‘An act of faith' or a new ‘Brown Empire’?: The Dismissal of India’s Transnational Anti-Racism, 1945-1961

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‘An act of faith' or a new ‘Brown Empire’?: The Dismissal of India’s International Anti-Racism, 1945-1961

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At the inaugural UN session in 1946, an India-sponsored resolution was passed with a 2/3rd majority against South Africa’s racist treatment of Indians. India continued its activism over racism and apartheid throughout the 1950s though the issue was increasingly seen as a painful yearly ritual. Still, Indian diplomats persisted in raising the issue every year, despite diminishing results. The British settler-colonies were particularly offended by India’s campaign, as it challenged the discursive justification for their existence. They rejected what they saw as India’s emotional, hypocritical, even imperialist, campaign against racism. By tracing the construction and rejection of anti-racist politics, we examine the dismissal of racism as a ‘legitimate’ international issue.

Introduction: Anti-racism and its opponents

Even before its independence, India made racism a matter of international diplomacy. This began in 1917, and carried on up until India’s independence, primarily through imperial platforms (Thakur, 2017). Just before its independence, however, India took its anti-racist project beyond imperial structures to a global platform. Just two days after he was sworn in as Vice-President of the interim Indian cabinet, Jawaharlal Nehru (1946, p. 437) wrote to a South African Indian leader, Ismail Cahalia:

> The struggle in South Africa is… not merely an Indian issue. It concerns all Asians whose honour and rights are threatened, and all the people in Asia should, therefore, support it. It concerns ultimately the Africans who have suffered so much by racial discrimination and suppression. It is a struggle for equality of opportunity for all races and against the Nazi doctrine of racialism. … Our cause thus becomes a world cause in which all people who believe in freedom are interested.

On 7 September 1946, in a radio address to the nation three days after this letter, Nehru enshrined anti-racism as a core principle of India’s future foreign policy. Later that year, an

Indian delegation led by Vijayalakshmi Pandit achieved a remarkable diplomatic victory over Jan Smuts-led South Africa. Not-yet-Independent India had attracted the world's attention to the racial discrimination in South Africa (Lloyd, 1990).

Throughout the late-1940s and 1950s, India's pursued annual UN resolutions on the racial treatment of Indians in South Africa and (from 1952 onwards) apartheid, consistently seeking to make racism an international issue. In these debates, India repeatedly challenged South Africa's insistence that race was a 'domestic' matter.

In the academic companion to world politics, International Relations (IR), Nicolas Guilhot (2014) has noted that the issue of race was struck off the disciplinary agenda in this same period. Just as India (and the decolonising world more broadly) sought to ensure race was part of world affairs so as to animate anti-racist politics, IR worked to excise its footprints from disciplinary theorising. Unfortunate as this was, the discipline has remained trapped within its 1950s paradigms, only recently seeking to break free of them. The contrived and forced absence of race and with it, racism, from IR has only served to further entrench racial hierarchies in world politics. Consequently, while much of the burden of critical thinking on race in IR in recent years has fallen on uncovering the racial origins of the discipline itself (Vitalis, 2000; 2005; 2015; Guilhot, 2008; 2014; Long and Schmidt, 2005; Thakur, Davis and Vale, 2017), postcolonial scholars have also engaged with race and racism as social constructs which operate discursively by shaping perception and identity (Vucetic, 2011; 2014; Davis, 2015). As a result of recent interventions (for example, Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam, 2014), only now have the various manifestations of racism and colonial power have become important areas of study in IR.

Our intervention into the debate on race and how it is understood in IR is to frame race in a new manner. We seek to understand the discourse on race through responses to India's anti-racism. The racism/anti-racism binary in world politics was, in many ways, mediated through tropes of rationality and security. For white-settler states at the receiving end, if India's critique on racism was acknowledged, it would mean implicitly accepting the argument that racism was a global issue. A more useful response was to delegitimise India's utterances by signposting them as 'irrational', 'emotional' or even 'imperialist'.

Although many scholars have highlighted India’s anti-colonialism as an element of its foreign policy (for example: Chacko, 2012; Davis, 2015; Biswas, 2001), its specifically anti-racist nature has not come in for specific attention. There are, of course, deep connections between anti-racism and anti-colonialism. India’s anti-racism was just one part of its broader anti-imperial project. Looking through anti-racist, rather than the broader anti-colonial, lenses allows for a more specific and more nuanced understanding of the transnational politics of race at the ends of empire.

