercise in autobiography. Yet whereas *My Experiments* is deeply invested in the process of self-constitution and self-articulation, detailing Gandhi’s own development in a manner which might inspire others, *Satyagraha in South Africa* forgoes the autobiographical preoccupation with the “I,” using first-person narration only sporadically.

Much as *Satyagraha in South Africa* disavows its status as a history, *My Experiments* disavows the genre of autobiography, a word that today features prominently in its most common English title: *An Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*. In the opening
pages, Gandhi ventriloquizes “a God-fearing friend” who describes the genre of autobiography as itself a Western form.\(^{55}\) He clarifies that he will not “attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography.”\(^{56}\) Genre here emerges as if by accident, instead of by design, and in that accidental emergence all questions of its cultural origins—and authenticity—are rendered moot. Concerned, some pages later, about “the inadequacy of all autobiography as history,” Gandhi imagines “some busybody” who would “cross examine me on the chapters already written.”\(^{57}\) Explaining that he is writing not “to please critics” but “to provide some comfort and food for reflection for my co-workers,” Gandhi declares: “Writing it [the autobiography] is itself one of the experiments with truth.”\(^{58}\) Genre, as explained by genre theorists, serves a communicative function, suggesting to the reader how a particular text should be read. Genre in Gandhi’s account, however, is primarily a Western peril. By conceptualizing his writing in these memorializing genres—the history and the autobiography—as accidental exercises toward a spiritual goal, Gandhi directs us to interpret his print internationalism for its effects. One of these, I argue, is the unusual form of international comparativism that he develops. This comparativism serves as a rhetorical conceit that enables Gandhi to declare: “What happened in South Africa will also happen here.”\(^{59}\)

Gandhi’s print publications frequently instructed their readers in the activity of reading: \textit{Indian Opinion} instructs its readers to clip, share, and reread articles, while \textit{Hind Swaraj}, as Isabel Hofmeyr has argued, “instructs readers on both the reading and the production of print culture.”\(^{60}\) Whereas these earlier texts achieved this instructional relation through a spare dialogism, the main portion of \textit{Satyagraha in South Africa} consists of an account of the Indian mobilizations led by Gandhi, in a narrative that alternates between factual detail and metaphorical hyperbole. Gandhi is particularly fond of biblical analogies: speaking of the slough of despond, describing the Indian satyagrahis as pilgrims, and so forth. His text thus operates through the instructive possibilities of the parable, not only at the level of the primary narrative but also through the insertion of smaller parables for the reader’s edification. The entire text, consequently, provides an exercise in proper reading. After an extended discussion of the “colour bar” (race-based restrictions), Gandhi explains that he has “deliberately discussed this question with much minuteness” so that the reader “may acquire the habit of
appreciating and respecting varieties of standpoint.” He explains: “I do not write this book merely for the writing of it. Nor is it my object to place one phase of the history of South Africa before the public.” His objective, rather, is to make known the origins and practice of Satyagraha, so that it might be emulated by “the nation.”61 Adapting satyagraha, consequently, requires learning an art of interpretation.

Satyagraha in South Africa begins with a chapter titled “Geography,” which opens on the topic of size: “Africa is one of the biggest continents in the world. India is said to be not a country but a continent, but considering area alone, four or five Indias could be carved out of Africa. Africa is a peninsula like India; South Africa is thus mainly surrounded by the sea.” 62 Africa is a peninsula, and India is a continent: these partial and motivated misreadings nonetheless enable worldwide comparisons. Through schematic geography and typological characterization, Satyagraha in South Africa inserts Indian analogues for every South African experience. Each South African detail consequently refers, not to South Africa as such, but to a larger geographical and historical unity unfolding before us. Gandhi’s text is thus allegorical, and this mode renders the personas of Satyagraha in South Africa typological: they are not individuated characters or human beings who seem “just like ourselves,” but figures chosen from an existing vocabulary of ethical possibilities. This rhetorical choice has significant implications for today’s reader of Satyagraha in South Africa, and particularly for our understanding of Gandhi not simply as a great man but as a great “person of color.”

Satyagraha in South Africa’s second chapter, which follows “Geography,” is titled “History,” and it undermines the earlier material in its very first sentence: “The geographical divisions briefly noticed in the first chapter are not at all ancient.” According to Gandhi,

It has not been possible definitely to ascertain who were the inhabitants of South Africa in remote times. When the Europeans settled in South Africa, they found the Negroes there. These Negroes are supposed to have been the descendants of some of the slaves in America who managed to escape from their cruel bondage and migrated to Africa.63

The “remote times” of the unidentifiable aboriginal inhabitants of South Africa are here pasted into a reverse migration: the “Negroes” of South Africa originated in America. In Gandhi’s history, the enslaved “Ne-
“groes,” fleeing “their cruel bondage,” made the first settlement of South Africa before Europeans arrived in the mid-seventeenth century. White settlers had long argued that Africans were not indigenous to South Africa, using this claim—grounded in willful misunderstanding—to validate their own ownership claims. These claims are often grouped under the “myth of the empty land,” for they purport that Whites had encountered a vacant landscape on their arrival in South Africa, only to then face overwhelming numbers of Black migrants who encroached on these hapless settlers. Gandhi, however, makes a crucial distinction: he renders Black South Africans as present prior to European colonization, describing them as the descendants of immigrants, not as immigrants themselves.

Through this historical claim, which is set off in carefully impersonal terms—“It has not been possible,” “are supposed”—Gandhi presents South Africa as having always been a place for immigrants, no matter their origins. Gandhi may have had some acquaintance with American “Negroes,” from, for instance, the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ tour of South Africa (1890–95) or the missionary activities of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The American “Negro” was, by the 1920s, a figure of racial possibility for many South Africans, and we might speculate that, given the extensive presence of African American missionaries in Zululand in the late nineteenth century, Gandhi’s framing of his local “Negroes” as the “descendants” of Black people escaping U.S. slavery could be a garbled interpretation of African American discourses of Providential Design. More likely, however, this claim is strategic. Gandhi undermines the autochthonous claim to South Africa, even as he then provisionally acknowledges it: “These Negroes must be regarded as the original inhabitants of South Africa. But South Africa is such a vast country that it can easily support twenty or thirty times its present population of Negroes.”

