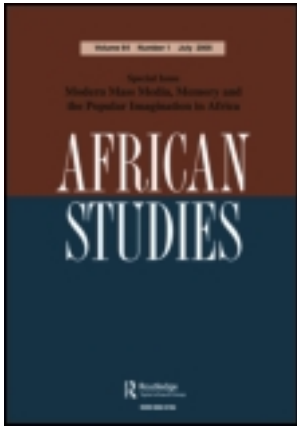


This article was downloaded by: [University of Rhodes]

On: 10 January 2012, At: 22:58

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## African Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cast20>

### The Life and Death of Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat, 23 February 1943 to 27 January 1989

Jon Soske<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> McGill University, Quebec, Canada

Available online: 02 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Jon Soske (2011): The Life and Death of Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat, 23 February 1943 to 27 January 1989, *African Studies*, 70:3, 337-358

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2011.628797>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# The Life and Death of Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat, 23 February 1943 to 27 January 1989

Jon Soske\*

McGill University, Quebec, Canada

*At the time of his murder in 1989, Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat was widely revered as 'the people's doctor' based on almost two decades of medical work in Soweto and health projects initiated across the Transvaal as Azapo's secretary of health. Despite his close relationship with leading African National Congress (ANC) figures and his major role in anti-apartheid medical activism, Asvat's name rarely appears in histories of the liberation struggle and his life's work has been almost completely overshadowed by the controversial circumstances of his death. This article reconstructs Asvat's biography from his childhood in the multiracial Johannesburg neighbourhood of Vrededorp to his medical study and political activism as part of a Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)-aligned student group in Pakistan; from his significant role in non-racial cricket to his emergence as a central figure in Soweto's life and politics. This article also reflects on the relationship between Lenasia and Soweto as social spaces during the years of apartheid and interrogates the ways in which apartheid racial categories – particularly 'African' and 'Indian' – continue to structure how historians represent the recent past.*

**Key words:** Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat, Azania People's Organization (Azapo), Black Consciousness (BC), Lenasia, Soweto, medical activism, space

The erasure of history is subtle and incremental and depends upon the erasure of links across time and space. (Farmer 2004)

To change life, however, we must first change space. (Lefebvre 1991)

On the evening of 1 July 1988, Dr Abu Baker Asvat – 'Hurley' to his friends and comrades – accepted the first annual human rights award from the Lenasia-based newspaper, *The Indicator*. After a few characteristically good natured barbs directed at other speakers, Asvat urged his listeners to cross the highway separating Lenasia from Soweto and break down the barriers that existed between the adjoining townships. His manner, as usual, was unassuming, almost modest. But the plainness of his words conveyed an unsettling passion:

Let us have social mingling. Let Soweto swarm Lenasia. Let Eldorado Park swarm Lenasia. Let Lenasia swarm Eldorado Park. Let Lenasia swarm Soweto. Then we will have put into practice what we preach. We can't wait until liberation because once liberation is on it is not going to be easy to mend the injustice and the oppression that this harsh system has done to the people in this country. We've got to start now in practical terms. (Asvat 1989)

---

\*Email: jon.soske@mcgill.ca

The designations ‘African’, ‘Indian’ or ‘coloured’ appeared nowhere in this speech. Nor did he exhort his listeners to rethink or abandon their ethnic identity, although he personally rejected the designation of ‘Indian’ and adhered to Steve Biko’s inclusive idea of blackness. Instead, Asvat confronted Lenasia for limiting itself to ‘passive action’ in support of the liberation struggle: symbolic gestures of protest that failed to transgress the barriers imposed and policed by the white supremacist government. It was time, he urged, for Lenasians to break out of the group area in which they lived and relocate to places like Soweto and Klipspruit West. It was time to dismantle apartheid in the everyday sites of work, school, and home. ‘It is because of the part you played pre-liberation,’ he warned, ‘that you will be able to enjoy the liberatory phase’. Asvat’s critique of ‘passive action’ unmistakably alluded to Gandhi’s strategy of passive resistance, but the foremost target of this warning was the manner in which oppressed communities like Lenasia and Soweto had internalised the categories of apartheid. Overcoming these divisions, Asvat implied, was not ultimately a question of political goodwill or ideology, but necessitated transforming the racial character of both community institutions and social space itself.

The main goal of this article is relatively modest. It attempts to reconstruct the contours of Asvat’s biography in order to argue that he was a significant figure in the liberation struggle and the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. When two men murdered Asvat seven months after *The Indicator* awards speech, he was widely revered in African areas across the Transvaal for his medical work in black townships, squatter camps, and rural settlements over the course of nearly 17 years (Pela 1988). He first rose to national prominence during the early 1980s as the head of the Azania Peoples Organization’s (Azapo) health secretariat. By the middle of the decade, he was the single most prominent anti-apartheid voice regarding questions of health and medicine. Between 1984 and the beginning of 1989, at least 193 articles appeared in English-language newspapers like the *Weekly Mail*, *The Star*, and *The Sowetan* that either cited his statements or publicised his medical activism. In the days following his death, thousands of messages flooded in from Pollsmoor Prison to Pakistan, from shacks in Soweto to centres of anti-apartheid activism in Europe and the United States (Akhalwaya 1989). Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, and Zeph Mothopeng wrote from detention exalting his contributions. His funeral was probably the largest political demonstration in Lenasia’s history. Over 20 years later, he is still remembered among older generations in Soweto as ‘the good doctor’, ‘the people’s doctor’, ‘part of us’.

Nevertheless, the few discussions of Asvat’s life that exist focus on the controversy surrounding his murder – especially the alleged involvement of Winnie Mandela and her notorious appearance at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – rather than his political and medical work (Bridgland 1997).<sup>1</sup> The second goal of this article is to ask ‘why?’ How did a figure as important as Asvat become marginalised in the writing of South African history? At the funeral of Albertina Sisulu in June 2011, Jacob Zuma broke over two decades

of official silence regarding Asvat by acknowledging the close relationship between the two struggle leaders – although he did so in such a way that appropriated Asvat for her memory and, indirectly, the legacy of the African National Congress (ANC).<sup>2</sup> Except for this gesture, the overall record of the ANC-led government is clear: rarely has it extended recognition to individuals from competing political currents for their role in the anti-apartheid movement. Indeed, the contrast between the flourishing industry of struggle commemoration centred on ANC figures and the general silence concerning Asvat – who still remains a distinctive presence in popular consciousness – could not be more sharply drawn. But the principle cause of Asvat's neglect in the pages of academic history probably derives from elsewhere. To a considerable degree, the historiography of modern South Africa remains organised around apartheid racial categories: distinct and largely hermetic literatures exist about 'Africans', 'Indians', 'whites', and 'coloureds'. Even when they do not explicitly assume a racial subject, many social historians reproduce these delineations by falsely abstracting locations that were themselves the product of segregationist policy. The major history of Soweto, for example, simply ignores the adjacent and interconnected areas of Lenasia and Eldorado Park (Bonner and Segal 1999). Additionally, most studies of Indian history – reflecting a Congress tradition of multi-racialism – focus on the emergence of a broad South African Indian identity (Hansen 2010) and therefore privilege figures, like Gandhi, Yusuf Dadoo and GN Naicker, who embraced a politics of community nationalism. Somewhat ironically, individuals who rejected designations such as 'Indian' and challenged their deployment within the liberation struggle are rendered peripheral by this racial optic.

