

The Bandung Spirit

Little over six decades ago, in 1955 to be precise, Indonesia hosted an important gathering that sought to make a major contribution to the ordering of the system of international relations in the post-Second World War period and the onset of the Cold War. This was the first Afro-Asian conference which was held in Bandung, Indonesia on 18-24 April 1955. It was sponsored by India, Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan and an additional 24 Asian and African countries. Fifty years later, on 20-24 April 2005, the second Asian-African Conference was also held in Jakarta and Bandung. The Bandung Conference considered problems of common interest and concern to countries of Asia and Africa and discussed ways and means by which their people could achieve fuller economic, cultural and political cooperation, thus launching an era of Afro-Asian cooperation.

Among others, this conference extended its warm sympathy and support for the courageous stand taken by the victims of racial discrimination, especially by the peoples of African and Indian origin in South Africa. The Bandung Conference was a direct product of the victories scored by the people of Africa and Asia in their historic struggle against colonialism and imperialist domination. To the vast majority of the peoples of Africa and Asia the Conference provided a source of inspiration, a step in the right direction of meeting the aspirations of the vast majority of mankind, particularly the oppressed people of Asia and Africa.

From a historical perspective, Africa's relations with Asia, particularly India, go back many centuries. Until the 20th century, India's relations with Africa were mainly cultural and economic. There was very little political interaction. Linked across the Indian Ocean, Indians have been neighbors and partners of East (and Southern) Africans for thousands of years. There was regular interaction between communities and traders especially from the west coast of Gujarat and parts of South India with Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), Somalia, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Mozambique, etc. These communities and groups played significant roles in the histories of both India and Africa. However, the advent of the Europeans and the era of the colonial rule disturbed these interactions, although they could not completely disrupt them.

In many ways, Indians and Africans trod a common path. As colonization came, their contacts acquired different dimensions. Both India and Africa shared the pain of subjugation and the joys of freedom and liberation. In the period of decolonization and the fight against apartheid, India and Africa stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the fight against apartheid and racial discrimination. *Satyagraha*, non-violence and active opposition to injustice and discrimination were first devised by Mahatma Gandhi on the Continent of Africa. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was also a firm believer and practitioner of the principle of Afro-Asian solidarity and support for the struggle of the people of Africa against discrimination and apartheid. Nehru regarded Asia and Africa as 'Sister Continents'.

The African-Indian Question

K. Mathews

AFRICA in the INDIAN Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation

by Antoinette BURTON

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After she achieved independence in 1947, India embarked on a path of close cooperation with the newly independent nations of Africa, which were sharing similar problems of underdevelopment, poverty and disease. India's cooperation with Africa was based on the principle of South-South Cooperation, on the similarities of circumstances and experiences. India has believed and still believes that Africa holds the key to its own development but it needs support, facilitation and durable partnerships. Among others, transfer of knowledge and human skills, going beyond government-to-government interactions and embracing civil society, has been emphasized. India has always been open to sharing its strengths, its much appreciated democratic model of development and its appropriate technologies, which many Africans found to be low cost, resource-efficient, adaptive and suitable to help identify local solutions to local problems.

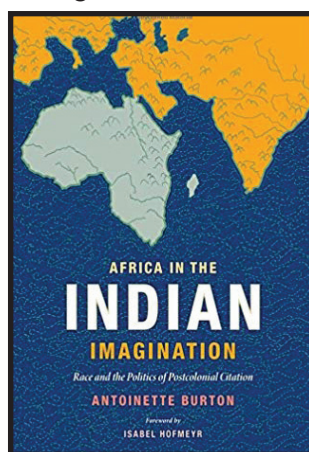
Africa in the Indian Imagination

In her well-conceived, well researched and well written book, *Africa in the INDIAN Imagination*, imperial historian Antoinette Burton provides a refreshing analysis of the Afro-Asian relationship from the vantage point of India. In the process, she contributes to a growing scholarly interest in the histories of the global South. Burton contends that Afro-Asian solidarity is best understood by using fiction as a lens to expose the racial, class, gender, sexuality, caste and political tensions throughout the postcolonial global South. Indeed, she reframes our understanding of the intricacies of post-colonial Afro-Asian connections that emerged from the 1955 Bandung Conference.