This assertion of South Africa’s vastness and abundance is the primary objective of Gandhi’s “History” chapter. Elaborating on the distances between Cape Town and Durban by rail and by sea, and the enormous area covered by the four colonies of South Africa, Gandhi provides the exactitude of numbers: 1,800 miles, 1,000 miles, and 473,000 square miles, respectively. He then supplies the Negro and European populations of South Africa in 1914 (5 million and 1.25 million, respectively). The insertion of such statistical detail clashes with his long-standing arguments against positivist history, yet it testifies to his central claim. By combining historical speculation and statistical detail,
Gandhi elaborates a politics of settlement in which cultivation is more important than origins, much as in his account of South Africa’s geography, good irrigation proved more important than powerful rivers. In South Africa, he suggests, the autochthonous claim is untenable—and, in any case, there is enough room for everyone.

The second paragraph of Gandhi’s “History” lesson begins: “Among the Negroes, the tallest and the most handsome are the Zulus.” The description he provides here, with its fulsome praise, has often been cited as evidence that Gandhi was not, in fact, racist.67 The section itself, however, is rather more complex. After that laudatory opening sentence, Gandhi’s chapter continues with an extended exegesis of the attractiveness of the Zulu people, which is also the occasion for his castigation of “our [Indian] ideal of beauty,” which fixates on “a fair complexion, and a pointed nose.”68 Elaborating various body parts and specific physical attributes, Gandhi introduces these legendary Zulus and commences a sequence of syntactic operations that assert similarity between Indians and Negroes only to immediately distance the terms. For example, in his account of their accommodations, he writes:

Like ourselves, the Negroes plaster the walls and the floor with earth and animal dung. It is said the Negroes cannot make anything square in shape. They have trained their eyes to see and make only round things. We never find nature drawing straight lines or rectilinear figures, and these innocent children of nature derive all their knowledge from their experience of her.69

This passage begins with the assertion of similarity but then jumps rapidly through four sentences, each with a different subject for its claim. Moving from the Negroes (who are “like ourselves”) to the impersonal assertion “It is said,” Gandhi becomes able to speak of a third-person plural—“they” who “have trained their eyes to see and make only round things”—and finally, and most importantly, in a first-person plural—“we,” who in this sentence observe both nature and her “innocent children.” Gandhi’s primitivism here seems immediately offensive, yet his precise phrasing offers some subversive hints, as for instance in his curious use of the verb “trained.” Recalling Gandhi’s claim some pages earlier that these people had previously been enslaved in the Americas, we might wonder if they “have trained their eyes” out of angular possibilities as a chosen rebuke of White values.
Gandhi’s depiction of Zulus as “innocent children of nature” diverges from the global Anglophone discourse of his day. Gandhi was directly involved in one of the last Zulu wars of resistance: the 1906 uprising against oppressive colonial taxation that came to be known as the Bambatha rebellion. Given his deep imbrication in British print culture, Gandhi would have been familiar with the trope of “the Zulus,” who frequently served in British literature, as Laura Chrisman has argued, “less as metonym of blackness and more as . . . an African ‘aristocracy’ and indigenous structure of ‘imperialism.’” In contrast to this widespread Anglophone discourse, which presented the Zulu people as a premonition of what might happen to the British, Gandhi erases Zulu political and military organization entirely, instead claiming that Zulus are “so timid that a Negro is afraid at the sight even of a European child.” He provides, instead, several digressions on Zulu culture. The Zulu language, for example, is “very sweet,” with “most words ending with the sound of broad ‘a’ so the language sounds soft and pleasing to the ear.” Gandhi writes: “I have heard and read that there is both meaning and poetry in the words,” thus entertaining the possibility of a meaningless language even as he asserts its meaningfulness.

To attend to Gandhi’s rhetoric around Black Africans is to join a much-rehearsed and highly contentious debate about the limitations of Gandhi’s antiracist politics. What the debate proves, however, at either pole, is that the notion of racial solidarity across the non-White world is a remarkably recent construction. Much as the theorization of Black Consciousness by Steve Biko insisted on a fundamental conceptual distinction between “non-white”—a racial descriptor—and “Black”—a political identification—so too, in revisiting Gandhi’s antiracism, we might be duly reminded that the “non-white” peoples of his era, while adversely affected by White supremacy, were not immediately conjured into the kinds of unified political orientation that are suggested in the category “people of color.” On the one hand, to name Gandhi “The Stretcher-Bearer of Empire,” as Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed do, is to misrecognize the intrainperial dynamics of the time: not only Indians but also Black and Coloured South Africans enthusiastically supported the British cause during the First World War, hoping thereby to improve their negotiating positions with the British administration. On the other hand, to say that he is a man of his historical context and therefore, by implication, unable to imagine a politics that exceeds that moment’s historical contours creates different problems. Such historical determinism rationalizes Gandhi’s racist rhetoric only by
simultaneously rendering inexplicable his radical innovations in race-based politics. Gandhi worked for the rights of migrants (who happened to be Indian); groups like the South African Natives’ National Conference (which later became the African National Congress) and the African People’s Organization, by contrast, worked for the rights of natives (who happened to be Black and Coloured). Neither side saw the concerns of migrants and of natives as equivalent. Gandhi’s relative disinterest in solidarity with Africans indicates not the failures of his time but the questions to which he was replying: in the twentieth century, the Native Question, after all, is not equivalent to the Indian Question, much as in our own twenty-first century context indigenous rights are not identical to migrants’ rights. To look back at Gandhi’s rhetoric with surprise is to apply the anachronistic category of “people of color”: a category brought into being well after Gandhi’s time, precisely to emphasize the common concerns of non-White peoples that Gandhi himself could only vaguely apprehend. Gandhi was initially a proud imperial citizen and then a proud Indian, but he was never, in our current understanding, a proud “person of color.”