In the following discussion, we begin by examining India’s construction and in particular its public performance of anti-racism in the 1950s. Thereafter, we analyse the discourses employed by the settler-colonial powers to reject India’s efforts. Australia, Canada and South Africa are particularly crucial case studies, as they were intimately connected to India by their colonial experiences and the justification for their very existence relied upon the racialized discourses which India was rejecting.[1] We find that these states drew from the same set of narratives in resisting India’s anti-racist politics, albeit with varying degrees of severity, demonstrating the transnational nature of the racial discourses. We argue that there were two strong strands of discourse in the 1950s that were used to dismiss India’s anti-racism. The first is the assertion that India’s anti-racism was ‘irrational’, ‘hypocritical’ and based on ‘emotionalism’. The second was more extreme. It is the assertion that India’s anti-colonialism was itself imperialist, and that India was seeking an empire of its own under the guise of opposing racism. As New Zealand did not open its high commission in India until December 1958, it far had less intimate contact with India, we have excluded it from the study.[2]

As we are concerned with the intimacy of the responses, we emphasize the private responses of diplomats to India’s anti-racist foreign policy, primarily either stationed in India or within the UN. The Commonwealth Conferences may seem like an obvious platform for such discussions but racial issues were deliberately kept out of the purview of these Conferences on the pretext of racial discrimination being a bilateral issue. In fact, a general reference to racial discrimination was first mentioned in a Commonwealth communique in 1960 only after more members from Afro-Asia had joined India and Pakistan at the Commonwealth Conference. The strong campaign by India, Ghana and Malaya led to the withdrawal of South Africa from the institution a year later (for a analyses, see Dubow, 2017 and Nothling, 2005).[3] We end in 1961, as South Africa’s expulsion from the Commonwealth meant the clash over race and racism had moved to a distinctly new phase.

We argue that there is something particular to the frustration, the irritation, that white diplomats felt which led them to roll their eyes at India’s ‘rants’ against racism rather than accept them as legitimate. If India’s anti-racist diplomacy could be construed not as a legitimate perspective on world affairs based on colonial grievances, but an unfair partiality, or a new imperialism, then India’s advocacy for a decolonized, deracialized world order, could be dismissed without serious consideration.

‘An Act of Faith’: India’s anti-racist project

India framed its anti-racism in numerous forms. It could be subtle and quiet. It could appeal to the values associated with the British empire. It could be loud and aggressive, like at the UN when discussing South Africa. It was sometimes framed as based on a quiet ‘emotion’, or as a quasi-religious struggle. India also performed its anti-racism in a theatrical and aggressive manner at the UN and at Bandung.

In 1946, before the formation of his interim government, Nehru had called upon the British Commonwealth and the UN ‘to cut her [South Africa] away from the family of nations if she follows the Nazi doctrine’. When he took over as the leader of the new interim government, he warned, that ‘if [the] UNO (sic), Europe, or America do not… [cut off South Africa] the time will soon come when all Asia may do that, and so might Africa’ (Nehru, Quoted in Pachai, 1971). This reflected India’s attitude at the UN where its representative Maharaj Singh criticized Smuts’ racism and told him that India will raise the voice for all non-self-governing peoples and work towards ensuring that autonomous and independent governments were installed in every part of the world. In the Indian parliament in December of 1947, Nehru argued that ‘[i]n supporting the cause of Indians in South Africa we have worked not only for the rights of people of our own race but for the rights of oppressed throughout the world. That attitude we are determined to maintain in the firm faith that our cause is right and that ultimately right will prevail’.[4]

There was also subtler public diplomacy aimed at Australia and Canada. In 1948, Nehru (1948, p. 547) emphasized what Australia and India shared, stating in a message to Australia that:

> We stand, as I believe Australia does, for democratic freedom, for human rights and for the ending of the political domination or economic exploitation of one nation or group of another. We should cooperate, therefore, for the extension of freedom, equality and social justice.

In a similar approach, while speaking to the Canadian House of Commons, Nehru discussed his efforts to end racial discrimination. He argued that Canada and India should be able to work together in this realm, stating that:

> India's championship of freedom and racial equality in Asia, as well as in Africa, is a natural urge of the facts of geography and history. India desires no leadership or dominion or authority over any other country… Canada, with her traditions of democracy, her sense of justice and her love of fair play, should understand our purpose and our motives and should use her growing wealth and power to extend the horizons of freedom.[5]

Here, by evoking 'British' liberal of freedom and democracy, Nehru could critique the racial discrimination practiced by Australia and Canada, while performing his version of Englishness.

In 1951, an article appeared in the East African press from the Bombay Forum newspaper, arguing that:

> India seeks no power and glory and pelf for herself. India wants the other part of the Orient to be free and strong and independent. Thereafter her mission will not end until the flag of white racialism, for the present firmly planted in Africa, is hurled into the dust.[6]

India's motivation for its anti-racist diplomacy was contested heavily and perceived very differently by the South Africans. This more aggressive framing was met with South African suspicions. A diplomat commenting on this article argued that: '[t]here can be little doubt that the fear of further Indian penetration into Africa constitutes at present the strongest link between East Africa and the Union'.[7]

Through the 1950s, India's framing at the UN remained aggressive. Krishna Menon argued in 1954 that:

> …when we approach this problem, we should understand the kind of earnestness and, from that particular point of view, the fullness of spirit with which this is approached. It is not just a political policy. We are up against something very much more fundamental. We are up against an evangelical view of the feeling in regard to races, the color and mixture of races and all the rest of it.[8]

As we will see, the Australians would occasionally state that when facing India, they themselves were 'up against' an irrational, evangelical point of view. Nehru (1954), speaking in the

parliament was keen to emphasize that India's anti-racism was something that was both emotional and rational:

> This problem of racialism and racial separation may become more dangerous than any other problem that the world has to face. I should like the countries of Europe, America, Asia and Africa to realise that and not to imagine that we are putting up with these things that are happening in Africa, whether on the communal plane or on the racial plane. They hurt us. Simply because we cannot do anything effective and we do not want to cheapen ourselves by mere shouting, we remain quiet. But the thing has gone deep down into our minds and hearts. We feel it strongly.

When speaking in English, Nehru constructed the issue as one of deep hurt but measured actions. But another speech in 1955, originally in Hindi, argued that:

> We will never forget this open *zoolum* [atrocity] which the South African government is perpetrating with impunity on crores of African and Indian people there. This naked persecution on the basis of colour will never go down the throats of these people. We are not prepared to tolerate this racial persecution under any consideration of communism or anti-communism.[9]

In his English speech, Nehru suggests a policy of restraint, but when speaking to his domestic audience in Hindi, he argues that India could not tolerate racism.

Nehru was also keen to ensure that his critique of colonialism and Bandung was not too threatening when it came to Australia and New Zealand. Nehru (1955, pp. 288-291) suggested that:

> I would like Australia and New Zealand to come nearer to Asia. I would welcome them because I do not want what we say or do to be based on racial prejudices. We have had enough of this racialism elsewhere.

This performance is measured. It was careful to define its anti-racism as not based on racial ideas. Australia and New Zealand are welcomed in to Asia, though they were observers rather than participants at Bandung. Nehru takes the race out of his anti-racism, to appeal to settler colonies on the outskirts of Asia.

From 1955 onwards, South Africa refused to discuss the issue at the UN. Still, India continued. In 1961, S Jha stated to the special political committee 'It is not only our duty but… an act of faith… We shall not rest content until inequality and racial discrimination have disappeared from South Africa. In this we have the mandate of millions of people in India and elsewhere.'[10] By this time, this was no longer likely to have success outside of South Africa. The 'west' had moved on, but India's anti-racist politics remained. Jha continued that the UN

must go on giving expression to world opinion on the issue ‘until the conscience of the rulers of South Africa is roused, and they recognize that the only thing to do is remodel society and government’ in South Africa on the basis of equality and freedom from racial discrimination.[11]

‘Emotional’ and ‘hypocritical’: Dismissing anti-racism as irrational

This leads us to the first example for rejecting India’s campaign against racism: writing if off as irrational, hypocritical ‘emotionalism’. Although Canada and Australia had very different responses to Indian anti-racism, Australia in particular grew tired of it throughout the 1950s. Under the conservative leadership of John Diefenbaker as well as the liberal Louis St. Laurent and Lester Pearson, Canada consistently opposed South Africa’s apartheid policies, but grew frustrated with India’s larger anti-racist project. Australia under its Anglophile PM Robert Menzies, was friendly towards South Africa and dismissive of India (Davis, 2015). Despite different approaches, Canada and Australia tended towards dismissing India’s anti-racism as irrational and as preventing it from focusing on the Cold War.

Australia’s first leader over this period was Labor’s Ben Chifley. Chifley and his External Affairs minister Herbert Evatt supported Indian independence and Australian representatives attended the 1947 and 1949 Asian Conferences in India (Suares, 2011). At the 1949 conference, aimed at discussing Dutch aggression in Indonesia, the Australian press warned they would be confronted by a ‘racially antagonistic… pressure group’ led by Nehru (Burton, in Suares, 2011: 505). Australian officials, though, found themselves in lock-step with Nehru, much to the surprise of High Commissioner to India Herbert Gollan. Gollan, reported that ‘there was generally little tendency to emotionalism or anti Dutch tirades during the session.’[12] In this early period, despite expectations of anti-colonial tirades, the Australians accepted anti-racism as a legitimate position.

Under Menzies, however, Australia found India far more tiresome. Menzies (1969, p. 92) himself was not particularly interested in India, stating in his memoirs that India was too confusing a place for any ‘occidental’ to understand. Menzies and Nehru did not get on well. Walter Crocker, a long-serving Australian High Commissioner to India, noted that when Menzies came to India, he was bored and did not want to see the sights (Gurry, 1992, p. 513). They had one particularly aggressive spat over Cold War disarmament issues, at a session of the UN General Assembly in September-October 1960. Nehru, sought to promote disarmament as a key matter for the Non-Aligned Movement, and rebuked Menzies for his approach.