Memories of a popularly venerated figure like Asvat often assume a dual character. They are highly personal and yet charged with an underlying political valence. Because they are embedded within particular experiences of oppression and struggle, concrete details can possess an almost symbolic dimension: they convey the meanings and values that a political life came to represent. Most historians of the anti-apartheid struggle privilege forms of resistance that directly confronted the state or white capital: strikes, boycotts, protests, rural uprisings, the armed organisations. In contrast, memories of Asvat largely focus on activities that defied the spatial order, social institutions, and foundational categories of a system that operated through the engineering of daily life as much as economic exploitation and state repression. Concentrated on questions like medical care, sports, education, the structure of households, and the spatial divisions between black communities, such recollections provide a window into everyday experiences of apartheid and the distinctive modes of opposition that they engendered.

Many people who knew Asvat recall his height (well over 6'3" or 1,9 metres), his personal warmth, his trademark safari suits – during that period, the near exclusive preserve of the Afrikaner. His humour was sharp and bawdy, especially when he shot taunts in Gujarati across the cricket pitch. Asvat could be fearless. When a foreign rugby team broke the sports boycott in the early 1980s, he

asked Yusuf Veriava and George Wauchope to go to the airport to protest: the three of them stood before the gate wearing signs that said 'go home' as a crowd of whites screamed and spat in their faces. Until the day he died, Asvat drove the same 1972 Datsun 1200 while most other doctors in Lenasia owned the latest Mercedes. He once asked a younger cricketer: 'I can go buy myself a fancy car, but will it give me dignity?' He could be quite mischievous. As a joke, he would call his close friends at the crack of dawn and bark in fluent Afrikaans: 'This is John Vorster Square. We want you to report to us!' But he was also making a point. When they come, they come: if you live in fear, they can still find a way to control you. He was an individual of deep, although largely private, faith. During the height of the 1980s township rebellions, Asvat would go to Avalon Cemetery to watch the funerals of his comrades, a lone spectator from the 'Indian' section, and once the crowd thinned he would walk to the graveside to pay his final respects.

### **From Fietas to Karachi**

Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Asvat's grandfather came to the Transvaal from a village close to the town of Navsari in Gujarat. He first worked as a hawker; later he established a shop on 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Vrededorp (Fietas), which his son eventually took over. Asvat's mother relocated to South Africa from India at the age of 19. Along with his two brothers, Asvat grew up in a much beloved house on 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Immediately to the south west of central Johannesburg, Vrededorp was in fact a group of neighbourhoods established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that gradually bled together: the old Afrikaner working-class area of Vrededorp proper, Fordsburg, the Brickfields, and the Indian area of Pageview (Van Onselen 1982:30). Divided from the Afrikaner neighbourhood by De La Rey and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, the families who lived in the western section of Fietas formed an uncommonly intimate community. Friendships that developed across yards and porches also transcended race and religion. Chinese, Malay, Coloured, Tamil, Gujarati and African households lived side-by-side in densely packed lanes. Here, city blocks developed the solidarities of an extended family and children grew up together in the streets under a dozen pairs of watchful eyes. On Saturday mornings, travellers from across South Africa would visit specialty stores in 14<sup>th</sup> Street; after the shops closed, neighbourhood children transformed the road into a cricket pitch or soccer field. Because there was only one Indian high school in the Transvaal, local children studied in Fordsburg alongside pupils from every conceivable class, religious, and linguistic background.<sup>3</sup>

Vrededorp was not without its faults. A layer of slumlords consigned groups of four or five families to sharing minimal facilities and contrived ways of illegally culling additional rents. At the time of Partition in 1947, Muslim League partisans clashed with Indian National Congress supporters (many of whom were also Muslim) outside local cinemas. Racial stereotypes were commonplace, particularly regarding Tamils; marriage rarely occurred across ethnic, religious,

or linguistic lines.<sup>4</sup> But the deep social antagonisms that divided the passengers and former indentured labourers of Natal were absent, and the much smaller weight of the South Asian population meant that the division between African and Indian was far less acute than in Durban. Many years later, several of his closest friends maintained that Asvat developed his commitment to fair play and fiercely inclusive sense of community during this period.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, he was part of a generation that came to consciousness before the implementation of the Group Areas Act and – having witnessed the methodic strangulation of its communities – never relinquished a broader, more cosmopolitan view of the world.

After graduating from Johannesburg Indian High School in 1961, Asvat departed for medical studies in Pakistan, joining his older brother Ebrahim (Foxy). Given that South African medical schools reserved only a handful of spaces for ‘non-white’ students, overseas study was an attractive option for those families with means. A few hundred South Africans lived and studied in Bombay during the 1960s; about 50 South African medical students were enrolled at the University of Sind in Karachi.<sup>6</sup> These were extraordinary years to be abroad. Legendary figures of India’s anti-colonial struggle, like Nehru and Krishna Menon, still dominated India’s political landscape. The intoxications of independence had not yet faded. For the first time in their lives, the students were free to travel; mix freely with people of their choosing; think, read, and be accepted by society at large. In the late 1950s, the Bombay group founded an organisation to help new arrivals get settled, arrange political meetings, and agitate against the apartheid government. Close relations soon developed between the students in Bombay and Pakistan, who often visited India and travelled throughout the sub-continent.<sup>7</sup> As a doctor who studied in India later recalled, the South Africans eagerly searched for ways to participate in the Third World project of building a new kind of nation liberated from both colonialism and despotism. There was a powerful sense of being surrounded – from Sukarno’s Indonesia to the Kenya of Tom Mboya – by the non-aligned world. At the same time, they encountered poverty on a scale that was unimaginable on the basis of their South African experiences.<sup>8</sup>

Abu Baker first completed a two-year science course in Lahore before beginning his medical studies in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). He and his brother later transferred to Karachi, where they completed their final three years. In Karachi, the Asvat brothers found a community of like-minded South African students and, in 1964, this group established an organisation called the Azania Youth Movement (AYM), which was affiliated with the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Several members of the AYM, like Ismail Nagdee, were staunch supporters of the ANC-led Congress movement. Nevertheless, they held that the ANC and PAC were part of a single liberation struggle and the sole criterion for collective work was ‘implacable hostility’ to the apartheid regime.<sup>9</sup> During this period, Pakistan International Airlines was the only airline that connected sub-Saharan

Africa with China and a major activity of the group was hosting PAC cadres en route to Shanghai and Beijing. They became active in student politics, especially around the question of Palestine, attended functions at the Cuban and Chinese embassies, organised commemorations of the Sharpeville Massacre, and published articles refuting the Nationalist government's propaganda in local newspapers.<sup>10</sup> Other members of the AYM recall that Abu Baker was among the least political of the core group. His main interests were rugby, American rock music, and travelling cross-country by motorcycle.<sup>11</sup> In later years, however, he spoke of this period often with his comrades in Azapo. His student days eventually informed a lifelong commitment to the idea of socialism.

