

Imagining Nation, State, and Order in the Mid-Twentieth Century

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This essay considers the relationship between the United Nations and the Third World. Using the apartheid debate as a framing device, it explores Indian and African nationalism in the mid-1940s and early 1960s. In focusing on themes of nationhood, statehood, and international order, the essay explicates the factors that separated Indian nationalists from their contemporaries in Africa, and hints at a novel portrait of the Third World as a contested political project in the mid-twentieth century.

This is a short essay about a big topic: the Third World. Looking closely at the global apartheid debate, it reflects on the ways Indian and African nationalists discussed the relationship between nationhood, statehood and international order in two moments of political upheaval: the mid-1940s and the early 1960s. These moments saw the nation-state proliferate through Asia and Africa, respectively, and my inquiry is prompted by two interrelated questions. How did postcolonial elites imagine the decolonized world? And how did their visions evolve as the decolonization process accelerated?

The scholarly conversation about these topics has grown rich in recent years. Historians have investigated Third World conferences, interventions, and ideologies, and they have developed new insights about postimperial politics and imperatives.¹ This essay uses the apartheid question as a framing mechanism. Residing at the intersection of the African, Atlantic and Indian worlds, South Africa was an outlier of the mid-twentieth century. Its controversial policies sharpened views about the past, present and future of European colonialism, and pushed intellectuals and diplomats alike to think more thoroughly about their attitudes toward freedom, paternalism and world order in the post-war years. The apartheid debate hardly provides a comprehensive portrait of this dynamic period, but it does offer a window to consider how perceptions of colonialism changed as more and more nation-states entered the international community.²

1 For some excellent work on the various dimensions of decolonization, see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Decolonization*, Pransanjit Duara, ed. (London: Routledge, 2003); Wm Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007); , ed. Christopher Lee, ed., *Making A World After Empire* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jason Parker, *Brother's Keeper* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (New York: New Press, 2007); Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); *The Decolonization Reader*, James Sueur, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003); Robert Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and O. Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), among many others.

2 Some aspects of my approach here overlap with my forthcoming manuscript *The Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order, 1960-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

This essay unfolds in two parts. The first section unpacks the motives and consequences of India's 1946 effort to put South Africa's policies on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. New Delhi's controversial actions have been read widely as the opening volley of a singular post-war apartheid debate.³ However, the move was only tangentially related to South African racism; it aimed first and foremost to strengthen the United Nations and influence an unsettled debate therein about whether the organization would adopt a paternalistic mindset toward the colonized world. On the threshold of independence from the British Empire, Indian diplomats saw their nation not as a fixed territorial unit but as a diasporic community of people spread throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. Safeguarding the rights of this Indian nation – a nation larger than the Indian state – constituted an existential quandary for many early nationalists. The United Nations was a way out. If post-colonial freedom was cast as interdependence within a strong United Nations, and if the United Nations recognized the universality of racial equality, it would be possible to indirectly protect the rights of Indians everywhere. Freedom from imperialism was merely one step in the process of making India the moral lodestar of the international community.

The essay then moves forward to the early 1960s and explores how African decolonization altered this formula. Emerging from the milieu of the so-called Black Atlantic, African nationalists saw South Africa – and the United Nations – through a slightly different lens. Whereas Indian elites viewed the apartheid question as a means toward the larger end of norm creation at the United Nations, African leaders tended to see South Africa as a direct threat to their survival. Divided into dozens of microstates by decolonization, African nationalists were not only weaker than their Indian counterparts but also more attuned to the legacies of transatlantic slavery. Apartheid rejected the underlying logic of black nationhood and tapped into anxieties about Africa's place in the postcolonial world. For these second-wave nationalists, the United Nations was not so much an end in itself as a means toward the more specific objective of eliminating white rule in southern Africa. The organization was a tool to be exploited, owned and employed.