Menzies found Nehru’s vision of diplomacy incomprehensible. He wrote to his wife immediately after the clash that ‘[a]ll the primitive came out in [Nehru]’ (Menzies, quoted in Martin, 1999: 422). A month later, Menzies repeated the story with even more racist language in a letter to his friend U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, stating that ‘I am still a little mystified about Nehru’s attack which I assure you was of the most intemperate kind. He did not revert to the Kashmir Brahmin. He seemed to me to revert almost to the branches of trees. He bared his teeth and snarled. He ranted.’[13]

A year later, Australia was hopeful of gaining India’s support for its holding of New Guinea as a colonial possession. Australia held New Guinea from 1920 until its peaceful independence in 1975. Periodically, however, the mandate would need renewal, leading to a UN vote. Crocker met with Indian High Commissioner Samar Sen and attempted to convince Sen to support Australia’s colonial project. In private musings about the meeting, Crocker attacked India’s hypocrisy with regard to racism:

> The strange thing is that this hyper-sensitiveness about racial colour and about slights, real or fancied, perpetuated by Europeans, is found in a people who have no equal for colour prejudice. Marriages in India are still arranged; matrimonial advertisements are therefore common. In the pages given to matrimonial advertisements in *The Hindustan Times* the majority of advertisements will demand, or will be vaunting, fairness in the girl.[14]

He lamented of Sen’s views, ‘[He] sees New Guinea as little more than one relic of the European's, the white man's, unjustified domination of the world.’[15] Crocker carried on attacking the approach of Sen, extrapolating it to all Indians:

> It is symptomatic of the lack of understanding and appreciation we are likely to find in the U.N. Meetings, and it is symptomatic of what we will have to expect from the most powerful of the anti-colonial countries, namely India. It is, moreover, worse than just a case of lack of understanding and appreciation. We are up against an emotional attitude so strong as to blind Indians to reality, to say nothing of blinding them to the mote in their own eyes. It is irrational; it seems to be unteachable.[16]

Here, anti-racism is seen as blinding India to the objective realities of world politics, in a manner which cannot be corrected.

Throughout his time in India, Crocker was fascinated with Nehru, publishing a book devoted to him. He doubtless admired Nehru. In his closing assessment, though he wondered why Nehru had been so keen to protect the more aggressively anti-colonial Krishna Menon. He concluded that it might have been down to Nehru’s emotions:

> Is it too fanciful to wonder if Krishna Menon gave expression from time to time to certain subliminal things in Nehru which he would not allow his conscious self to express, such as on the west or on America or on race? Nehru by nature was an emotional man who had schooled himself into an iron self-control. It is for the psychologists to explain whether Krishna Menon might… have served the purpose of expressing Nehru’s subconscious mind for him and thus materializing getting out of his system certain demonic currents inside him. (Crocker, 1966, p.157).

Here, Nehru’s ‘demonic currents’ which were driven by his emotional side mostly likely refer to his anti-imperialism.

Over the 1950s, Canada pursued policies which were more favourable to India than Australia’s. Canada allowed Indians to emigrate to Canada and granted citizenship to its existing Indian population, as the US had done, while Australia flatly refused. This itself was a concession to India’s anti-racist project, though the mechanism by which the tiny quota of 150 Indians per year caused friction. This friction was dismissed by the Canadians as due to the irrationalities of the Indian High Commissioner Ramji Saxena.[17] By the mid-1950s, though, some Canadian diplomats ceased accept some colonial grievances as legitimate and tended to dismiss India as a hypocritical actor.

Under the guidance of St. Laurent, and particularly during the term of deeply idealistic diplomat Escott Reid, Canada sought to translate India to the US. For Reid, India held a hybridity: a stable democracy that might share Canada’s values, but needed to be interpreted clearly. He saw India and Canada as possible ‘bridges’ between ‘East’ and ‘West’, meaning that India-Canada relations were essential to global peace and security. Likewise, Lester Pearson argued in India under Reid’s tenure that he hoped that the Commonwealth might ‘act as a bridge between Asia and the West, at a time when there are all too few bridges of this kind’.[18]

Despite Reid’s project, or perhaps, because of it, there were continual difficulties between India and Canada. Ultimately, the two states did not see the world the same way

(Touhey, 2015). Reid began to grow frustrated by India’s anti-racism, viewing it as a partiality. One lengthy report in 1956 argued that

> Mr Nehru has grudges to contend with in his own heart and in the heart of India which are much more ancient and much more deep-rooted… [Nehru’s] mind is receptive to visual impressions of imperialism and aggression in Egypt. Even if his mind were to receive equally clear visual impressions of imperialism and aggression in Hungary, his mind would do its best to reject those impressions as a false reality.[19]

He concluded that with subtle Canadian persuasion, Nehru’s position could be influenced:

> Being a sensitive man, once he begins to feel for [Hungary] and with them he will begin to feel a nauseating revulsion against the brutality and treachery of the Russians…. Once the barriers begin to come down the game in India can be won by the West – if we play our cards well.[20]

Here, India was thought of as unable to see Suez and Hungary clearly due to its racial blind spots. Reid still believed, however, that India could be brought around. He saw India as teachable, in a way Crocker did not.