Recent attention to the urgency of economic and political cooperation between the Indian government and African states – often termed South-South globalization – suggests that the time has come for more critical histories of 'Afro-Asian solidarity' than are presently available. That term, which gained currency at the historic 1955 Bandung Conference, refers to the story of affinities and exchanges between peoples of African and South Asian descent from ancient times to the present. More recently, it has gained popularity as a metaphor for the fraternal links between ex-colonial peoples in the wake of decolonization, when Africans and Indians (and others) joined forces to create the Non-Aligned

Movement (NAM) in the Cold War world dominated by the USA and the USSR. Briefly put, this book represents an unconventional, critical, and refreshing account of Afro-Asian interactions in the post-Bandung era, taking India as a case study.

The author, Antoinette Burton, is Senior Professor of History and Global and Transnational Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Campaign. In this study, she turns her acute moral, intellectual and analytical attention to



how twentieth-century Indian nationalists used Africa and Africans as reference points for imagining an independent identity. Powerfully acting on its own injunction to provincialise empire by meshing postcolonial critique with feminist one, Burton's bold and erudite study redraws the map of intercultural relations and trans-nationalist col-

laboration in the twentieth century. She contributes to a growing scholarly interest in the histories of the global South. In fact, Burton here joins a number of scholars, mainly diplomatic historians, in challenging the narratives of solidarity by arguing that Asian and African relations were fraught with tension and competition. A seasoned colonial and postcolonial scholar, Burton advances our understanding of Afro-Asianism more so because she offers a social and cultural history of the India-Africa relationship and delves deep into previously unexplored archives and sources. Burton's essays are largely concerned with Indian works of fiction and non-fiction that depict the subcontinent's relations with Africa. Burton contends that Indian writers cited or referenced Africa as a buttress of Indian identity. At the same time, they produced a hierarchical positioning of 'brown over black' that served to empower Indians and refashion Africans as their radicalized others.

As Hofmeyr rightly notes in the Foreword, in its form, content and making, this book is a portable experiment. Each essay is devoted to one novel or work of fiction and the volume constitutes a speculative book shelf comprising texts whose authors and characters rove widely – from Bombay to Durban; Goa to Ghana; Uganda to India. These itineraries crisscross previously colonized parts of the world, creating a constellation of pathways in what we now call the global South, itself an experimental configuration whose outline and import are currently far from clear. Focusing on India's imagined (and real) relationship

with Africa, Burton historicizes Africa's role in the emergence of a coherent postcolonial Indian identity. She shows how, despite Bandung's rhetoric of equality and brotherhood, Indian identity echoed colonial racial hierarchies in its subordination of Africans and blackness. Underscoring Indian anxiety over Africa and challenging the narratives and dearly held assumptions that presume a sentimentalized, nostalgic and fraternal history of Afro-Asian solidarity, Burton demonstrates the continued need for an anti-heroic, vexed and fractious post-colonial critique.

As the significance of the global South as a geopolitical force gains momentum, opinion on what it is or how it might be understood proliferate. Is it the post-American future towards which the declining West is inevitably evolving? Could it be the portent of what a sustainable future might look like? Or is it in fact the future of capitalism itself, as post-colonial elites entrench themselves by enabling devastating forms of extractive labor while creating new multilateral power alignments like BRICS? Or, is this multilateralism in fact an anti- or perhaps semi-capitalist arrangement that could shift the gravity of world power southward? Others insist on global South as the post-1989 situation of the 'Third World', where older traditions of anti-imperialism will be reprised in the neoliberal order, making the global South the locus of radical global social movements.