Comparing these two moments illuminates a trio of arguments. First, the Third World was a contested project that changed over time. Its champions in India and Africa imagined both colonialism and nationhood in alternative ways, and they often adhered to disparate objectives within the global arena. Second, apartheid softened the

3 For classic treatments of apartheid debate, see Janice Love, *The U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement* (New York: Praeger, 1985); Robert Massie, *Loosing the Bonds* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1997); Bernard Magubane, *The Ties That Bind* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987); William Minter, *King Solomon's Mines Revisited* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); George Shepherd, *Anti-Apartheid* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Les de Villiers, *In Sight of Surrender* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); as well as George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); idem, *Black Liberation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For more recent treatments, see Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2004); Donald Culverson, *Contesting Apartheid* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); and Eric Morgan, 'Into the Struggle: Confronting Apartheid in the United States and South Africa, 1964-1990', (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Colorado State University, 2009). Other relevant works that examines South Africa's place in the world include Lewis Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1995); Thomas Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Thomas Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); James Barber and John Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Calvin Holder, 'Racism towards Black African Diplomats during the Kennedy Administration', *Journal of Black Studies*, 14, 1 (1983); Ronald Walters, *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora* (Detroit, 1997).

edges of this project. It provided Indian and African nationalists with a common reference point that helped them work through their distinct visions of global order and political process. Third, the United Nations was central to the story of decolonization. Reducing Third World nationalism to Cold War neutrality misses the essence of post-colonial politics in Asia and Africa. In both the mid-1940s and early 1960s, the United Nations provided non-European diplomats with pathways to pursue their goals, and a way to envision the actual contours of the postimperial world. Without the organization, the Third World – as a project and as an idea – would have been a chimera.

Thinking the Third World

Jan Smuts was in the twilight of a distinguished career when he arrived in San Francisco for the United Nations Conference on International Organization in April 1945. He was six years into his second term as South Africa's Prime Minister, and he had played a role in most of the major events of his lifetime. Raised in the Cape Colony but educated at Cambridge, he had distinguished himself originally as a legal advisor to Cecil Rhodes, and then as a partisan of Paul Kruger's Afrikaner republic during the South African War (1899-1902). After negotiating an end to that conflict, Smuts had gone on to become one of the preeminent figures of both the South African Union and the British Commonwealth – pushing Whitehall to reconceptualize the Empire's historic relationship with its various settler colonies.

Most of the diplomats at the United Nations conference saw the seventy-five year old politician as an apostle of world government.⁴ By the end of European hostilities in May, Smuts had already penned and distributed a first draft of the U.N. Charter's preamble, and he was the only member of the meeting to have played a role at Versailles in 1919.⁵ His task at San Francisco reflected his stature: he presided for three months over the commission that gave form to the U.N. General Assembly. Broken into four committees, his group reviewed and revised the proposals of the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks meeting – where the basic structure of the post-war order had been outlined by the United States, Great Britain and Soviet Union – and negotiated the final framework, procedures and functions of the world's new parliament.

By late June, his group had wrapped up most of its work: it needed only to discuss the recommendations of its fourth and final committee. The subject was trusteeship, and while the great powers had provided extensive guidelines on other topics, no such provisions existed in this case, giving the committee – dominated by America's Harold Stassen – unusual leeway and autonomy. Speaking to the commission on June 20, Smuts seemed troubled by the resulting recommendations. Whereas the earlier mandate system, which he had helped design at Versailles, had applied only to 'ex-German and ex-Turkish colonies', the 'principle of trusteeship' now applied to 'all dependent peoples in all dependent territories.'⁶

4 For useful background and analysis, see Saul Dubow, 'Smuts, the United Nations and the Rhetoric of Race and Rights', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 1 (2008), 45-74; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*.