Gandhi was a sophisticated journalist, memoirist, and politician: his writings, with their repeated insistence on the implications of specific words and particular genres, are not solely intended as direct reflections of his personal opinions. Whether Gandhi’s rhetoric accurately reflects his views of Black people, thus, is not an easy issue to resolve. I do not know if Gandhi was or was not racist, but I am confident that if he had wished to emphasize his antiracist credentials, he certainly possessed the rhetorical dexterity to do so. That he wrote of Africans in the way that he did, therefore, is of interest not to evaluate the Mahatma but to understand what those writings accomplished in his route to Mahatma-hood. Accordingly, rhetorical effects, and not righteous insights, are foregrounded in this chapter.

In attending to rhetorical effects rather than latent opinions, I am deploying a reading method that is in keeping with Gandhi’s own early protestations of the necessary failures of any historical record: what we might term its constitutive gaps. For instance, Gandhi’s infantilizing description of Africans in Satyagraha in South Africa is, I would argue, ambivalent in its effects, especially in his historical moment. By erasing the martial modernity of the Zulus, he erased a past that many southern Africans, then and now, proudly claim. In doing so, however, he also disputed the mythos of African aggression persistently used by the British and by other Europeans to justify their brutal rule in Africa. Given
his familiarity with the use of that racist allegation to justify the violent suppression of Zulu protest in 1906, Gandhi’s depiction of the Zulus as childlike and innocent is likely a political provocation. We might, for instance, read these comments on African naïveté—cringe-inducing to the twenty-first-century liberal reader—as the less personal corollary of his remarks about the 1906 uprising in his autobiography. In My Experiments, Gandhi recalls that “there was no [Zulu] resistance that one could see” for it “was no war but a man hunt.” In Satyagraha in South Africa, he makes the same point by providing ethnographic description rather than personal observations: his ersatz ethnography is troubling, but in the early twentieth century it was anti-imperial and anti-Black at once.

Moreover, thanks to Gandhi’s strange and unlikely history of American Negroes’ migration in Satyagraha in South Africa, these alleged descendants of Black settlers cannot be equated with the noble savages of European typology. From Jean-Jacques Rousseau onward, the noble savage trope was used to describe the peaceful simplicity of those untouched by the rapacity of modern civilization, thus replacing the Hobbesian state of nature with a more Edenic vision. Gandhi’s figures of African simplicity, by contrast, exist well after Europeans’ depredations: they are not the unchanging descendants of a culture inviolate but, rather, the cultivated offspring of those who escaped White civilization, which had enslaved them, and who then successfully established a different and harmonious settlement. These figures in Gandhi’s text betoken not an anterior form of utopia, as does the European trope of the noble savage, but a laudable future possibility for all of us, no matter how ensnared in the evils of modernity we may currently be. In this respect, the “Zulus” of Satyagraha in South Africa serve a purpose analogous to the “India” of Hind Swaraj: described in mythical and laudatory terms, both attest that there are better ways to run human civilization than those preferred and propagated by the West.

Gandhi moved between different strategies of racial comparison in support of his struggles against White domination of Indians. Initially, he seems to have used Black-Indian comparisons to expose the White supremacist within Britain’s ostensibly liberal imperial regime. For instance, in the 1896 pamphlet The Grievances of the British Indians, he wrote:

There is a very good reason for requiring the registration of a native in that he is yet being taught the dignity and
necessity of labour. The Indian knows it and he is imported because he knows it. Yet to have the pleasure of classifying him with the natives he too is required to be registered."76

The twenty-first-century reader will likely focus on the first sentence of the above quotation, horrified and perhaps surprised by Gandhi’s denigration of “the natives.” For Gandhi’s contemporaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I argue, the subversive nature of the concluding sentence was likely more remarkable. Gandhi here mocks the “pleasure” of White chauvinism, even as he repeats the Victorian rhetoric that justifies coercing Africans into wage labor. In connecting the treatment of the Indian and the “native” and then declaring the connection absurd, Gandhi performed the connective analysis of the concept of “people of color,” for “people of color” makes White supremacism evident as a deep-rooted system by showing its diverse effects. He did so, however, without then enunciating a shared struggle against that system of oppression. Whereas the category “people of color” enables us not only to recognize the subjection of the “native” and the Indian as indicative of a shared experience of White supremacism and, consequently, a shared antiracist struggle, Gandhi in the nineteenth century could only register that White supremacism was at work. He could not, through that recognition, group the (African) “native” and the “Indian” (migrant) together in common cause. Such linkage, after all, would have required him to discard of the civilizational claims that he then championed, which positioned Indians as the inheritors of Aryan civilization and Africans, by contrast, as “the children of blank heathendom and outer darkness.”77

In the twentieth century Gandhi would move away from this dependence on the Indo-Aryan hypothesis, and his depiction of Africans would shift in the process. The 1909 Hind Swaraj, for instance, recounts the glories of Indian civilization without invoking the grandeur of an Aryan past, instead describing India in spiritual terms. In Gandhi’s writings Africans continue to be differentiated from Indians, but they are no longer phobic figures. They are, rather, the supposed children of Nature, and Nature, for the twentieth-century Gandhi, is a repository of virtue. By 1928, in the quest narrative Satyagraha in South Africa, the ostensibly natural Negro helps to demonstrate that there are two civilizations, Western and Indian—which stand in contrast to the Negro’s alleged lack of civilization. In this rhetorical framework, certain kinds of Black suffering are crucial to Gandhi’s writings, if not always to his public mobilizations. Satyagraha in South Africa, for instance, emphasizes the
disastrous effects of Western civilization on Negroes, and he narrates in scrupulous detail the introduction of mining in South Africa. He begins with the introduction of the poll tax and the hut tax, which were extortionate measures imposed on Africans to compel them to seek wage employment and abandon their earlier, sustainable modes of production. Rather than extolling these measures as pedagogical, as he had in the nineteenth century, Gandhi now recognizes them as yet another instance of European rapacity. The consequences of mining, Gandhi explains, have been disastrous for Negroes: “miner’s phthisis,” a form of tuberculosis; venereal disease, from the all-male labor compounds; and alcohol-induced criminality. He is concerned here for the suffering of Black people, because their predicaments could be replicated on the bodies of others, including Indians—not because, as we might wish from a “person of color,” their sufferings under White supremacy are systemically connected to those of Indians.