Methodologically, the book assembles a series of texts each of which opens up a miniature world where 'Africa' and 'India' intersect: African Indian interactions around the anti-apartheid struggle in Durban; the travelogue of Frank Moraes, editor of the *Times of India*, through several African countries in 1960; and a novel about East African Students in Delhi. It tracks the racial hierarchies that were often at work in the lived experiences and geo-political imageries of men and women for whom the ideals of Afro-Asian solidarity pose a genuine challenge.

Significantly, the study also takes gender and sexuality as indispensable categories in the history of postcolonial India in/and the world. It draws on the writings of Anusya R. Singh (Chapter 1, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, 1960); Frank Moraes (Chapter 2, *The Importance of Being Black*, 1965); Chanakya Sen (*The Morning After*, 1973) and Phyllis Naidoo's *Impressions of Anti-apartheid History 2002-2006* (Ch. 4) and also, briefly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's famous 2007 novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, (Epilogue, pp. 167-71), providing praise for India's post-colonial achievements, her appreciation for the example of the Indian poor and his frank admiration of Gandhi as a political model. As both a veteran historian and a gifted literary critic, Burton dissects these novels, listening to the possibilities they open up even while tracing the contradictions in which these become knotted. For her, novels are not simply reflections of the world; they are imaginary attempts to resolve contradictions, to use the narrative to settle the ambiguity. Her readings of the texts productively mine these fault lines, showing the limits of the ideological projects embodied in each text. According to the author, the Indian

conception of Africa that emerges is biased by ‘racialised’ capitalist relations, ‘colonial-era racial hierarchies and entrenched practices of racial endogamy’.

In this Indo-centric conception of the post-colonial world, we find again the superstructures of intra-colonial interdependence that the British empire had created, a hierarchy in which India was subordinate to the ‘motherland’ and other colonies like those in Africa occupied in turn a place inferior to India, which signify the idea of ‘brown over black’! According to Burton, India’s efforts to create a national identity entailed a vision of Africa and of blackness that was intrinsically defined by the assumption of their inferior status, in civilisational and racial terms. Although Burton is careful to observe that this does not deny the close entanglement between India and Africa and their archive of cross-racial interaction, she invites her readers to consider Afro-Asian solidarity, and the modern and contemporary history of South-South connections, from the vantage point of frictions and fault lines.

One may conclude that *Africa in the INDIAN Imagination* covers a cognate domain of complexity: the historical archive of interactions between ‘Africa’ and ‘India’. The lattice of linkages between these two world regions is indeed old and deep – ancient monsoon-driven trade routes across the Indian Ocean; relationships of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid support and solidarity; and, more recently, a neo-liberal wave of Indian investments in the continent. Focusing on India’s imagined relationship with Africa, Burton historicizes Africa’s role in the emergence of a coherent post-colonial Indian identity. She demonstrates as to how – despite Bandung’s rhetoric of equality and brotherhood – Indian identity echoed colonial racial hierarchies in its subordination of Africans and blackness. Underscoring Indian anxiety over Africa and challenging the narratives and deeply held assumptions that presume a sentimentalized, nostalgic and fraternal history of Afro-Asian solidarity, Burton shows the continued need for anti-rhetoric, vexed, and fractious postcolonial critique.

Analysis

Burton’s main chapters offer close readings of two novels (Chs. 1 & 3), one travel narrative (Ch.2), and one memoir (Ch.4). The first chapter brings to the reader a commentary on the first novel written by a South African Indian, and on the interpretative possibilities that arise from a method that is attuned to the citationary politics that plays out within—and beyond—the text. Written in 1960, Ansuya R. Singh’s novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, is the story of a transnational Indian marriage set in Durban against the backdrop of the passive resistance campaign of 1946-1948, which was organized in response to the Smuts government’s introduction of the notorious Ghetto Act, the bill which limited the rights of Indians to own or occupy land.