### **Coronation Hospital and the Chicken Farm Surgery**

Nearly all of the medical students in India and Pakistan returned to South Africa. It was, as one doctor later recalled, like stepping back into a cage. A police informer inside the AYM had sent extensive reports back to the Security Branch. On arrival, the major in charge of monitoring Indian political activists summoned several of its members to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of John Vorster Square and interrogated them regarding their overseas activities.<sup>12</sup> Many returning students also confronted the humiliations of practising medicine in an apartheid hospital: an entirely white senior staff, discriminatory wages, inferior facilities to hospitals in white areas, segregated dining and sleeping rooms, flagrant racism from white colleagues, and the perennial abuse of the completely black nursing staff.<sup>13</sup> Initially, Asvat found a position at Coronation Hospital in central Johannesburg, where he worked under the immediate supervision of Dr Yusuf Veriava – he and 'Joe' later collaborated in the development of the Azapo health secretariat. Asvat's friends and colleagues watched as he became increasingly politicised. Unable to tolerate the hospital's racism, he raised a series of complaints regarding the conditions of staff and patients. The breaking point occurred when he confronted a white pharmaceutical representative for failing to speak with black doctors during a visit to the hospital.<sup>14</sup> The administration dismissed him with 24 hours notice. It was sometime in late 1972.

Unemployed, Asvat took over a small surgery at MacDonald's Farm in Soweto (popularly known as Chicken Farm), which his brother Ebrahim was struggling to make profitable. Across the road from Regina Mundi Church, the tiny, makeshift building shared the surrounding area with a shack community of some 60 families. Over the next several years, Asvat began to build close relationships with the inhabitants of shantytowns in Chicken Farm and nearby Kliptown. He provided them with medical care and he visited them almost daily, bringing food and blankets during the winter, and became a counsellor and friend.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, Asvat hired a local woman to run a crèche and soup kitchen for the children living in the camp, and purchased portable toilets for the community.<sup>16</sup> Although the majority of his patients stayed in Rockville, Dlamini, and Mofolo South, people began to come to see him from every corner of Soweto. Asvat arrived at his surgery around noon and stayed until he had

seen everyone – often until eight or nine at night. According to his nurse, Asvat would sometimes treat more than 100 patients a day (Sisulu 2002). Approachable and down to earth, he began to develop a reputation for his generosity: he made house calls when patients could not travel, he provided medicine for free, and he assisted patients with transport costs home.<sup>17</sup> Famously, Asvat never declined to see someone when he or she could not afford to pay. In some cases, he treated individuals over 40 times without collecting any money.<sup>18</sup> This was not charity: he advised patients to pay if and when they could afford it.

The Chicken Farm surgery became a township institution. During the 1976 Soweto Uprising, protestors sought sanction and treatment at its premises, safe in the knowledge that Asvat would shield them from the police. On one occasion, so many wounded children flooded the surgery that he resorted to teaching patients in the waiting area how to remove buckshot from the backs and scalps of the screaming victims. Afterwards, his patients left the surgery covered with the blood of injured students.<sup>19</sup> When demonstrators burned Indian shops and other building in the area, the surgery caught fire by accident and the people from the squatter community somehow managed to extinguish the blaze. They watched over the clinic until he came the next day.<sup>20</sup> It was during this time that his activities first became known in political circles and Soweto residents began to call him the 'people's doctor'.<sup>21</sup>

Almost a decade later, the surgery became the venue for one of the most remarkable collaborations in the history of the liberation struggle. In 1984, Asvat hired Albertina Sisulu (co-president of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and wife of imprisoned ANC leader Walter Sisulu) to serve as his nurse when no other doctor in Lenasia or Soweto, including those affiliated with the ANC, would take the risk of employing the banned leader. Cooperating across sharp political divisions, the unlikely duo strongly defended their medical practice as an embodiment of unity in action and became nearly inseparable. Asvat paid her salary while she was detained and frequently gave her leave to visit her husband on Robben Island; she called Asvat 'my son' (Sisulu 2002). During the mid-1980s, internecine violence erupted between Azapo and UDF supporters in African townships across the country, resulting in hundreds – perhaps thousands – of casualties. Injured combatants from both formations visited the surgery for treatment despite Asvat's well-known leadership position in the Black Consciousness (BC) movement.<sup>22</sup> Clandestine meetings of banned political leaders were also sometimes held on site. At the end of these conferences, Asvat would tell his comrades to roll up their sleeves so that he could quickly check their vital signs and remonstrate with them for neglecting their health.<sup>23</sup>

### **Lenasia, Soweto, and Black Consciousness**

Sometime during the mid-1970s, Asvat began to grapple with the question that he called 'the great divide': the division between African and Indian, Soweto and



Lenasia. Separated by Avalon Cemetery, a small lake, and several miles of wetlands, Lenasia and Soweto were linked by a bridge that stretched across the main road connecting both townships to Johannesburg. A powerful sense of estrangement existed between the two locations. Most people remember that there was no real interaction, but also no great enmity, between the two communities given the general absence of contact. While significant tensions between different black groups in the Transvaal have a long and complex history, many neighbourhoods in Johannesburg – such as the western freehold areas of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare or Vrededorp and Fordsburg – were racially diverse and, in certain respects, highly integrated before the implementation of the Group Areas Act. By the 1920s, Africans outnumbered Indians even in some designated locations like Pretoria's Asiatic Bazaar (Maasdorp and Pillay 1977). The forced removals of the 1950s and 1960s not only instantiated systematic segregation between black groups for the first time, they inscribed the differentiation between African, Indian, and coloured into a spatial order characterised by unequal access to basic resources (water, electricity, education), different forms of housing, and disparities in wealth and property ownership. Fear often governed the relationship between communities – fear of arrest for violating the Group Areas Act and the attention it could draw to oneself and one's family, fear of negotiating unfamiliar and dangerous neighbourhoods, fear of social opprobrium for mixing with the 'wrong' types of people. Apartheid urban planning was enormously effective in this regard. The simple adjacency of distinct areas reinforced the perception of difference: here and there, Indian and African.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea of Lenasia as an 'Indian' area was – and remains – profoundly distorting. From its zoning as a group area in 1956, Africans have always been present in one way or another, and generally in quite significant numbers: patronising shops, working in stores and factories, and living in the majority of households as domestic workers. Most of Lenasia's legal residents – virtually all of whom were classified as 'Indian' – encountered Africans in subordinate roles and viewed 'them' as coming from, and thus fundamentally belonging, elsewhere. Africans were called *karia* (the Gujarati word for 'black' and sometimes used as the equivalent of *kaffir*) and African women *blouies*, a term which referred to skin colour (blues), but which also connoted sexual availability. This reconfiguration of the African as outsider within an 'Indian' space was one of the most striking and long-lasting successes of apartheid social engineering. The separation between African and Indian was therefore not only spatial: it was also reproduced *within* Lenasia by the micro-politics of everyday social practice. Underwriting hierarchies based on class (especially property ownership and employment), vigilante gangs would target Africans walking through neighbourhoods at night; many people allege that sexual encounters – coerced and consensual – between young men from Lenasia and African domestic workers were ubiquitous. At the same time, the majority of Soweto residents believed that Indians chose to keep to themselves and (because of either cultural

difference or racism) did not want to mix with Africans. Their interactions with Indian doctors, social workers, or shopkeepers in Soweto tended to reinforce this prejudice. Outside of professional contexts, most of these individuals had little contact or few close personal relationships within the African community. The archetypal Indian was, within this discourse, the parasitic shopkeeper.