Pairing the 1928 text of Satyagraha in South Africa with the 1927 and 1929 volumes of My Experiments, moreover, demonstrates an even more striking shift in Gandhi’s rhetoric around African and Afro-diasporic persons. From an early anecdote in which “an American Negro” saves Gandhi from a crisis, My Experiments provides a far more sensitive and sympathetic portrayal of persons of African descent.78 This is, I suggest, partly because in My Experiments Gandhi develops a vein of comparativism absent in Satyagraha in South Africa, which focuses not on geography but on persons. The Gandhi of My Experiments analogizes the treatment of Indians in South Africa to that of low-caste groups (Dalit in today’s terms; “untouchable,” “pariah,” or “Harijan,” in Gandhi’s language) in India itself. Racial discrimination thus becomes “the punishment for our own sins,” because “coolly” in South Africa, Gandhi explains, “means what a pariah or an untouchable means to us.”79 In a sustained and remarkable analogy in the second volume, Gandhi declares that “today we have become the untouchables of South Africa,” much as “in Christian Europe the Jews were once its ‘untouchables.’”80 Maintaining his contention that racism against Indians is retribution for Indians’ own caste prejudices, Gandhi analogizes anti-Indian racism to what he terms “a strange and even unjust retribution” on contemporary Jews because of the ancient Jews’ belief that they are “the chosen people of God, to the exclusion of all others.”81 In this seeming aside, Gandhi’s earlier remarks become not simply a symptom of his own racist marginalization—a good example of our contemporary concept of “internalized racism”—but also its cause within a larger spiritual history.
Satyagraha in South Africa was translated into English by Valji Desai, with input from four other Gandhi disciples, and then edited for its final version by Gandhi himself. In his 1928 foreword to the translation, Gandhi assures the reader that the text retains “the spirit of the original in Gujarati”—and, in addition, that Desai “has not hesitated to make the necessary corrections.”

There is, in the Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand, an undated manuscript of Satyagraha in South Africa, typewritten with copious handwritten corrections. The substitutions in this typescript are numerous and unsystematic, with terms such as “bantu” that are absent in the published English version. As my analysis has demonstrated, however, seeking to parse the lexical differences between Gandhi’s use of “African” versus that of “Negro,” or even his “bantu,” would likely prove a futile endeavor. In a world where writing and editing, translation and correction, are rendered nearly interchangeable, a reading practice of looking for Gandhi—of hunting, endlessly, for intentions and originals—may miss the overriding intentions of his print internationalism. Gandhi was not, after all, simply translating Africans, as concept or community, to his imagined Indian readership. He was, rather, conjuring into being a category of persons, as much mythical as referential, for an ignorant readership and for his own purposes. As Gandhi moved from South Africa to South Asia, his representations of the native South African shifted decisively, from the indolent “Kafir” of his 1890s writings to the natural “Negro” of his 1920s texts. In all instances, however, they were indicative of the satyagraha-facilitating logics of Gandhi’s print internationalism, and not, for better and for worse, about Africans at all.

A White Secretary for People of Color

Gandhi’s depictions of Africans as the children of nature in his accounts of satyagraha can help us to apprehend his analogous connection of satyagraha to the noble suffering he found natural to women. Having expressed his conception of a new mode of ethical and political protest—satyagraha—Gandhi further worked to articulate the agent of that protest form—the satyagrahi. While the prominent actors in the main text of Satyagraha in South Africa are Indian men, the first story of satyagraha in South Africa in that text features satyagrahis who are neither Indian nor male. This crucial early anecdote tells of the thousands of “Boer” (Afrikaner) women who were interned by the British during
the Anglo-Boer War. Outnumbered and with fewer resources than the British, the Afrikaner troops nonetheless resisted British conquest for several years.\textsuperscript{83} They were vanquished only when the British undertook scorched-earth campaigns and invented the forcible internment structures we know as concentration camps.\textsuperscript{84} Because of their impressive (if unsuccessful) demonstration of military prowess, the British ceased to regard the Afrikaners primarily as yet another despised people of Africa, and began to consider the Afrikaners as fellow Whites who could be useful in upcoming White men’s wars—wars, that is, with other European countries.\textsuperscript{85} Consequently, their joining with the British in the Act of Union in 1910 was celebrated by the mainstream British press as a moment of triumph for British liberal imperialism.\textsuperscript{86}

Even though the Afrikaners’ postwar recognition by the British was ultimately disadvantageous to Gandhi’s purposes, he nonetheless finds in the Afrikaners’ war experience a demonstration of his satyagraha principle. He does so by sidelining their fabled military might—much as he did, as we saw, in describing the Zulu people. He provides the masculine history of the war in a single paragraph, writing that the English and the Dutch, who “were of course cousins,” clashed as they sought to conquer the African continent. While he calls Afrikaners “brave soldiers” and declares that “every Boer is a good fighter,” Gandhi attributes their success to women’s suffering rather than men’s valor.\textsuperscript{87} Described as brave, simple, and inspirational, these Afrikaner women underwent what Gandhi terms “indescribable sufferings”—which he then details nonetheless:

They starved, they suffered biting cold and scorching heat. Sometimes a soldier . . . might even assault these unprotected women. Still the brave Boer women did not flinch. And at last King Edward wrote . . . that he could not tolerate it, . . . bring[ing] the war to a speedy end.\textsuperscript{88}