One hundred years after the arrival of the first indentured Indians in South Africa, Ansuya R. Singh published this, her first, novel which is the story of this transnational marriage between a Bombay woman, Yogeshwari, and a Durban

man, Srenika. In order to capture the full historicity of Singh’s book, Burton rightly suggests that this be read not only as a diaspora novel that portrays the struggles of the Indian community in South Africa at the intersection of class, gender, and race, but also as a work of fiction where African characters, and the possibilities of interracial encounters and collisions, are central to the plot. Most of the book engages a variety of fictional and non-fictional narratives that are used as specific accounts of the ways in which Africa was imagined by Indians or by Africans of Indian descent.

The other novel (Ch.3) is Chanakya Sen’s *Morning After* (1973), which also tells stories of diaspora across Afro-Asia. In *The Morning After*, Sen narrates the story about African students studying in India. Spearheaded by the Government of India in the mid- 1950s, the drive to enroll African students in India’s then 55 universities was motivated by Jawaharlal Nehru’s commitment to cultivating Africa’s technical capabilities as part of their training for post-colonial self-government. Nehru also took the initiative to establish a separate Department of African Studies in Delhi University in 1955. As the author notes, if such a scheme sounds paternalist, it should come as no surprise (p. 92). The post-colonial Indian market was dependent on African markets – including Kenya, Zambia, Zanzibar, Ghana and Nigeria. This was part of a larger scheme of developing long-range policy objectives for Africa – known as ‘economic diplomacy’ – which accelerated in the wake of the Sino-Indian war of 1962. Burton convincingly argues that the interface between Indian and African characters in each novel reproduced racialised and gendered hierarchies that privileged ‘Brown over black’. Burton also points to the anxieties about crossing Afro-Asian boundaries. But, in Sen’s novel, we also find Indian women and African men crossing racial boundaries in intimate spaces. Such crossings proved devastating for the African characters and provided a cautionary tale against interracial mixing within the Afro-Asian communities in India.

Burton’s final essay on Phyllis Naidoo’s *Memoirs* (Ch. 4) about Indian and African collaboration in the anti-apartheid struggle is noteworthy. She argues that Naidoo’s book, *Footprints in Grey Street*, captures the interracial struggle against apartheid in South Africa and registers a new way of narrating solidarity across the Afro-Asian experience. Burton finds promise in Naidoo’s ‘Afrindian’ story because it ‘cites’ interracial solidarity on the ground in the anti-apartheid movement, while also recognizing the ‘frictions between brown and black that were characteristics of the struggle’ (p. 145).

Earlier in Chapter 2 (pp. 57-87), Burton’s study of Frank Moraes’s *The Importance of Being Black: An Asian Looks at Africa* (1965), reaffirms the significance of racial hierarchies in Indian perceptions of Africa. Burton believes that Moraes, a journalist who wrote about his travels throughout Africa in 1965 and relied on older discursive hierarchies of the colonial era to position African states ‘below’ India developmentally. However, this book only

provides the view of ‘Africa from an airplane’ (Moraes never lived in Africa!). It is nonetheless a critical ethnography of emergent African nation-states – refracting the fate of postcolonial India and Indians through its telescopic lens and honing in on African practices on the ground as evidence (or not) of Africans’ fitness for self-rule.

That ground – the ‘below’ as seen from the airplane window – is ostensibly highly differentiated, with each chapter mapping the history and contemporary politics of emergent nation states from Ghana to Rhodesia to Kenya to the Congo. As Burton points out (p. 59), the rhetorical effect of Moraes’ frequent touch-downs strategy is two-fold. First it registers ‘Africa’ not simply as an undifferentiated geographical mass but as a fitfully decolonizing space under pressure from mass nationalist movements and superpower competition. What is significant here is how readily Moraes, as a self-identified ‘Asian’/‘Indian’ observer of post-colonial African politics, follows in its wake. Interestingly, Moraes compares an almost 20 year independent India (in 1965) with the nascent, even adolescent, quasi-independent Africa in the making. The following quote from his book reveals his rather racist orientation:

The average African truly certainly lacks the education, training and experience not only of the European, but of the Asian. If he is a hundred years behind Europe, he is at least fifty years behind Asia in the development of his aptitude and abilities (p. 60). No wonder readers generally found Moraes’ views alternately surprising, distasteful and unnecessarily censorious. In the opinion of many, Moraes’ patent lack of sympathy for Africa undercut the force of his political observations. Elsewhere, Moraes notes: ‘While Africa regards the West as being unduly complacent, the West accuses Africa of being unnecessarily truculent’. He also says: ‘Asia’s heart is with Africa though her head is often more inclined to the West!’