When the 1976 Soweto Uprising occurred, Asvat had probably been thinking about these issues for some time. He already knew many of the BC political figures active in Soweto, who represented the only above-ground political resistance. But the experience of practising medicine in the midst of unprecedented revolt and police repression appears to have pushed him towards a more overtly political stance. Yusuf Veriava put Asvat in contact with his brother Sadecque, who was then vice-president of the Black People's Convention for Education and Culture. Surprised that a member of the Indian professional class was interested in the BC movement, Sadecque and another comrade quickly made arrangements to meet with Asvat. Before Sadecque could launch into his carefully prepared recruitment pitch, Asvat simply asked his visitors: 'How do I join?'<sup>25</sup>

Asvat went on to explain that he was attracted to BC for two reasons. First, the BC movement was striving towards the unity of the oppressed by attacking the racial and ethnic divisions fostered by the apartheid system. Asvat was referring to Steve Biko's understanding that blackness was not a question of skin colour but political consciousness: to be black was founded on the awareness that one was an oppressed black human being. In later years, Asvat would remark that this concept of blackness could also address religious and ethnic divisions within so-called 'Indian' communities.<sup>26</sup> Like other adherents of BC, he rejected the Congress tradition of separate political organisations for Africans, Indians, and coloureds, and viewed the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) as an organisation of the 'merchant class' that ultimately served to entrench ethnic divisions and isolate so-called 'Indians' from the broader liberation struggle.<sup>27</sup> The very categories of Indian and coloured, according to this argument, played into the divide-and-rule strategy of apartheid racial ideology. Second, Asvat was strongly attracted to the cultural activism and community projects of the BC movement. 'The only way you can communicate with people,' he told Sadecque 'is through work'. In particular, he cited the Lenasia-based People's Experimental Theatre of the early 1970s and clinics organised by BC members in places like King William's Town.<sup>28</sup> Asvat soon became active in BC projects in Soweto. After Biko's murder and the banning of BC organisations, he was a founding member of Azapo in April 1978.

During these years, BC activists regularly travelled between the two townships and built close bonds in explicit defiance of the Group Areas Act.<sup>29</sup> Despite periodic raids conducted by the police, it was easier for people from Soweto to move around Lenasia: enough Africans worked and shopped in the township for their presence to appear normal. With the exception of business owners (who some-

times paid the police to ignore illegal enterprises), cops were far more likely to arrest Indians in areas zoned as African. The level of day-to-day surveillance in Lenasia was also less intense, a fact that activists employed strategically: many political meetings were organised in the township and African comrades would hide from the police at the homes of their Lenasia friends.<sup>30</sup> In turn, a smaller core of BC activists from Lenasia and Eldorado Park carried out regular political work in Soweto and attended important events at the Orlando YMCA and Regina Mundi Church – often scaling fences or ducking into near-by houses in order to avoid arrest.<sup>31</sup>

But the strongest connection between the two townships was Asvat. Significantly, memories of Asvat among comrades, friends and patients from Soweto involve questions of household and hospitality as much as his medical practice or political activism. At a time when many Lenasia home owners asked African visitors to wait outside their houses, or would scarcely consider inviting Africans to eat at the same table, Asvat's doors were always open: he insisted his friends walk right in – as one would in an African township – and he threw monthly parties with guests from every conceivable walk of life.<sup>32</sup> In Soweto, he was at ease, travelling throughout the township day and night, dropping in on friends or patients unannounced, and never hesitating to accept an invitation to share a meal in someone's home, except perhaps when fasting. Many people also remember Asvat visiting them or coming to the clinic with his family: his brothers, his wife Zohra (they married in 1976), and later his three young children, Suleiman, Akiel, and Hasina.<sup>33</sup> Every year, the Asvat family would take Eid meat to share with the area around the surgery and their friends. A few individuals even remember his mother's *atchar*.

In stressing the exceptional character of Asvat's actions, these anecdotes comment on a landscape of everyday social practices within which simple – but nevertheless fundamental – gestures like entering a home, accepting a particular kind of food, or simply being physically relaxed acquired potent racial dimensions. They concern the manner in which apartheid came to be embodied in quotidian interactions among black South Africans and the fact that many people within black communities policed their behaviour according to its norms. And they express considerable bitterness over the ways in which racial prejudice insinuated itself into personal affect and bodily language, the organisation of households, and the very terms of extending generosity. As Asvat warned in his speech at the *Indicator* human rights awards, these aspects of apartheid – refractions of its overarching structure within the realm of ordinary social life – would continue to haunt South Africa if, and ultimately when, they were not consciously transformed from below.

### **'No Normal Sport in an Abnormal Society'**

The late 1970s was a period of intense activism on another front: cricket. In January 1976, Ali Bacher of the South Africa Cricket Board (SACB) launched

an initiative known as 'normal cricket', which allowed black teams to play against white teams at sports facilities in white areas. The move divided the black cricketing world. Almost from the start, the majority of Western Cape cricket clubs and a small group in the Transvaal argued that the inclusion of black players was fundamentally superficial: the SACB was attempting to present the image of a 'normalised' sport to break the boycott and regain admission to international sport (Murray and Merrett 2004). Although sceptical, Asvat nevertheless considered that it was worth attempting to exploit this opportunity and his team, the Crescents, affiliated to the previously all-white provincial league.<sup>34</sup> The result was a debacle. Black players could not use the same clubhouses or facilities as white players. They were forced to change in their cars and leave the cricket grounds for lunch. White players, officials, and fans displayed overt racism. Moreover, black teams endured the humiliation of competing in world-class stadiums and then returning to their resource-starved townships.<sup>35</sup> Asvat finally refused to continue playing in these conditions after the Crescents won a tournament in the northern Transvaal. Several team members wanted to have a drink afterwards, but no venue would serve them. Asvat's decision split the closely-knit Crescents.<sup>36</sup> He soon began meeting with Ajit Gandabhai and Rasik Gopal, members of the recently established Transvaal Council of Sport, and these discussions led to the formation of the South African Council of Sport (Sacos)-affiliated Transvaal Cricket Board (TCB) in August 1977. Despite the fact that a majority of its members supported the politics of the TIC, Asvat was elected an honorary vice-president of the new organisation and served as its second president from 1979 to 1981.<sup>37</sup>

Under the slogan 'no normal sport in an abnormal society', the new organisation aggressively campaigned for the Sacos principles of non-racialism and non-collaboration with apartheid structures. This rebel league began with less than a dozen teams and virtually no financial resources or equipment (Gandabhai 1983). Many new players were initially shocked when Asvat, as president of the TCB, personally met them first thing in the morning and drove them to the field to insure that fixtures were set up for the matches.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the TCB began to develop a credible alternative to 'normal cricket', which by then had its only significant base in the Transvaal. In 1980, the TCB organised a protest against the opening of a new stadium in Lenasia: a first-class facility with a modern glass clubhouse built in order to promote normal cricket in the township. Despite warnings from the security branch to stay away, protestors positioned themselves outside the stadium and managed to grease the wicket before the beginning of play. In the end, police far outnumbered civilian spectators in the bleachers.<sup>39</sup> The event collapsed. Shortly afterwards, coloured and Indian students launched a massive school boycott throughout the country. Protestors in Lenasia compared their disintegrating high school to the immediately adjacent stadium: increasing numbers of people identified normal cricket with collaboration. Asvat and the TCB intensively canvassed teams and players, drawing

significant numbers out of the opposing league.<sup>40</sup> In November 1981, the TCB – long denied playing space in Lenasia – arrived before dawn and occupied the city cricket fields, displacing the opposition. In August 1982, Ali Bacher publicly conceded that normal cricket was dead (Akhalwaya 1982).