Gandhi concludes this eccentric history from a spectatorial position, describing their ordeal as “a wonderful sight”: it was evidence, he writes, that “real suffering bravely borne melts even a heart of stone.”\textsuperscript{89} Gandhi’s hyperbolic account of the ending of the Anglo-Boer War is provided not to tell us anything about that war but because the women’s ordeal demonstrates “the potency of suffering” as such, a potency which might be deployed as well by other persons in other places.\textsuperscript{90}

The replicability of these women’s actions is demonstrated several chapters later in \textit{Satyagraha in South Africa}, when Gandhi writes of In-
People of Color

Indian women protesting the 1913 Searle judgment, which deemed marriages conducted under Hindu or Muslim rites invalid in South Africa. Gandhi describes the satyagraha of Indian women through a substitutive rhetoric: replacing the concentration camp with the prison; King Edward with the Indian political leader Sir Pherozeshah; brave simplicity with innocent faith; and “indescribable sufferings” with “bravery [that] was beyond words.” Effecting political transformation through their patient suffering, Indian women in South African prisons served much as Boer women had in British concentration camps a decade earlier: “These events stirred the heart of the Indians not only in South Africa but also in the motherland to its very depths.” Much as King Edward “could not bear it” when the Afrikaner women were interned in concentration camps, so the incarceration of Indian women “pleaded with [Sir Pherozeshah] as nothing else could. . . . His blood boiled at the thought of these women lying in jails herded with ordinary criminals and India could not sleep over the matter any longer.” Much as the Boer women’s “indescribable sufferings” were nonetheless described, we are told that “the [Indian] women’s bravery was beyond words” just before we read all about it:

It was an absolutely pure sacrifice that was offered by these sisters, who were innocent of legal technicalities, and many of whom had no idea of their country, their patriotism being based only upon faith. Some of them were illiterate and could not read the papers. But they knew that a mortal blow was being aimed at the Indians’ honour, and their going to jail was a cry of agony and prayer offered from the bottom of their heart, was in fact the purest of all sacrifices.

This account of Indian women’s participation in satyagraha thus replicates the account given earlier of Boer women’s suffering, signaling a replicability that is decisively gendered even as it crosses cultural divides. Women, whether Indian or Boer, seem to be the repository of the principle of satyagraha, which Gandhi in Hind Swaraj had situated in the resolution of a quarrel between brothers. In narrating the political work of women in South Africa, Gandhi shifts satyagraha out of the familial space and into the public sphere. The body of the traditional woman, Boer or Indian, becomes the vehicle of satyagraha’s entry into the wider world as these women leave the confined space of the home for the confined spaces of the camp or the prison.
Operating out of religious and marital compulsion, these women are able to transform politics, but they do not themselves undergo the transformation experienced by the male satyagrahi, as we saw for instance in the before-and-after pictures of Gandhi in the 1914 souvenir booklet. Instead, in an article in the same booklet titled “Women and the Struggle,” written by Millie Polak (née Millie Graham Downs), a close comrade and sometime housemate of Gandhi’s, we are told that the women protesters were entirely unchanged through their experience as satyagrahis. In that article, Polak emphasized that these women managed to undertake satyagraha “without any training for public life, accustomed to the retirement of women of India, not versed or read in the science of sociology, just patient, dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters of a struggling class of workers.” They were not motivated by reason, Polak argued, because “woman follows a surer path than any dictated by reason,” and they were certainly not motivated by “the pride of heroism.” The 1914 Polak attested that “To-day, all these women are back in their homes and are busy in the usual routine of an Indian woman’s life. . . . They are the same, patient, dutiful women that India has produced for centuries.”

Yet if in 1914 Polak repeated Gandhi’s understanding of women’s instinctive satyagraha grounded in their placid domesticity, in 1931 she published a book of her recollections, under the title Mr. Gandhi: The Man. In that later volume she subverts Gandhi’s claims about women’s nature rather than repeating them. In a chapter on her establishment of the Transvaal Indian Women’s Association, Polak also recounts her conversations with Gandhi on women as satyagraha participants. In these recounted conversations, Gandhi reassures her that women’s political involvement will not damage their domesticity, because he has “learned more of passive resistance, as a weapon of power, from Indian women than from anyone else.” Gandhi, as presented by Polak, proclaims that women

must rouse themselves to do their share in the work of reform. It is for them to set the standard of life. . . . men will have to listen when women refuse to obey. . . . They can die . . . and what man can prevail against a dead woman?

Polak’s account renders Gandhi’s position absurd: dead women, after all, are rarely dynamic agents in “the work of reform.” Her text encourages us to wonder: what happens when a woman publicly “refuse[s] to
obey” but no men listen—and no women die either? We can find such an example of women’s autonomous (and unsuccessful) satyagraha in Gandhi’s comrade Sonja Schlesin (1888–1956), who had courted arrest in her protests of the racist segregation of railway travel. Schlesin in 1912 repeatedly sat in the “reserved” compartment—that is, in one reserved for non-White travelers—during her train journeys. As a White woman, she knew this action was illegal—and she hoped, in doing so, to draw attention to the proliferation of segregation in South Africa, by being arrested and publicly prosecuted. After each removal from the “reserved” car she would write a letter of protest to the railroad company. She published these exchanges in *Indian Opinion* in 1912, becoming one of the few White voices protesting the increasingly aggressive segregation of transportation.