India-Africa Synergy in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Burton’s final essay (Ch. 4), on Phyllis Naidoo’s memoirs about Indian and African collaboration in the anti-apartheid struggle, stands out. Phyllis insists, ‘Do not call me an Indian. I am South African’. In the mid-1950s, Naidoo threw herself into activism in South Africa, initially by raising funds for treason trials – the 156 people, including Nelson Mandela, who were tried for treason between 1956 and 1961 – and helping people who were banished to remote areas. She joined the ANC-aligned Natal Indian Congress and, later, the South African Communist Party and married one of the young party leaders, M.D. Naidoo. Initially, her work focused on the underground, helping ‘comrades’ to escape the country, a role that became even more vital after the ANC was banned in 1960. Phyllis was warned by underground leaders to flee the country, but she took her chances and remained at home, while continuing to assist others to leave. However, because of her underground work, Naidoo was finally forced to flee into exile in Lesotho in 1977. The apartheid government cer-

tainly regarded her ‘a difficult woman’, as did many of her friends and comrades. She had little respect for conservative conventions about how women should behave etc. and was renowned for being straightforward with her opinions, even with the rich and the powerful.

Antoinette Burton argues that Naidoo’s book, *Footprints in Grey Street*, captures the interracial struggle against apartheid in South Africa and registers a new way of narrating solidarity across the Afro-Asian experience. Burton finds promise in Naidoo’s ‘Afrindian’ story because it ‘cites’ interracial solidarity on the ground in the anti-apartheid movement, while also recognizing the ‘frictions between brown and black that were characteristics of the struggle’.

Epilogue and Conclusion

In Ngugi waThiong’o’s 2007 novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, the hero Kamiti, university-educated and unemployed, poses as a wizard and topples a fictional African regime gluttoned on corruption and seduced by the evils of global capitalism. Among the things that made Kimati who he is – i.e., what makes him a threat to the ‘Republic of Aburiria’ and its would-be leaders – is that he has traveled through and studied in India. Just as irritating to his enemies is his praise for India’s postcolonial achievements, his appreciation for the example of the Indian poor and his frank admiration of Gandhi as a political model. ‘...Wasn’t it only after fifteen years of anti-colonial struggles in South Africa that he went back to India to organize *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* against the British rule in India?’, he asks. Rightly so.

Burton notes that if Kimati is an avatar of the Africans in these essays and novels she has been tracking in the book perversely figuring India as a challenge to the self-actualization of Africa’s independence, he is also a critical marker of the persistence of Afro-Indian comparison in the post-colonial imagination. Not just Gandhi but India and Indians are regarded by Kimati as evidence of the path forward, and by his enemies as proof that he is not really African, or not purely so (p. 168). The choice is wide open! Burton points out that her criticisms of India in the book is not to suggest that Indians were simply racists or did not participate in fighting apartheid in South Africa or in shaping Afro-Asian solidarity in the wake of the 1955 Bandung Conference. The analysis in this book is compelling, although it has its limitations. Burton’s overdependence on textual analysis leaves little room for exploring the geo-political context and material forces.

The generations of South African Indians who succeeded Gandhi put their bodies on the line to protest racial segregation; and there is no gainsaying the impact of joint struggles by Indians and Africans to secure a platform for Third World issues, and to re-configure the post colonial globe, in the heat of the Cold War and beyond. As the author rightly points out, Ngugi’s approach makes it impossible not to take the centrality of women and gender and sexuality in his story seriously (p. 169). As such, the African-Indian Question is riddled with tensions that, perforce, generate friction: the heat and light we need to make new histories!