Younger players remember their first TCB meeting as a political education.<sup>41</sup> Alongside the day-to-day matters of running the league, the board discussed questions such as engagement with overseas unions, global human rights issues, and the use of sport to raise political consciousness. In the midst of often heated debates over the relationship between politics and sport, Asvat – always persuasive rather than forceful – articulated a broad and integrated vision: like education, health, and dignity for one's community, sport was only one component of being a complete human being. He spoke about the ability of sport to break down the barriers of apartheid society (the Crescents included several white members and at least one African, Duncan Stamper), and the pressing need to draw players from African townships into the league. These arguments were widely influential. Nevertheless, Asvat surprised many people by announcing that he would step down after his second term. 'My conscience won't allow me to stand as president for one more term,' he explained, 'because there is much more important work I need to contribute towards'.<sup>42</sup> Asvat continued to play an active role in the TCB. But his announcement was a political statement. His main priority was the work of Azapo.

### **The Azapo Health Secretariat**

In July 1982, the Azapo health secretariat announced the formation of the Community Health Awareness Project (CHAP). As Asvat explained to the newspapers, the programme sought to mobilise local branches, health workers, and community organisations around two central goals: health education and preventative health care (Moroke 1982). At the time, a cholera epidemic was raging in rural areas and Azapo was struggling to distribute information on prevention, early signs of the disease, and first steps to take for treatment. In the midst of one tragedy, another struck: a deadly outbreak of polio in the north-eastern Transvaal claimed the lives of at least 28 African children and infected hundreds more (Sacks and Moroke 1982). After the director general for health blamed the 'ignorance' and 'apathy' of the victims, the Azapo health secretariat sent a fact-finding mission to Gazankulu that exposed the absence of health-care facilities, prevalence of unclean drinking water polluted by sewage, and rampant malnutrition.<sup>43</sup> As health secretary for Azapo, Asvat publicly argued that the serial outbreak of communicable diseases not only highlighted the complete indifference of the government, but also demonstrated that the state of health services and the political situation were inextricably connected (Sacks and Moroke 1982).

The health policy that Asvat developed for Azapo stressed the close relationship between social structure and the phenomena of disease and care: apart-

heid had rendered every aspect of health profoundly political.<sup>44</sup> The staggering inequality in access to medical facilities and treatment was only the most obvious expression of this relationship. Most diseases that afflicted the African population were directly related to extreme poverty, malnutrition, unclean drinking water, inadequate housing, and the complete absence of health education. Furthermore, the vast majority of the poor were completely unaware that they were suffering from serious – but nonetheless treatable – medical problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma. Given their slender resources, Asvat argued that preventative care and health education should be the secretariat's priorities. A principal goal of this work was to generate collective responsibility, awareness, and self-reliance. At another level, these types of programmes can be seen as a form of counter-biopolitics: a political struggle with the apartheid system over the conditions of sustaining and reproducing life itself (Chari 2008; Li 2009). Racial capitalism had produced sections of the black poor – squatters, unemployed, former miners suffering from silicosis, the rural poor, pensioners – as acutely vulnerable surplus populations whose physical survival was very much in question. The health secretariat's programmes not only strove to preserve lives rendered precarious by structural inequality and state racism, but also to reverse this dehumanisation by providing the material conditions for an improved existence.

In 1984, Asvat authored a 20-page health manual that provided clear and simple instructions on child care, hygiene, nutrition, risk factors for heart disease and cancer, and patient rights. Presented in English, sePedi, isiZulu, and seSotho, the manual went through five additions in a year and the health secretariat sometimes distributed as many as 5,000 copies in a day (Tema 1984). The secretariat also launched campaigns and interventions around major crises. During the 1984 uprisings in the Vaal triangle, Asvat and Yusuf Veriava led volunteer teams that provided triage care to hundreds of people whom had been severely injured by indiscriminate repression. In the midst of teargas and gunfire, they photographed and X-rayed victims in order to expose the mendacity of official reports (Qwelane 1984). In October 1984, Asvat worked with the Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers Union (BAMWCU) to initiate a widely-publicised campaign to expose the conditions in South Africa's asbestos mines and the prevalence of asbestosis among miners. In interviews, Asvat described being refused access to inspect mining areas and black residences; unprotected asbestos dumps where children played; and small towns where almost half of the impoverished population of former miners showed signs of the disease (Asvat 1984; Molefe 1984a). By the mid-1980s, Asvat was regularly quoted in *The Star*, *Rand Daily Mail*, and *Sowetan* as the foremost anti-apartheid voice on health issues. In a 1988 newsletter issued to the press, he lashed the Nationalist government for failing to confront the scourge of HIV/AIDS.<sup>45</sup>

CHAP's most ambitious project was the mobile clinic, which became popularly associated with several caravans that Asvat purchased and outfitted with medical

supplies. The clinics concentrated on rural settlements, peri-urban areas, and squatter camps that fell outside of municipal boundaries and thus lacked even the minimal health-care facilities available to the townships. It targeted communities like Onverwacht in the Orange Free State: a shantytown with a population of 250,000, 50 per cent unemployment, no hospital or formal transportation, malnutrition on a mass scale, and over a 1,000 new settlers a month (Tissong 1985b). The mobile clinic generally involved a core team from CHAP (including Thandi Myeza, Jenny Tissong, and Ruwaida Hallim) and volunteers recruited by Asvat from Soweto, Eldorado Park, and Lenasia. Doctors, nurses, medical students, and community organisations – especially women's groups – from the areas in question would often participate as well.<sup>46</sup> The team would examine children to make sure they were in the normal weight range; monitor individuals for early rheumatic disease; conduct vision tests; take pap smears and urine samples; and monitor blood pressure (Tissong 1985a).<sup>47</sup> Whenever possible, dental and eye care would be provided. The clinic would also deliver lectures on health and hygiene to churches or community groups, sometimes addressing as many as 6,000 people in the course of a weekend, and conducted health surveys to publicise acute situations and guide future interventions (Tissong 1985b; Pela 1987). From the beginning of the project, there was a strong emphasis on women's health and questions such as domestic violence. In a day, the team treated between 150 and 500 hundred patients, often working to the point of sheer exhaustion. Asvat led these clinics most weekends for a period of four years.<sup>48</sup>