Reid’s project was contested within the Canadian MEA. Chester Ronning, a diplomat working from Ottawa, complained that Delhi saw imperialism as just ‘white domination of non-white peoples’, and could not see Soviet domination of Eastern Europe as imperialism.[21] Lester Pearson touched on this in 1955, when he commented that ‘Nehru was quite bitter about American policy, and resented, as an Asian, their bullying and threatening tactics. He obviously doesn’t feel the same resentment when Chou bullies and blusters, because Chou is not so much a Communist as an Asian’.[22] This was seen as a double standard, but one that could be overcome.

Another Canadian diplomat, J.H. Cleveland, disagreed with Reid’s project. He argued in 1956 that India’s desires to annex the small French and Portuguese colonies within India might only be the beginning:

> Undiscriminating Canadian support for Nehru and India might lead to imposition of a new type of imperialism in Asia and Africa. My personal impression is that India is expansionist. Pondicherry and Goa are but the prelude to annexation, penetration or satellite control of much of southern Asia and Africa.[23]

This is a rare example of viewing India as a possible imperialist from Canada, which we will return to below.

While Australian and Canadian diplomats viewed strains of unnecessary, even primordial, idealism and deep-rooted anti-Western prejudice in India's emotional behaviour, South Africans viewed it as outright hypocrisy and devious design. In an internal memo in 1952, G.P. Jooste, South Africa's permanent representative at the UN, argued that India deliberately made race an 'emotional' issue, arguing that:

> We need but read the title [of the Indian item at the UN] – 'Treatment of the Indians in the Union of South Africa'. When 'treatment' is therefore, by a process of misrepresentation of fact, given the meaning of 'oppression' then, clearly, this item immediately has an emotional impact on all who, in this organization, believe in the promotion of human happiness. This we fully understand and it is because of this fact that we so strongly despise the false position in which we are placed by the actions and especially the words of Indian delegates.[24]

Here, India's emotional performance is seen as just that: a performance. South African internal memos repeatedly argue that this was not directed towards securing the human rights for South African Indians or to combat racial discrimination. Rather, India's only aim was to seek 'prestige'. In hankering after status and prestige, India did not even care about the 'terrible injustice' it caused South Africa.[25] This allows South Africa to be the victim.

Finally, South Africa's response to India's tirades at the UN was to constantly emphasise the latter's hypocrisy, but in a more aggressive fashion. South African diplomats pointed to India's stances on Kashmir and Hyderabad and the continuing practice of casteism as evidences of India's hypocrisy on human rights. Casteism was defined as 'Apartheid in India', despite India dismantling its caste system in law while South Africa was doing the opposite on race.[26] This line of attack became particularly vicious when Eric Louw, South Africa's foreign minister from 1955 to 1963, attended UN sessions. Louw, who had notoriously gained himself monikers such as the 'undiplomatic diplomat' (Van Wyk, 2005) and 'South Africa's Goebbels', (Pogrund, 1990) threw allegations of hypocrisy on human rights on not just Indians but all countries who opposed South Africa at the UN (van Rensburg, 1962 and Wolvaardt, 2006).

A new 'Brown Empire'?: Anti-Racism as an Imperialist project

The idea that India was a new imperialist power was deeply embedded within South African diplomatic discourse, though it appeared only very occasionally within Australian and Canadian discourse on India’s foreign policy projects. A Scottish-Australian journalist Erskine Wyse devoted an entire book to this idea in 1946, the unsubtly titled ‘Brown Empire’. He argued that Indian independence would pose a strategic problem for Australia because India would seek an Asian empire of its own. This was an especially fearful prospect for Wyse (1946: 113-116), as he believed Hindu society had quasi-fascist tendencies and because leaders like Nehru operated ‘on an emotional basis instead of… logical conviction.’ Frederick Eggleston, an early Australian IR scholar, once wrote to Crocker, arguing that, ‘India has many fighting races and very many trained soldiers and she may easily become an Imperialist Power if she is able to overcome her internal problems’.[27] Cleveland’s example, discussed above, was an outlier on the Canadian side. These isolated examples, though at most a mild undercurrent, illustrate that these three states were drawing from the same set of narratives. Our spotlight here falls squarely on South Africa.