5 Smuts played a high profile but very minor role in conceptualizing the text. His name was attached to the final document to give it added legitimacy, but Archibald MacLeish and several U.S. officials – most importantly Virginia Gildersleeve – wrote the text. See Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 235-7; Christof Heyns, 'The Preamble of the United Nations Charter: The contribution of Jan Smuts', *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 7, 2 (1995); J. . . van Aggelen, 'The Preamble of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights', *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, 28, 2 (2003), 134.

6 *The United Nations Conference on International Organization: Selected Documents* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 678-680.

The aged South African outlined the committee's proposal in detail. Although not all of Europe's colonies would be placed within the trustee system, all U.N. members – if they expected to remain within the United Nations – would have to support the 'sacred trust of civilization,' binding them to: '(a) insure the economic and social advancement of the [colonized] peoples; (b) develop self-government in forms appropriate to the varying circumstances of each territory; and (c) further international peace and security.'⁷ Never before had colonial powers been asked to adhere to such an explicit set of principles – and never before had these principles been linked so clearly to membership in the world community. This arrangement, according to Smuts, had the potential to not only remake social conditions in the dependent world; it could subsume the entire imperial project within the United Nations.

The ensuing debate was orderly but it exposed fault lines within the commission. British and French delegates laid claim to the sacred trust concept immediately, and equated it to the civilizing impulse that had always animated European imperialism. Colonial people did not want independence, Britain's diplomat declared. They desired liberty, justice, free institutions and self-government – the cornerstones of liberal empire. Iraq's delegate moved in a different direction, lamenting that the proposal failed to safeguard the rights of subject peoples, but the Philippines' representative celebrated the document, announcing that it gave universal, fixed meaning to colonialism – a precedent in the twentieth century – and provided the dependent world with a lever to gain independence. Having designed the agreement, America's delegate spoke last, and tread carefully through this discursive morass. 'This document can open the door to millions of people; it can mark out a path,' Stassen told his colleagues. 'But only the helping hand of the ... more advanced and privileged nations can make it live.' Everyone, in other words, was partly right. It would be up to *future* U.N. members to determine the United Nations' precise relationship to freedom and paternalism.⁸

Smuts reluctantly passed the committee's proposal and returned home to South Africa, but his anxiety was not displaced. South Africa would not escape this discussion unscathed. One year later, during the U.N. General Assembly's inaugural meeting in London's Westminster Hall in June 1946, India's representative, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit – sister of soon-to-be Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru – declared that the United Nations' sacred trust necessitated intervention in South Africa's internal affairs. South Africa's policies toward indigenous Indians, she claimed, violated the U.N. Charter's commitment to human rights – enshrined in Smuts' own preamble – and made social advancement and self-government impossible in South Africa. It was incumbent upon the United Nations to condemn Pretoria's actions, encourage the government to undo its laws, and force the Union to accept a more appropriate mindset toward non-white people.

The subtext mattered as much as the timing. Just months earlier, Nehru had been released from jail and elected president of the Indian National Congress Party, and Indian nationalists were pushing vigorously for independence from the British Raj. At nearly the same moment, Smuts' government, roiling from a series of urban upheavals, had passed the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, which limited both the property and voting rights of Indians in South Africa. Unfolding

⁷ *Ibid.*, 647.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 678-702.

on opposite ends of the British imperial world – and advanced in the name of freedom and paternalism respectively – the two events exposed the ambiguities just beneath the 1945 trusteeship agreement. Pandit's move demanded a direct answer to a straightforward question: Would the United Nations protect the imperial status quo or promote a new type of world order?