Health, Asvat strongly believed, was not the absence of disease or infirmity, but an optimal state of physical, mental, and social well-being. In a fundamental sense, health was a collective property of communities.<sup>49</sup> The memories of his patients and collaborators aptly capture this aspect of Asvat's medical practice. They recall Asvat sitting on a tree stump, or box, or 25-gallon oil drum in the middle of barren fields, talking about the issues that affected black areas not as a medical professional or outsider, but as a member of the same group, someone with strong ties to the people he was addressing.<sup>50</sup> Virtually everyone who speaks about Asvat stresses that 'he was so ordinary. When you first met him, you would never know he was a doctor'.<sup>51</sup> These are not merely statements about his personal style. They reflected Asvat's tacit, but nonetheless unmistakable, rejection of a social hierarchy that existed in both African and Indian areas. Few professional avenues existed for either Indians or Africans under apartheid – lawyer, nurse, teacher, social worker – and doctors were the unquestioned aristocracy of the townships. Everything about them stood out: their houses, clothes, cars, and associates. In contrast, Asvat dissuaded patients from calling him 'doctor'. Throughout Soweto, he was known as Abu.<sup>52</sup> Residents of squatter camps described him building relationships with communities through years of frequent visits: he counselled his patients, identified with them, befriended them, and treated their problems as his own.<sup>53</sup>

## **Politics During the 1980s: Winnie Mandela, WRAB, and the PEC**

The most widely publicised of the Azapo clinics took place in the Orange Free State with the support and collaboration of Winnie Mandela (Tissong 1984b). Yusuf Veriava became Mandela's physician after the regime had restricted her to Brandfort in May 1977; Asvat first met Mandela while accompanying Veriava on a trip to see her. Asvat soon began to visit her regularly and assumed responsibility for her care. They developed an extremely strong friendship.<sup>54</sup> A *Star* photograph of the two consulting in advance of a clinic presented a powerful and compelling image: prominent leaders of Azapo and the ANC cooperating across political and racial divisions to provide basic care for the beleaguered and desperately poor. With Asvat's assistance, Mandela obtained the resources to launch a local chapter of Operation Hunger, a soup kitchen and day clinic that enabled her to build ties with the local community and, over time, emerge from the political obscurity of her banning. On at least one occasion, Asvat travelled to the Free State in the middle of the night to check on Mandela's condition after she had been imprisoned.<sup>55</sup> 'He sought me out in Brandfort,' she would later recall, 'at the risk of torture and imprisonment'.<sup>56</sup> When Mandela brazenly defied her banning order and returned to Soweto, their relationship remained close. She regularly attended parties at the Asvat house and dined with the family every Friday night.<sup>57</sup> At the height of the violence between the ANC and Azapo, some of Asvat's comrades raised questions regarding his collaboration with Mandela and Sisulu. Asvat defended his right to work with any genuine partisan of the liberation struggle – a stance endorsed by other senior Azapo leaders.<sup>58</sup>

During the mid-1980s, Asvat would regularly phone younger members of Azapo or the Crescents Cricket Club and tell them 'I'm going to be there in ten minutes. Phone the other guys and get them ready'. Someone from Soweto had managed to contact Asvat and tell him that blackjacks had torn down a shack settlement and its residents were now trying to erect shelters in the veld.<sup>59</sup> He would visit them whatever time of day, carry out quick medical examinations, contact a grocer or Muslim aid organisation to obtain food, and organise housing – sometimes erecting tents, sometimes taking people to a local church, sometimes bringing them to his home (Akhawaya 1989). One former Azapo member recalls driving into Soweto with Asvat late at night and finding himself in the middle of a raid on a squatter camp at the scrap yard behind Midway Station. The situation was chaotic: people were shouting and running helter-skelter; cops were chasing squatters with batons; and Asvat's group was in Soweto illegally. Someone came up to Asvat and demanded 'Who are you and what are you doing here?' Asvat was unflappable: 'I'm Dr Asvat and I am here to help my people'. The person quickly backed down. Asvat then went to a near-by church, woke up the pastor, and informed him that he would be housing the displaced squatters. The Lenasia group spent the rest of the night transporting people from the camp to the church.<sup>60</sup>



These interventions resulted in increasingly sharp disputes with the West Rand Administration Board (WRAB) and the collaborationist Soweto council. In 1983, WRAB declared Asvat *persona non grata* after its employees expelled him from a dilapidated bus where he was helping a group of homeless people replace their identity documents. A WRAB official ordered Asvat's arrest on trespassing charges when he refused to show a permit (Collinge 1983). Two years later, his activities among the homeless resulted in a public confrontation with the mayor of Soweto, Edward Kunene. After the authorities demolished the shacks of eight families, Asvat arranged transport for the group to the mayor's house in Soweto. The mayor first welcomed the families with some sympathy and indicated that he would provide shelter. Soon afterwards, he arranged for buses to send the homeless back to the ruined settlement. On hearing this news, Asvat organised transport to his own home where he housed and fed the families in defiance of the Group Areas Act. The newspapers reported the incident in all of its vainglorious detail: a furious Kunene declared that Asvat was a 'troublemaker' and demanded he leave Soweto (Ngcobo 1985; Maivra 1985).

In January 1988, the Soweto Town Council ordered the destruction of the shacks at Chicken Farm in order to clear the area for a real estate project. In the aftermath, the surgery stood alone, the only building in the midst of ruins. Even after the council cut the power, Asvat and Sisulu continued to care for patients (Badela 1988). Asvat categorically refused to relocate unless provided alternative accommodation at the council's expense: 'they will have to bring in bulldozers to move me'.<sup>61</sup> Once again, this standoff splashed across the inside pages, and Asvat pilloried the indifference of the Soweto Town Council to the homeless in the press. He subsequently moved to temporary premises behind a shop near the Wesleyan Church before he acquired a house in Rockville, across from the Mchina squatter camp (Mochaeneng), through a nominee. By this time, he was also overseeing a clinic at the Mzimhlope hostel and transit camp in Soweto.<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of these battles, Asvat began to work on yet another front. The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) first convened in late 1985 in order to address the situation created by the township rebellions: the complete disruption of schooling in many black areas, army occupation of educational institutions, the unprecedented mass detention of students, and the intransigence of the Department of Education and Training in the face of student demands.<sup>63</sup> At its first conference in March 1986, the NECC called for the return of students to school while simultaneously embracing the protestors' central political demands and advocating a programme of 'people's education' under an alternative curriculum (Seekings 2000:172). The Lenasia-based People's Education Committee (PEC) formed in advance of the founding conference in order to discuss these proposals: its overwhelmingly pro-Congress membership elected Asvat as its first president. Despite police harassment and multiple state injunctions against its meeting, the PEC evolved into one of the township's most prominent organisations.

Unquestionably, the PEC's most radical programme was its struggle to integrate children from Soweto and the nearby squatter camps of Vlakfontein, Weiler's Farm, and Thembelihle into Lenasia's public schools. Part of a national drive to break down apartheid barriers in education, the PEC's efforts also sought to diffuse escalating tensions between a section of Lenasia homeowners and the rapidly growing shanty towns now virtually on their doorsteps. Asvat drew individuals active in providing support for squatter communities into the PEC and used his political standing to assert considerable pressure on school administrators.<sup>64</sup> In 1987, the Department of Indian Affairs admitted only 15 of over 300 African applicants to Lenasia's schools.<sup>65</sup> By the time the nationalist government lifted the ban on the struggle organisations in February 1990, approximately 15 per cent of students in Lenasia came from the surrounding African areas.<sup>66</sup> This campaign was a powerful illustration of Asvat's challenge to Lenasia at the *Indicator* human rights awards. It represented the reconstruction of apartheid's institutional and spatial framework by black communities themselves.