The belief that India had designs on Africa had roots before Indian independence. Parts of East Africa had been run from India under the Raj (Blyth, 2003). In the early 20th century, some Indian liberals had called for parts of Eastern Africa to become a colony of British India, given the strong presence of Indian diaspora. This demand was completely repudiated by the leadership of the Indian National Congress (Blyth, 2003). European settlers were alarmed by the increasing Indian presence. In the 1920s, South Africa and Jan Smuts (1930) in particular had played on these fears to push for the idea of a ‘Greater South Africa’ from the Cape to Kenya. In the 1940s, as Indian independence drew near, Smuts reinvigorated the debate about the Indian as a coloniser in Africa. He said:

> South Africa is a little epic of European civilisation on a dark continent. India is threatening this noble experiment with her vast millions who have frustrated themselves and now threaten to frustrate us. All along the coast of Africa from Mombasa to Durban and ultimately to Cape Town they are invading, infiltrating in all sorts of devious ways to reverse the role which we have thought our destiny. East and West meet at this moment of history and I frankly am a Westerner, although I love and respect the whole human family, irrespective of colour and race. We stand for something which we will go and be lost to the world, if India gets control of eastern South Africa. (Smuts, in Van der Poel, 1973, p. 101).

Here, Smuts tied India’s population to its possible imperialism, but asserted that his desire to resist this was based on the superiority of western civilization rather than a scientific racism. The discourse, though, only became more extreme.

In each of these cases, it was assumed that the Indian diaspora, who had been spread around the world by colonial practices, would remain loyal to India and act as the ‘fifth column’ for Indian empire.[28] Even Nehru was, at some level, sympathetic to the idea that the Indian diaspora tended to isolate themselves from the local struggles and look towards India as their natural home.[29] To the dismay of many, Nehru repeatedly made the point in his diaspora policy that Indians in other countries must identify themselves with the struggles of the local population. This failed to reassure the South African government, which saw the entire Indian population in Africa as ‘foreign'. The telos of apartheid ideology, indeed, was repatriation of the entire Indian population from South Africa.[30]

One of the most forceful proponents of the repatriation of Indians from South Africa was G. Heaten Nicholls. Nicholls was Smuts’ deputy at the 1946 UN General Assembly (and South Africa’s High Commissioner to London), and his deeply racist speech at the UN was one of the reasons why South Africa lost the vote to India. A politician from Natal, Nicholls stated to the South African parliament in 1949: ‘the real struggle today is a struggle between India and the Europeans for the possession of Africa’.[31] He was responding to D.F. Malan’s speech outlining his foreign policy. Notably, Nicholls came from a party which was more liberal than Malan’s, but criticised Malan for being less serious about the Indian threat. This reflects a relative consensus in South African politics on India’s nefarious intents.

At the UN however, South Africa was initially measured in its accusations. In a speech at the UN, G.P. Jooste tried to make the case gently:

> has it not become clear to all who have followed the course of Indian penetration into the continent of Africa, how the racial pattern in parts of that Continent is being changed… in a manner which cannot leave us in doubt as to the nature of Indian objectives in Africa… There are also of course other parts of the world similarly affected. I will leave it yet to each and every one familiar with, or representing, those areas to draw his own conclusions.[32]

The accusations became more hyperbolic. On 11 August 1953, Malan stated to the parliament that ‘India is a danger not only to Africa but also to all Powers with interests in Africa.’ He argued that India was trying to load off its excess population in Africa and that ‘India was a

danger for Africa – in Natal, in Southern and Northern Rhodesia and in East Africa.' Indeed, Jooste argued that on every occasion of a difference between whites and non-whites in South Africa, India deliberately sided with the non-whites and attributed the resistance campaign in South Africa directly to an appeal made by Nehru. Nehru had done the same in Kenya, he argued, where Nehru had asked Indians to stand with the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (often known by the pejorative British term, Mau Mau). Malan also included the UN in India's nefarious designs and asked the Commonwealth to stand together and 'drive the UN back within its own boundaries'.[33] Continuing his tirade India, Malan stated that India's primary aim was to drive the white man from Africa and asked why India did not interfere in the affairs of Australia which was closer to India and had vast tracts of unpopulated lands (Anon, 1953). Louw also drew on the idea that India wished to control Africa to dispatch its poorest people. He pitched this as a clash for who would control and colonize Africa: the 'West', the Soviet Union or India. He concluded that that '[t]he aim of India is to obtain a dumping ground for its millions of surplus population, and eventually to take the place of the present despised "colonial" powers.'[34]

Worried about India's designs, South Africa viewed every Indian move as a confirmation of the latter's imperialism. When India decided to send a commissioner to Accra with jurisdiction in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) and Nigeria, South Africa saw only infiltration.[35] Here, anti-racism is recast as a security discourse. Couched in geopolitical terms, India's anti-racism becomes securitised, something demanding a strategic response.