Schlesin is best remembered as Gandhi’s secretary during his time in South Africa, a job she held from 1905 to 1915. Consequently, she inscribed and imprinted much of Gandhi’s South African politics, whether through the ostensibly mechanical task of typing up his scribbled writings or the obviously complex machinations of coordinating events and managing people. She was the first woman in South Africa to attempt to register as an attorney’s clerk—an application that was summarily denied on account of her gender—and she occasionally participated directly in protests. In 1908, for instance, she wrote a speech against the Asiatic Restriction Ordinance, which Gandhi read aloud at a crucial protest rally and then published in *Indian Opinion*, printing it both in English and in Gujarati translation. In Gandhi’s framing of Schlesin’s words, her gender and nationality were paramount: the English-language section titles the relevant article “An Englishwoman’s Sympathy” and terms her a “Colonial-born European,” while the Gujarati pages describe her as “an unmarried girl of twenty” who “had obtained her parents’ permission” for her writing. The Moscow-born child of Lithuanian Jews who migrated to the Cape when she was four, Schlesin was British by naturalization. Despite Gandhi’s published claims, however, she was neither “an Englishwoman” nor a “Colonial-born European.” In that speech as published, Schlesin deployed her gender as a rallying cry: she motivated the would-be satyagrahis, almost exclusively male and Indian, through the invocation of gendered shame:

Let me remind you of a similar crusade now being waged by my sisters in England. I refer to the suffragettes. For the sake of a principle, they are prepared to lose their all, to brave in-
numerable trials. Many have already suffered imprisonment, more are ready, nay eager, to do so. If delicately-nurtured women can do this, will hardy men, inured to toil, do less?¹⁰⁶

In her own writings as published a few years later in *Indian Opinion*, Schlesin articulates herself first and foremost as a professional European woman. On the front page of *Indian Opinion*’s August 31, 1912, issue, we read Schlesin’s letter to the South African Railways, protesting that she was asked to leave the compartment “‘reserved for coloured people’” when she was “travel[ing] with an Indian lady friend.”¹⁰⁷ Schlesin concludes her brief letter by arguing “that it is the coloured people, and they only, who can object to the presence of a European in a compartment reserved for their use.”¹⁰⁸ The railway responded nearly a month later, in a letter addressed to “Mr. Sonja Schlesin” and rejecting Schlesin’s claims “in terms of the regulations duly gazetted.”¹⁰⁹ The railway’s subdued procedural response reflects the regulatory transformations then underway. Trains in South Africa were initially only loosely segregated: prioritizing revenues over racists, the railways had allowed non-White persons who purchased the more expensive fares, always minuscule in number, to ride in those carriages provided that they were “respectably dressed.”¹¹⁰ However, White passengers and staff frequently attacked and ejected these non-White travelers, and in the early twentieth century explicit railway segregation quickly became South African law.¹¹¹ This changing regulatory context rendered Schlesin’s nonviolent protests all the more urgent.¹¹² However, as we see in the pages of *Indian Opinion*, Schlesin continued to protest and to disobey, but she was never arrested, imprisoned, or charged. This impunity was likely gendered, and it rendered her protest less effective.

She did, however, manage to trouble the railway authorities and to record her actions in the publicity of the printed page. Schlesin’s first published reply, for instance, began with an abrupt clarification: “May I, first of all, draw your attention to the fact that I belong not to the male, but to the female, sex?”¹¹³ Schlesin then argued that “compartments [were] marked ‘Reserved’ . . . with a view not to wound the feelings of non-European passengers.”¹¹⁴ Consequently, she reiterates, only “non-European passengers” can demand a European’s removal from these cars: non-Whites, but not Whites, can enforce this racial homogeneity according to Schlesin. She invokes her “comparatively helpless” companion, a “lady,” thereby invoking female frailty and British chivalry even as she asserts both her authority and her womanhood.¹¹⁵ The
railway replied quickly, ignoring her gendered appeal and adding an ominous prediction: “If Europeans are permitted to travel in ‘reserved’ compartments, it will cause dissatisfaction amongst the non-European section of the community.”

Schlesin’s published letters exposed the falsity of a racist claim: throughout the first half of the twentieth century, South Africa’s White leaders insisted that Black, Indian, and Coloured passengers disliked traveling with White passengers, and that women in particular found racially integrated travel offensive, unpleasant, and dangerous. Strict segregation, it was argued, could be beneficial for the public peace; it could even be the harbinger of racial equality. Schlesin’s published letters, however, insistently testified to the contrary: “Had I noticed the slightest trace of dissatisfaction among the non-European passengers, I should myself have undoubtedly withdrawn.” Her situation, she emphasizes, is constrained by her professional obligations: “My work throws me greatly with non-European people.” In the next published letter, Schlesin writes of traveling with two men, Indian and German, in the “reserved” car. She was asked to move, and she refused:

The Conductor thereupon took my name and address, which, I dare say, are before you at this time. I do not know whether you propose to take any action in this matter, but it seems to me that it would be better for all concerned if my right to travel with non-European friends were tested in a Court of Law.

Schlesin invokes “my right to travel with non-European friends” and emphasizes “my work,” noting that she is “the Honorary Secretary of the Indian Women’s Association.” We receive one last installment of Schlesin’s railway dispute in the following week’s issue of Indian Opinion. The temporal break, crucially, has no correlation to the dates on the letters: it indicates, instead, an editorial decision made to leave Indian Opinion’s readers in suspense. Will Schlesin be charged, arrested, or even imprisoned? Turn to the issue of September 7, 1912, to find out.

Despite this cliffhanger ending, however, the next week’s issue offered bureaucratic repetition rather than political drama. The assistant general manager of the railway, addressing her now as “Dear Madam,” reiterates much of the same regulatory detail—“as already intimated to you in a previous correspondence,” “I would remind you of the fact.” Schlesin responds with a brief letter which “reiterate[s] . . . that, should
I be unreasonably asked to move . . . , I shall have to reluctantly de-
cline . . . , and take the risk of a prosecution, which, indeed, I should
welcome.”124 Schlesin was never sued: to do so would have embarrassed
the state. Her letter campaign, when published, makes her an activist
woman without invoking women’s honor: it frames her as a worker,
choosing in accordance with her professional responsibilities, rather
than a victim. Schlesin is, moreover, quite literally in transit: she may not
be transported to jail or to court, as she had wished, but she is an un-
married woman traveling around South Africa (mostly) as she pleases.
According to Polak, Gandhi had claimed that women’s disobedience
might lead to their death, but not to men’s continued misbehavior;
Schlesin’s nonviolent protest, despite satisfying the rules of satyagraha,
fails to elicit the repressive response that would make her a satyagrahi.