### **Death and Funeral**

Like all prominent activists, Asvat endured regular police harassment for years. In January 1978, he filed a sworn affidavit after a Special Branch major beat him severely and threatened his life while under Section 6 detention at the Protea Police Station.<sup>67</sup> Officers frequently came to his house when he was away, snidely asking Zohra if she knew 'where he was' and claiming to have arrested him in front of their children. Zohra would remain silent, refusing to dignify their remarks with a response.<sup>68</sup> When Asvat went underground to avoid arrest during the 1986 state of emergency, unknown forces attempted to fire bomb the Asvat family home in Lenasia. Eight months later, two knife-wielding men attacked Asvat in his surgery. As he warded one of them off, he called to Albertina, who ran shouting to the neighbours for help. Asvat was slightly injured on his face. Sometime in 1988, a gunman pulled a weapon on Asvat at his surgery, but then fled when a patient walked into the room (Akhlaya 1989).<sup>69</sup> After Asvat relocated to Rockville, police in balaclavas came to the new clinic several times at night, shining floodlights into the premises.<sup>70</sup> Throughout all of these incidents, Asvat was undeterred: he made repeated statements to the press that he would never leave Soweto.

Then something dramatic clearly occurred, although we may never know exactly what. Asvat, who routinely drove into the middle of Soweto late at night, started asking friends to follow him home from meetings in Lenasia.<sup>71</sup> He began showing up at people's houses as if he wanted to talk and then leaving abruptly.<sup>72</sup> When a tyre went flat the night before he was killed, he drove home without stopping and later told Zohra that he was too scared to change it: he thought that an unspecified 'they' were trying to set him up for attack. He then made two attempts to see his lawyers the next morning, before arriving home two hours late for family prayers. He was so distracted that he held his hands the wrong way during the ritual.<sup>73</sup>

Two men shot Abubaker Asvat in his surgery on the afternoon of Friday 27 January 1989. He died almost immediately. The police quickly arrested Zakhele Mbatha and Thulani Dlamini for murder. The alleged motivation was robbery. However, the following Sunday a newspaper quoted Winnie Mandela to the effect that Asvat's murder was related to his ability to substantiate child abuse accusations against Methodist Bishop Paul Verryn. The family then conducted an inventory of the surgery and established that no money or valuables had been taken. From statements made by one of the accused and members of the Mandela household, an alternate scenario gradually emerged. Allegedly, Asvat had examined the youth 'Stompie' Seipei after Mandela's entourage – the so-called football club – had beaten him to the threshold of death. According to this version of events, Asvat and Mandela fought after he demanded that she take the boy to the hospital. When Stompie Seipei died, Mandela supposedly ordered Asvat's assassination to eliminate a possible witness to murder (Sisulu 2002). From my interviews, it appears that elements of this story had begun to circulate in political circles the day after Asvat died.<sup>74</sup> Winnie Mandela has always strenuously denied these claims and the TRC found that the evidence did not substantiate allegations of her involvement. Nevertheless, many people have never accepted that Mandela was not somehow implicated.

In accordance with Islam, Asvat's burial took place the next day. It was the largest funeral in Lenasia's history. Ten thousand mourners poured into the area from the surrounding townships and across the country: squatters from the communities where Asvat worked, domestic workers from Lenasia, leading members of the Congress movement, car loads of activists who had travelled all night, and ordinary men and women whose lives Asvat had somehow touched. When buses of activists arrived outside Asvat's house singing struggle songs, Azapo members approached them and asked that they wait for the march: Azapo wanted to show respect for the solemnity of an Islamic funeral.<sup>75</sup> But on the march to Avalon Cemetery, thousands of people toyi-toyed led by Azapo youth members and old women from the squatter camps – many of Lenasia's men followed them with their fists raised.<sup>76</sup> When the security police attempted to enter the crowd and seize Azapo banners, Muslims from Lenasia drew their guns and warded them off. As the Special Branch officers fled over a wall, the crowd started to chant: 'Allahu Akbar'.<sup>77</sup> Several of Asvat's comrades from Lenasia recall feeling stunned. They were only beginning to comprehend the magnitude of the loss. After the mourners arrived at the cemetery, a crowd of thousands – almost equally Indian and African – passed the casket overhead. Too many people were at the gravesite to properly complete the prayers and, contrary to tradition, women went into the cemetery to see where Asvat would be buried. In the midst of the confusion, one Muslim demurred: 'This is not right,' but he was quickly corrected by another, 'Who are we to judge?'<sup>78</sup> As a third mourner remarked: 'The black community viewed Asvat as part of the black community. We buried him as an African'.<sup>79</sup>

## Note on Contributor

**Jon Soske** is Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Classical Studies at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. An earlier version of this research was presented at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research (WISER) in May 2010. Jon wishes to thank Michael Titlestead for the invitation to speak and the audience – particularly Elinor Sisulu, Saths Cooper, Tom Manthata, Lybon Mabasa, and Strike Thokoane – for their comments. He also acknowledges the invaluable assistance in his research from the Abu Asvat Institute for Nation Building, especially Jerry Waja and Anver Randera, and the Asvat family. This article also benefited considerably from discussions with Antoinette Burton, Sharad Chari, Natalie Zemon Davis, Bill Freund, Liz Gunner, Isabel Hofmeyr, Achille Mbembe, Yunus Momoniat, Sarah Nuttall, Nick Smith, and Sadecque Variava. The research for this article was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of the Witwatersrand.

## Notes

1. The major exception is Sisulu (2002), which gives significant attention to Asvat's relationship with Albertina Sisulu. The forthcoming revised addition of *From Protest to Challenge*, vol 4, will contain a biographical entry on Asvat as one of the approximately 750 figures profiled. I owe thanks to Gail Gerhart for sharing a draft of this entry with me.
2. Zuma cited Sisulu's work with Asvat as an example of her political broad mindedness, which reduced a relationship of profound mutual respect and solidarity – including Asvat's financial support of her during periods of detention – to her magnanimity. See below for a further discussion of this relationship.
3. I Nagdee, interview with author, 21 March 2006; E Asvat, interview with author, 4 February 2010.
4. Nagdee interview; S Variava, interview with author, 15 January 2010.
5. Nagdee interview; A Mangera, interview with author, 17 January 2010.
6. Nagdee interview; E Asvat interview.
7. Nagdee interview; J Coovadia, interview with author, 19 April 2010.
8. Coovadia interview.
9. Nagdee interview.
10. Nagdee interview.
11. Nagdee interview; E Asvat interview.
12. Nagdee interview.
13. Nagdee interview; Y Veriava, interview with author, 17 May 2010.
14. Y Veriava interview.
15. 'Death of a son of the soil . . .' *New Nation* 2–8 February 1989.
16. Z Asvat, interview with author, 16 January 2010; L Mabasa, interview with author, 19 January 2010.
17. Z Cindi, interview with author, 17 February 2010; Mabasa interview; N Mathiane, interview with author, 21 January 2010.
18. M Tirmahomed, interview with author, 22 January 2010.
19. Mathiane interview.
20. Z Asvat interview.
21. S Veriava interview; Cindi interview.
22. S Variava interview.
23. Mabasa interview.