South Africa's view of India as imperialist *and* security threat was exemplified when Menzies visited in 1953. Speaking in Menzies' presence, Malan referred to Australia and South Africa as 'The Twin sisters of the Southern Seas', a bond based not on 'a cultural and racial affinity rooted in a common pioneering history (implicitly suggesting this was an element), but as a bulwark against 'powers in the Indian Ocean'. He carried on to say that these 'powers' would threaten white civilization and 'might soon be knocking on the door of Australia'. To his mind, the call for 'the white man [to] quit Africa' really concluded 'and let India enter in'. Malan concluded that Nehru was 'the enemy of White man' and promised South African aid to Australia in the event of an Indian attack. In response, Menzies merely affirmed 'Commonwealth unity'.[36]

One largely unexamined element of the UN South Africa-India clash is a low key struggle fought through UNESCO over the construction of global human rights norms. After several years of debate on the nature of human rights, an anonymous South African representative wrote to their colleagues that the anti-colonial nature of the human rights movement was deeply troubling. The discussions were 'tainted… by the vicious anti-colonial political currents which mill below the seemingly idealistic surface of the human rights question.'[37] They argued that:

> The plain truth is, and who should know this better than South Africa, that the human rights game is one of the most insidious present day political past-times of the United Nations anti-colonial pressure groups; to them the draft covenants are merely political vehicles towards a political end.[38]

The author listed all the various anti-colonial groupings, describing their sinister motivations. They suggested that when Morocco talks of human rights, they are thinking of pan-Islamism, when Greece does so it is really thinking of Cyprus, Russian talk of decolonization in Africa dreams of a brutal new 'Imperialism *a la Russe*' and the South Americans of 'their own ebullient liberation from the Iberian yoke'.[39] The strongest words were left for India, however, evoking Nazi Germany, 'when the Indians speak of self-determination they are thinking of "lebensraum" for themselves.'[40] The debate had come full circle. What began with Nehru's campaign against South Africa's 'Nazi doctrine' had be reframed as India's quest for Lebensraum. The displays of emotion made by India were seen as cold, calculating realpolitik to disguise a nefarious goal of expansionism.

Conclusion: Anti-Racist Performance, Racist Responses

The response to India's quest to keep race on the international agenda reveals a complex transnational politics of postcolonial identity. Australia painted India as irrational and emotional and denied India's perception of reality. Canada tended more towards accepting India's position, but found India's campaign deeply frustrating. South Africa's assertion that India's anti-racism was not only hypocritical, but that it was itself imperialist enterprise today sounds absurd. Yet, it was rooted in long term issues of the empire and predated India's efforts at the UN. And yet, the idea India would seek to colonize Southern Africa was deeply embedded and assumed as truth in the South African foreign policy discourse. Just as opposing racism today is sometimes attacked as racist, opposing imperialism could be seen as a form of imperialism.

India’s act of faith was to keep it the issue alive when the powerful did not want to hear it. The post-imperial world had moved on far quicker than the postcolonial world, enabled by their dismissals of India’s anti-racist performances. The idea that India is an imperialist power has largely dissipated from global political discourse. And yet, the idea’s conspiratorial nature, it played a part in the dismissal of race as a top-tier international issue. While South Africa employed it to ignore India’s aggressive rhetoric, but it also exemplified the former’s own increasing paranoia about race and security. But the imperial powers had moved on far quicker than the postcolonial world, and was enabled by these two means of dismissing India’s anti-racist performances. These discourses limited India’s anti-racist successes to the most extreme case of South Africa. It left South Africa isolated. But the responses of the post-imperial world to anti-racism limited race as an international issue, meaning racism was left largely unchallenged outside of South Africa.

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ENDNOTES

[1] We have excluded the US and the UK from this study. The UK was not quite so challenged by the Indian attack on racial discourse as it was not a settlement. Similarly, although the US was also a settler-colony, its early independence from Britain gave it a greater distance from India.

[2] Prior to this, New Zealand only had a trade commissioner stationed in India. On the lack of representation, see: G. R. Powels, 'Annual Report: Office of the High Commissioner for New Zealand, New Delhi' 1962, specific date not given. 'India: External Relations – General: 1957-1965' at Archives New Zealand, Item ID: R18227560.

[3] For discussions on South Africa's withdrawal from the conference, see SAB, BLO, Vol. 450, Ref. PS26/13/17 -- Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference Political, SANA.

[4] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'India and South Africa at the UNO: Pandit Nehru's Comments in Parliament', at National Archives of South Africa (hereafter SANA), Pretoria 'Note on 18 December, BVV5, 10.2, vol 1.

[5] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Speech to the Canadian House of Commons', October 24, 1949 at Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG25-A-3-b, 9908-Y-2-40, vol. 2, pp. 1103-1106.

[6] Anon, High Commissioner for South Africa, London, 'India's Ambitions in East Africa', 27 Jan, 1951, at SANA, 'Indian representation in British dominion colonies' BLO/280/PS13/1/3.

[7] Anon, 'India's Ambitions in East Africa'.

[8] Krishna Menon, 'Statement at Ad-Hoc Committee on 28 October 1954', at SANA, BVV/5/10.2, Vol. 2.

[9] Quoted in 'Telegram, Secret. Foreign, New Delhi to Minextern, Cape Town,' at National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Ministry of External Affairs, F. 5 (1)/55 – AFR-I, 1955, f. 17.