Schlesin’s railway segregation protest thus offers a compelling and
mostly overlooked contrast to Gandhi’s accounts of women’s participa-
tion in satyagraha protests. The stories of women’s satyagraha in
the text of Satyagraha in South Africa are racially distinct, but they are
united in their framing of women as wives and victims—and not, as in
Schlesin’s case, as traveling professionals. These two modes of women’s
nonviolent resistance to racism, moreover, are directly incompatible, as
Schlesin’s experience makes evident. Whereas in 1912 her secretarial
position within the Transvaal Indian Women’s Association facilitated
her determined protest of railway segregation, with the advent of Indian
women’s protests in 1913, Schlesin’s professional position became an
impediment to women’s satyagraha, rather than its enabling function,
because this professional woman was not authentically Indian.

Once the Indian members of the Transvaal Indian Women’s Associ-
ation became directly involved in passive resistance, Indian Opinion’s
coverage of women’s activism acquired a new racial politics. Announc-
ing the advent of women’s satyagraha activities on May 10, 1913, for
instance, Gandhi ran a front-page article titled “Indian Women as Pas-
sive Resisters”: as the title indicates, the contributions of White women
like Schlesin were now to be obscured. The article reprinted a telegram
sent to the government by the Transvaal Indian Women’s Association,
which warned that the affected women “would offer passive resistance
and . . . suffer imprisonment.”125 This telegram, however, was signed
“Sonja Schlesin, Honorary Secretary”: a woman, certainly, but one nei-
ther Hindu nor Muslim; never married; and not even Indian. To explain
this anomalous signature, Gandhi appended a bracketed note, in which
he wrote that Schlesin would much rather “an Indian woman” occupy her position,” but “her Indian sisters have not that knowledge of the English language and of South African politics which is required.”

Women’s participation thus became more prominent within satyagraha even as its interracial (and, thanks to the immigrant status of White and Indian members, international) nature came to be obscured. The expansion of women’s participation entailed the contraction of racial boundaries, and the valorization of women’s suffering in satyagraha meant that women’s constancy, rather than their political transformation, defined the woman satyagrahi’s role.

In this chapter, we have explored the print internationalism of M. K. “Mahatma” Gandhi, using his neologism “satyagraha” as an entry point into his extensive corpus. Gandhi is well known for his methods of protest and for their proven transportability into varying contexts of oppression. Responding to the significant scholarship on the translatability of Gandhian nonviolence into different cultures, I approached his print internationalism to consider that which he decides to render untranslated. In the deployment of his Sanskritic coinage “satyagraha,” I found a neologism that, like Tagore’s “gitanjali,” signaled both a new word and a new set of practices. Yet in tracking that term’s untranslated migration from South Africa to India, I demonstrated how Gandhi’s powerful work against racism paradoxically relied on existing racial tropologies. Because the transportability of satyagraha required, as we saw, the conversion of past experiences into easily comprehensible allegories, Gandhi created a mode of antiracist protest that could be replicated by various peoples of color but that could not, in his practice, be inclusive of the entire category. These limits to his antiracist method became apparent not only within his well-known failure to substantively involve Black South Africans in his protests but also in the racial narrowing of women’s participation in his movement. As such, Gandhi’s print internationalism can assist us in thinking carefully about our choices in forging internationalism’s interpretive community.

The term “satyagraha” is mentioned in what may be the most famous essay in all of postcolonial studies: Gayatri Spivak’s 1988 “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In the midst of a discussion of sati, the upper-caste Hindu practice of widow immolation, Spivak suggests that sati could, and perhaps should, have been understood as a form of political violence. She ends the paragraph by jumping to Gandhi:
Chapter 2

The only related transformation was Mahatma Gandhi’s re-inscription of the notion of *satyagraha*, or hunger strike, as resistance. But this is not the place to discuss the details of that sea change. I would merely invite the reader to compare the auras of widow sacrifice and Gandhian resistance. The root in the first part of *satyagraha* and *sati* are the same.¹²⁷

_Satyagraha*, as we have seen, can hardly be translated as “hunger strike,” but Spivak’s comma-offset phrase translates it thus nonetheless. According to Spivak, Gandhi “reinscribed” *satyagraha* as resistance, which was the “only related transformation” of existing ideas of female self-sacrifice to that which she proposes for widow immolation. Denying her ability to discuss “the details” of this “sea change,” Spivak speaks of “auras” and “roots.” She then extends an invitation to the reader, and she accompanies this invitation with a bit of Sanskrit: the shared first syllable, *sat*, in the two words of which she speaks. As Spivak’s essay demonstrates, Gandhi succeeded in his indigenizing aspirations, for in seeking to articulate passive resistance in an emphatically Indian idiom, Gandhi generated a Sanskrit neologism that sounds far older than its twentieth-century origins. Eighty years later, Spivak follows the Sanskrit and, in doing so, argues that Gandhi’s concept relates to widow immolation.

Spivak’s *sati-satyagraha* connection was trenchantly criticized in a 2011 article by Harish Trivedi. Quoting the passage just mentioned, Trivedi writes:

The misrepresentation here is matched only by the confidence of assertion. As every schoolchild in India knows, *satyagraha* does not mean “hunger strike,” for which Gandhi’s word was *anashan* or *upavas*. . . . As for the display of insider Sanskrit erudition here, though it is technically correct to say that the root *sat* (carrying the broad primary meaning of “being, existing,” etc.) is common to both *sati* and *satyagraha*, to yoke the two words together in this manner is irrelevant and misleading, and therefore may work only with readers who have never come across either of these words before. For the same root is also common to a whole host of other words, including *satkarma*, *satkavi*, *satkara*, *satkirti*, *satpatra*, *satsanga* and *satchidananda*, which it may tax the ingenuity of even such a brilliantly resourceful critic as Spivak to configure in any coherent pattern of common semantic signification.¹²⁸
Trivedi here performs that for which he condemns Spivak: seeking to correct Spivak’s “display of insider erudition,” he resorts to his own display, generating a paragraph full of Sanskritic words. As this contentious exchange between two distinguished literary scholars suggests, philology in the postcolonial world is often a confusing affair. In South Asia, there is no canonical method for discussing the philology of secular texts, and there is no Oxford English Dictionary to arbitrate disputes. In the absence of such institutional authorities, understandings of etymology become highly idiosyncratic. Spivak simply notes the shared root, whereas Trivedi invokes the authority of what “every schoolchild in India knows.” Both roots and children, however, are highly variable.