India's nationalist leaders cared tremendously about the answer. On the eve of the 1945 San Francisco conference, Mohandas Gandhi had explained that India's 'nationalism spell[ed] internationalism', and claimed that his country – if granted true freedom – would overcome Europe's tendency to think in narrow terms of territory and self-interest. The 'problems of the modern world ... demand a world federation', he said, citing a 1942 Congress resolution on the topic. 'Such a federation would ensure the freedom of its constituent nations, the prevention of aggression and exploitation by one nation over another, the protection of national minorities, and the advancement of all backward areas and peoples, and the pooling of the world's resources for the common good of all.'⁹ Nehru put the issue more plainly in *Discovery of India*, his famous 1946 explanation of Indian nationalism: 'We shall have to put an end to the national state and devise a collectivism which neither degrades nor enslaves.'¹⁰ Because European nationalism – the engine of imperial conquest – had nearly destroyed the world between 1939 and 1945, the solution was 'a wider vision ... and international rather than national perspectives.'¹¹

The United Nations was the ballast of this vision. 'Sometimes we are told that ... true internationalism would triumph if we agreed to remain as junior partners in the British Empire or Commonwealth,' Nehru observed in 1946. Such claims, however, ignored 'that this particular type of so-called internationalism [was] only an extension of a narrow British nationalism.'¹² True freedom – and true internationalism – demanded an organization that treated its members equally. Scholars have mostly overlooked the United Nations' centrality here, but as K.M. Munshi – a prominent Indian diplomat and politician – made clear in a speech shortly after independence, the organization gave life to the larger Third World idea. Although the world would always be divided in some respects, the United Nations was 'a forum where words replace[d] weapons'. Unlike the interwar years, when the great powers abandoned the League of Nations, the international community now 'support[ed] the moral force of the UNO. This is where India comes in, as the protagonist of the power of moral force.' The country's unique history – embodied by its freedom struggle – gave India the power to 'mobilize the incalculable moral opinion ... and form the conventions of world self-rule.'¹³

This embrace of the United Nations flowed from the spatial dimensions of Indian nationalism. During the 'past one hundred years, four million Indians have been transplanted to various parts of the world under the aegis of the colonial governments concerned, and are now residing abroad in special communities, created at the request and for the benefit of those governments,' an Indian delegate explained to her U.N. colleagues in January 1947.¹⁴ Indian nationalists adopted an internationalist

9 AICC Resolution, 8 August 1942, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, accessed online: www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html.

10 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: Meridian Books, 1946), 543.

11 Quoted in Marika Sharwood, 'India at the Founding of the United Nations', *International Studies*, 33, 4 (1996), 413.

12 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 41-2.

13 K.M. Munshi, *Our Greatest Need and Other Address* (Bombay, 1958), 214-16.

14 Quoted in Manu Bhagavan, 'A New Hope: India, the United Nations, and the Making of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44, 2 (2010), 341-2.

outlook in other words, because they had always been part of a larger (albeit imperial) world system. If postcolonial nationhood grew from peoplehood, New Delhi had an obligation to look after the welfare of its diaspora.¹⁵ Nehru discussed the issue frequently in his private correspondence. Although the ‘rights of Nationals must necessarily differ from those of Non-nationals,’ he wrote in 1946, there could ‘be no discrimination i.e. Non-Nationals should be treated alike,’ especially ‘in countries which have so far belonged to the British Empire or Commonwealth Nations.’¹⁶ A strong United Nations would not only supplant Empire with a more equitable and responsive super-structure; it would give India’s leaders a lever to protect the minority rights of South Asians everywhere.

This mindset anchored India’s desire to put South Africa’s policies on the agenda of the first U.N. General Assembly meeting. India wanted, primarily, to slice through the ambiguity that lingered over the 1945 meeting in San Francisco, and connect the sacred trust idea to universal human rights. Pandit’s arguments were twofold. First, she placed South Africa’s 1946 legislation firmly within the context of imperial history. Indians had originally travelled to South Africa, she explained, under the conditions that they would gain citizenship rights after the completion of a term of indentured labour. This promise, Pandit said, had been codified in Cape Town in 1927, when South Africa’s government renounced discrimination against Indians who accepted ‘western standards of life.’ South Africa’s 1946 legislation violated this earlier agreement. Although Britain had not registered the 1927 agreement as a formal treaty at the League of Nations – Commonwealth dominions existed in a special category of international law by virtue of their shared loyalty to the King – it would be a mistake ‘to take a technical view.’ In spirit, the 1927 agreement was ‘an international document between two equal sovereign States,’ and it made South Africa accountable to the United Nations.¹⁷