[10] S. P. Jha, 'S Jha statement at the Special Political Committee, 21 March 1961', at SANA: BVV5, 10.2, vol 3.

[11] Anon, ‘India’s Ambitions in East Africa’.

[12] Herbert Gollan to Casey, 20 January, 1949, at National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), A1838, 854/10/4/5, ‘Asian Conference – New Delhi – January-March 1949, Australian Embassy, Washington to Department of External Affairs, 25 January, 1949.

[13] Robert Menzies to Felix Frankfurter, 21 November 1960: National Library of Australia: MS 4936, series 1, box 12, folder 104.

[14] Walter Crocker, 'India's attitude to Australian New Guinea' (1961) at NAA: A452: 1961/3163. p. 5.

[15] Crocker, ‘Australian New Guinea’, p. 5.

[16] Crocker, ‘Australian New Guinea’, p. 4.

[17] Laval Fortier to Dana Wilgress, July 15, 1953 at LAC, RG26-A-1-c, vol. 127, part 2, no. 157-HC/53.

[18] Lester B. Pearson, ‘Address to the Indian Council of World Affairs’, November 4, 1955 at LAC, MG31-E46, vol. 8, file 22, no. 55.

[19] Canada House, ‘Mr. Nehru’s Visit to Canada, December 22-23, 1956: Commentary’, p. 11, at LAC, R219-103-1-E, ‘Visit of Prime Minister Nehru of India to Canada and the USA - Subjects for discussion’.

[20] Canada House, ‘Mr. Nehru’s visit’.

[21] Chester Ronning, ‘Comments on Glazebrook report’, at LAC, RG 25, Vol. 7128, File 9126-40 pt. 10.1 ‘Draft Report on Indian Foreign policy by Glazebrook, 16 October 1957’, pp. 128-129.

[22] Lester Pearson, ‘Prime Ministers’ Conference Diary’ at LAC, Pearson papers, MG 26 N1, Vol. 23, File Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference Diary 1955. p. 93.

[23] J.H. Cleveland, 'Visit of Prime Minister Nehru' (1956), p. 2, at LAC, R219-103-1-E, ‘Visit of Prime Minister Nehru of India to Canada and the USA - Subjects for discussion’.

[24] G.P. Jooste, ‘Treatment of People of Indian Origins in the Union of South Africa, Statement by Ambassador G.P. Jooste in the Ad-Hoc Committee, 19 October 1953,’ SAB, BVV, Vol. 5, Ref. 10/2, Part 3, SANA.

[25] G.P. Jooste, ‘Treatment of People of Indian Origins’.

[26] Ambassador to France to the Secretary for External Affairs, 5 December, 1959, at SANA, BPA/5/18/10.

[27] F. Eggleston, ‘Part Two: Diplomatic Studies’, p. 526, in Barr-Smith Library, Crocker Papers, Series 9, (7-11).

[28] P.F. Grey to H.T. Bourdillon, 9 June 1948, at British Library, F7558/1288/61’, IOR/L/PS/12/4670.

[29] See for instance, the discussions on this issue at the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, Asian Relations Conference, *Asian Relations: Being a report of the proceedings and documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, March-April 1947,* (New Delhi, 1948).

[30] In 1949, Malan proposed to Nehru the onetime repatriation of about 250,000 Indians. See, D.F. Malan ‘Addendum to New bulletin 101’, 24 September 1953, at SANA BPA/5/18/10 – Indian Question’.

[31] Heaton Nicholls, at ‘Dr. Malan Outlines South Africa’s Foreign Policy’, at SANA, BPA/5/18/12 – ‘Foreign Policy of SA’, p. 15.

[32] G.P. Jooste, ‘Treatment of People of Indian Origins’

[33] Eric Louw, ‘Graduation address by the honourable Eric H. Louw M.P., Minister of External Affairs, on the occasion of the Graduation Day of the University of Pretoria’ 30th March, 1957, at SANA: BPA/5/18/12: Foreign Policy of SA, ‘Foreign Policy of the Union’, 25 April, 1949, p. 14.

[34] Louw, ‘Graduation address’

[35] D.B. Sole to R. Jones, 3 September 1953, at SANA, BPA/5/18/10

[36] J.H. Le Rougetel, ‘Visit of Mr R G. Menzies’ (1961) at United Kingdom National Archives, DO 201/04, ‘Correspondence respecting Commonwealth Relations: volume IV. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Southern Rhodesia, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Irish Republic’, pp. 120-121.

[37] Anon, ‘Report on UN General Assembly, Ninth Session, Third Committee: Draft international covenants on human rights: Agenda Item 58’, 2 December 1954 p. 5, at SANA: BVV 25, 11/4/3 ‘Human Rights Commission’.

[38] Anon, ‘Report on UN General Assembly’, p. 5.

[39] Anon, ‘Report on UN General Assembly’, p. 5.

[40] Anon, ‘Report on UN General Assembly’, p. 5.