Much like Spivak and Trivedi’s presentations, Gandhi’s coinage of “satyagraha,” as we saw, was neither traditional nor falsifiable. In postcolonial contexts without hegemonic linguistic institutions, the moment of providing a gloss becomes both informative and transformative. Drawing on the romance, and the indisputable reality, of other languages, elsewhere, the author who writes untranslated words can summon other worlds into being. This is not, as we have seen, what Emily Apter calls an Untranslatable, whose linguistic particularity resists our repeated attempts at translation. The term “satyagraha” signals novelty rather than singularity: its axis of signification is as much temporal as cultural. Even as its linguistic divergence from its global Anglophone context seems to signal geographic interruption, satyagraha seeks, through such international interconnection, to create changes within the global Anglophone, and not primarily to mark its limits.

This chapter has approached the South Africa–focused portions of Gandhi’s writings through readings that sustain and engage the brief mentions of Africans in Gandhi’s writings. In doing so, I hope to ameliorate what is often perceived as the damage caused by Black marginalization in both the politics and the celebration of Gandhi, which has contributed considerably to the difficulties of Indian-African relations. For Indians in India, or even in the United States, engaging allegations of Gandhi’s racism can serve as an invitation to consider their own allegiances and prejudices. Within Africa, in contrast, such allegations have often served as an alibi for racially motivated violence against people of Indian descent. To ask whether Gandhi was racist in his writing on Africans is to ignore the most salient racial aspect of his political practices in South Africa: namely, his failure to directly incorporate the grievances of the Black and Coloured inhabitants of South Africa in his antiracist campaigns. Given this notable omission from his politi-
cal mobilizations, I suggest that his writings’ references to Africans are unlikely to yield some key truth about his racial views. Much as Black people in Gandhi’s South African struggles served primarily as context and not as concern, so too, I suggest, Black people in Gandhi’s rhetoric and writings serve as symbols and not as referents. They are rhetorical flourishes in his larger depiction of South Africa, not referential descriptions that we can mine for his personal views.

This insight does not resolve the debate, either exculpating him for his lack of intent or incriminating him for his lack of care. Instead, my contribution dramatizes the phenomenon of discrepant and simultaneous readings, each proceeding from a specific position, whether in racial or geographical terms. For readers familiar with the discipline of literary studies, I am suggesting that the question of Gandhi’s racism in his writings resembles the debates around the appropriate reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Conrad’s most famous novel has been both celebrated for its critique of imperialism and castigated for its racism, the latter most famously in Chinua Achebe’s scathing critique. Since Achebe’s intervention, first published in 1977, admirers of *Heart of Darkness* (and of Conrad) have frequently mobilized a defensive claim that Natalie Melas has termed “an imperial contradiction”: “the notion that the text could be a critique of imperialism in Africa and therefore, in a fundamental sense, documentary, and have nothing to do with Africa.”¹³⁰ I build on Melas’s insight, expanding its purview to include Gandhi. Like *Heart of Darkness*, Gandhi’s texts enable two different readers: the text is not, I would say, racist despite being anti-imperialist but, rather, racist and anti-imperialist at the same time, that is, during the time of reading, depending on the reader’s self-assumed task. To read Gandhi’s writings about South Africa for India appropriately, I argue, we have to read at once “from” India—his intended readership—and “from” Africa—his site of allegorization. This process facilitates a kind of split postcolonial subjectivity, but not one that resides in the split between the (post)colony and the (former) metropole. Instead, this split postcolonial subject lies between regions once linked through explicitly defined circuits of imperial subjugation and now connected primarily through the linkages that we choose or decline to recognize. We will revisit this split in more detail in the following chapter, which considers, via the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, the cleavage between the African diaspora and the Indian one.

In this respect, reading Gandhi’s writings on Africans is emblematic of the problems of postcolonial reading as theorized by Melas, in which
parts of the world that have long been subordinated can (and should) read and respond to texts with “a distinctly local positionality as well as a partial and an almost intimate mode of identification.” To read “from” Africa—that is, to read with an attentiveness to that part of the world that Gandhi’s text, like Conrad’s, prefers to “deploy as metaphor”—is to read from the metaphor rather than to read with it or through it. Whether or not Gandhi’s writings are racist is thus a question of reading that cannot be resolved into the methodological debates of close versus distant, paranoid versus reparative, surface versus symptomatic. The kind of reading that will resolve this debate requires not an adjectival modifier but a prepositional phrase. One reads Gandhi’s (alleged) racism, not with or against the grain, but from somewhere—or, ideally, from two places at once. The postcolonial reading that I propose, accordingly, is split not between the metropole and the colony but between two former colonies at once. This is a dialectical mode of reading that seizes on the “imperial contradiction”—the allowance that one could write about a place and yet not write about a place, at the same time—and interrogates its enabling logic. Reading in this manner precipitates, then, to the simplest of interpretive classroom tasks: to attend simultaneously to the literal and the figurative. This practice of simultaneous and discrepant reading, moreover, echoes the simultaneous and discrepant analysis that our contemporary category “people of color” ethically demands. U.S. advocates for “people of color,” for instance, may champion “Black Lives Matter” at the same time, even though the first phrase emphasizes the shared experience of racism across diverse racial categories and the latter emphasizes the unique precarity of a single racial group. As this example suggests, embracing “people of color,” like approaching Gandhi’s anti-racism, demands a split subjectivity: the insistence that recognizing the shared nature of racism can enable an antiracist agenda that prioritizes its particular forms.