

Antoinette Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). pp. 200.

Timothy Nicholson

Antoinette Burton's latest publication, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*, proves to be quite ambitious and theoretically rigorous for a short book. This well-argued collection of essays uses a series of lesser known books written by Indian authors to provide new insight into the understudied issue of African-Indian interactions and relations during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Providing examples from sources published in South Africa and India, Burton develops a mandate for scholars to further historicize both the connections between India and Africa and the divides that separated these two peoples. In accomplishing this goal, Burton expands on her quest to decenter the British Empire by encouraging scholars to similarly decenter the Cold War. While this question has been recently raised, Burton uses understudied sources and a postcolonial perspective to give this subject new urgency.¹ Written in a clear and engaging manner, suitable for scholars, postgraduates, and upper level literary/history students, Burton engages with an impressive range of scholarship as she complicates our understanding of Indian-African interactions and raises larger issues dealing with the legacy of imperialism and the development of the postcolonial state.

The book is comprised of a series of case studies based on relatively obscure literary works that Burton contextualizes and uses to show how racial boundaries were maintained and policed. Two essays deal with Indians in South Africa—one on Gandhiera South Africa and the final chapter dealing with South Africa during the struggle against apartheid. Burton's analysis of *Behold the Earth Mourns* demonstrates the schism between the local African and Indian communities, as well as what Burton dubs the "hidden histories of cross-racial politics," a narrative that is overlooked in nationalist historiography.² The second South African text examined, *Footprints*, contains a series of biographical profiles that Burton uses to highlight the complexity of race relations during the struggle against apartheid, when Indians and Africans worked together, sharing a political consciousness and racial solidarity.³ The other two chapters examine views of Africans in

India in the immediate postcolonial period. The first, *Importance of Being Black*, was written to provide Indians (living in South Asia) an overview of the state of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, straddling the divide of decolonization. Burton demonstrates how the book shows African backwardness as a method of proving Indian development and associated claims of modernity. Finally, in what I believe the strongest chapter, Burton's examination of *The Morning After* by Chanakya Sen is used to demonstrate the policing of intimate relations at a familial level. Burton argues that African students studying in India and dealing with issues such as miscegenation and intimate contact represented a threat to the Indian national body and identity. Any attempts at intimate contact were swiftly condemned by the Indian family in the book and racial separation was maintained. In these two chapters, Burton contradicts Nehru's claims of racial solidarity with the non-aligned world by demonstrating the pervasive level of racism encountered on the ground level and, overall, represents the fluid nature of race relations.

The four case studies provided by Burton highlight the complexity of Indian-African integration, along with showing the continuation of colonial-era stereotypes in the imperial and postcolonial periods. In arguing that India used similar colonial-era developmental discourse and reproduced imperial-era stereotypes of Africans, Burton carefully unpacks the layers of the racial encounter in Africa and India and, in doing so, raises issues surrounding the supposed transnational nature of the non-aligned movement and the legacy of imperialism. Thus, her work enhances our understanding of imperial and postcolonial studies by highlighting the continuing influence of colonial ideologies and their reproduction in colonial arenas. Furthermore, this book complicates the traditional colonized/colonizer dichotomy associated with colonial rule and scholarly explorations of miscegenation, which too often focus on white-nonwhite relationships. Burton's focus on "south-south racial and sexual politics"⁴ provides a framework for scholars to move beyond existing limitations in the field in examining intimate encounters, sexual regulation and the policing of racial boundaries in the postcolonial era. Additionally, Burton makes important contributions to the growing historiographic alternatives to Western-centered histories of the British Empire and the Cold War. The book demonstrates the

continued need to examine the Cold War in areas where the power and influence of the United States was marginal and Third World peoples established connections that circumvented imperial and Cold War metropolises.

Perhaps the most important contribution is Burton's ability to problematize the connections among countries in the Global South. By questioning a narrative "deeply submerged in and by accounts of Bandung,"⁵ Burton shows how African students were welcomed by the Indian government in the name of solidarity but were condemned by the local population, who did not welcome such camaraderie, especially in shared or intimate areas. Additionally, these transnational connections worked to reaffirm national boundaries and further limit non-Western solidarity. Thus, Burton nuances the story of Afro-Asian friendship and questions previous, more utopian accounts of the Bandung moment.

However, even in such a well-written, engaging and at times provoking work, limitations exist. The voices, agency and examination of the African component are largely excluded. Except in the last chapter examining apartheid protests, *Africa in the Indian Imagination* excludes Africans and the agency of individual Africans. Additionally, Burton's Africa is homogenized. The degree to which Indians viewed Africans as a single place is not addressed and, based on the historical connections and state interest in the 1960s, this is probably an oversimplification. The degree to which such racism pervaded Indian society remains unclear. Considering the service of East Africans in India during World War II, presumably some Indians welcomed interactions with Africans and spoke out against such prejudices. Historians need to further develop Afro-Asian encounters and add greater historical detail.

Overall, *Africa in the Indian Imagination* allows Burton to fulfill her own call to complicate the histories of the global South and is at the vanguard of an expanding historiography of the transnational postcolonial connections and non-aligned movement. Themes such as networks and youth are now starting to receive the attention of historians exploring how transnational connections functioned within the overlapping spheres of the British imperial world and Cold War politics, and Burton's work pushes scholars to consider these neglected yet important issues.

Notes

¹ See for example Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney and Fabio Lanza, eds. *De-centering Cold War History: Local and Global Change* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Also see Christopher J. Lee, ed. *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010).

² Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*, 50.

³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.