24. This paragraph and the next are based on over 50 interviews that I have carried out in Lenasia and Soweto since 2006 and several periods of short residence in both townships. It is important to underline that these paragraphs attempt to outline the social dynamics between two (highly complex and internally differentiated) *spaces* that are read in and through a broader discourse of 'race relations' by their inhabitants. It is not an attempt to provide a general analysis of African-Indian relations in the Transvaal or elsewhere.
25. S Variava interview.
26. Mabasa interview.
27. S Variava interview.
28. Ibid.
29. A Randera, interview with author, 21 April 2010.
30. Mathiane interview; Mabasa interview.
31. Randera interview.
32. Mathiane interview; T Manthata, interview with author, 5 February 2010.
33. Mathiane interview; M Wauchope, interview with author, 13 February 2010.
34. 'Double standards: Magera's bombshell', *The Leader* 13 May 1988.
35. A Gandabhai, interview with author, 17 January 2010; 'Apartheid cricket: change but no improvement,' typed and mimeographed pamphlet, n.d., personal papers of Zorha Asvat.
36. Magera interview.
37. Memorandum prepared by Azad Cricket Club for the South African Cricket Board Commission of Enquiry into the Lenasia Cricket Stadium, 15 July 1986:6, personal papers of Dr Rasik Gopal.
38. A Osmany, interview with author, 17 January 2010.
39. Gandabhai interview.
40. 'Black clubs set to quit council and join Howa', *Sunday Tribune* 27 July 1980.
41. Osmany interview.
42. Ibid.
43. 'Polio on decline – Azapo', *Sowetan* 8 October 1982.
44. CHAP, 'Proposed establishment' of mobile clinics for both preventative and curative medicine,' papers of Zorah Asvat, n.d.
45. 'Health group issues newsletter on AIDS', *The Indicator* 25–31 August 1988.
46. R Hallim, interview with author, 22 January 2010.
47. Also see 'Now the Asvat team visits Mathopestad', *The Indicator* 25–30 July 1985.
48. Hallim interview.
49. CHAP, 'Proposed establishment of mobile clinics for both preventative and curative medicine,' papers of Zorah Asvat, n.d.
50. Hallim interview.
51. Cindi interview.
52. Mabasa interview.
53. 'Death of a son of the soil . . .', *New Nation* 2–8 February 1989.
54. Y Veriava interview.
55. Hallim interview.
56. 'Asvat accusations depraved and cruel, says Winnie', South Africa Press Association (SAPA) 9 September 1997.
57. Manthata interview; Z Asvat interview.
58. S Cooper, interview with author, 5 May 2010; S Variava interview.
59. Randera interview.
60. Ibid.
61. *City Press* 31 July 1988.
62. 'Waiting in vain', *New Nation* 11 December – 7 January 1986.
63. 'Education crisis: NECC issues its program', *The Indicator* 29–30 April 1986.
64. B Lorgat, interview with author, 16 January 2010.

65. *The Indicator* 24–30 April 1987.
66. Lorgat interview.
67. Sworn affidavit by Abubaker Asvat, 24 January 1978, in the possession of Zorha Asvat.
68. Z Asvat interview.
69. Also see 'I stared death in the face, says Asvat', *The Indicator* 24–28 February 1987.
70. K Zunga, interview with author, 2010.
71. Gandabha interview.
72. Mathiane interview.
73. Z Asvat interview.
74. S Variava interview; Wauchope interview.
75. S Variava interview.
76. Video recording of Asvat funeral by Rashid Abed, 28 January 1989, copy in author's possession.
77. S Variava interview.
78. J Waja, interview with author, 9 May 2010.
79. Wauchope interview.

## References

- Akhalwaya, A. 1984. "'Normal" cricket dies — but none rejoice', *Rand Daily Mail* 14 August.
- Akhalwaya, A. 1989. 'Gentle humanitarian who bowled barriers over and pricked our Consciences', *The Indicator* 8–15 February.
- Asvat, A. 1984. 'Asbestos danger!', *Lenasia Times* November.
- Asvat, A. 1989. "'Active action" needed to break artificial barriers', *The Indicator* 8–15 February.
- Badela, M. 1988. 'While walls crumble, the doctor works on', *Weekly Mail* 29 January to 4 February.
- Bonner, P. and Segal, L. 1999. *Soweto – A History*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Bridgland, F. 1997. *Katiza's Journey: Beneath the Surface of South Africa's Shame*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
- Chari, S. 2008. 'Silencing the Present: Histories of Planning, Habitation and Spatial Justice in Durban, South Africa', paper presented at the Asia Institute, University of Toronto, 24 October.
- Collinge, J. 1983. 'Ejected MD clashes over homeless', *The Star* 25 July.
- Farmer, P. 2004. 'An Anthropology of Structural Violence'. *Current Anthropology* 45:305–25.
- Gandabhai, A. 1983. 'Transvaal Cricket Board – 1977 to 1983', in *Azad Cricket Club 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir Brochure: 1942–3 to 1982–3*.
- Hansen, T. 2010. 'The unwieldy fetish: desire and disavowal of Indianness in South Africa', in P. Gupta, I. Hofmeyr and M. Pearson (eds), *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Lefbvre, H. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Li, T. 2009. 'To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations'. *Antipode* 41:66–93.
- Maivra, M. 1985. 'Please leave!', *City Press* 24 February.
- Maasdorp, G. and Pillay, N. (1977). *Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation: The Case of Indian South Africans*. Durban: University of Natal Press.
- Molefe, Z. 1984a. 'Its do – or die!', *City Press* 14 October.
- Moroke, M. 1982. 'Azapo launches health program', *Rand Daily Mail* 17 July.
- Murray, B. and Merrett, C. 2004. *Caught Behind: Race and Politics in Springbok Cricket*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Ngcobo, S. 1985. "'Get out" mayor tells eight families', *Rand Daily Mail* 7 February.
- Pela, M. 1987. 'Tokoza health threat', *The Star* 29 December.
- Pela, M. 1988. 'Local hero', *Sowetan* 12 August.
- Qwelane, J. 1984. 'The doctors of mercy ...', *Sunday Mirror* 16 September.
- Sacks, A. and Moroke, M. 1982. 'Mothers queue for polio vaccine', *Rand Daily Mail* 16 July.
- Seekings, J. 2000. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983–1991*. Cape Town: David Philip.

- Sisulu, E. 2002. *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Life Time*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Tema, S. 1984. 'Azapo helps with health', *Rand Daily Mail* 25 March.
- Tissong, M. 1984a. 'Azapo handbook to help mothers on health care', *The Star* 19 March.
- Tissong, M. 1984b. 'A rare treat for Brandfort', *The Star* 15 June.
- Tissong, M. 1985a. 'Medical students to hold health clinics', *The Star* 24 July.
- Tissong, M. 1985b. 'Health visit highlights misery in Onverwacht', *The Star* 23 November.
- Van Onselen, C. 1982. *New Babylon New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.