Second, Pandit asked her colleagues to think more thoroughly about the relative weight of the various items within the U.N.’s Charter. In her mind, article 2(7) – which said that the United Nations would not interfere in the domestic affairs of member states – was less important than articles 10 and 14, which empowered the General Assembly to ‘recommend measures for the peaceful adjustment of any situation, regardless of origin, which it deems likely to impair the general welfare of friendly relations among nations, including situations resulting from a violation of ... the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.’ South Africa’s decision to discriminate against Indians constituted just such a situation. The country’s 1946 legislation violated article 1(3), which said that one of the U.N.’s purposes was to promote ‘respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race.’ It also challenged article 55, which framed the United Nations’ *raison d’être* as the promotion of ‘universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms.’¹⁸ Taken together, these dual provisions outweighed article 2(7), gave new meaning to the broader sacred trust principle, and mandated political action against South Africa.

15 For interesting primers, see Charles S. Maier, ‘Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,’ *American Historical Review*, 105, 3 (2000); Eric Weitz, ‘From Vienna to the Paris System,’ *American Historical Review*, 113, 5 (2008).

16 Quoted in Bhagavan, ‘A New Hope,’ 350.

17 Quoted in Lorna Lloyd, ‘A Most Auspicious Beginning: The 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa,’ *Review of International Studies*, 16, 2 (April 1990), 134.

18 For a copy of the United Nations Charter, see www.un.org/en/documents/charter. For discussion of Indian strategy, see Lloyd, ‘A Most Auspicious Beginning,’ 133-7.

Backed by Great Britain, Smuts wrapped South Africa's response in the logic of colonial paternalism. Human rights, he countered, included (1) the protection of life and sustenance, (2) freedom of conscience and speech, and (3) access to tribunals that administered justice. The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act prevented South Asians from owning land in South Africa's 'European' areas, but it did not violate the human rights of Indians. On the contrary, Smuts asserted, the Act recognized Indians as South African citizens for the first time by providing them with parliamentary representation in Natal. This representation existed in a separate sphere from the country's all-white parliament in Cape Town, but the U.N.'s sacred trust only promised to 'develop self-government in forms appropriate to the varying circumstances of each territory'. Racial separation, for Smuts, did not equate to inequality – it merely empowered Indians to enjoy their rights in their own cultural spaces.¹⁹

Initially, it appeared this argument would succeed, and prevent India from getting its complaint on the General Assembly agenda. However, support from French and Mexican diplomats – who developed a vaguely worded compromise resolution that received support from the United States – turned the debate in Pandit's favour in late November. When the discussion moved from the U.N.'s political committee to the actual General Assembly in December, she cast India's objectives in vivid terms. This important 'test case', she announced, demonstrated that the United Nations had heard the 'millions of voiceless people who, because of their creed or colour, have been relegated to positions of inferiority.' These individuals – spread throughout the colonial world – were 'looking to us for justice', having been 'moved to intense indignation at all forms of racial discrimination which stands focused on the problem of South Africa.'²⁰ India's actions, in other words, were purposefully symbolic – designed to influence the moral agenda of the newly formed United Nations.

Smuts last-ditch effort to have the entire issue moved to the International Court of Justice was defeated in early December, and the French-Mexican resolution won a bare two-thirds majority (32 to 15 with 7 abstentions) on December 10 – ensuring its passage at the General Assembly. '[H]appy, excited, a little proud', Pandit claimed an 'Asian victory', and sent a celebratory telegram back to New Delhi.²¹ Standing before the Constituent Assembly a few days later – knee deep in the process of writing India's postcolonial constitution – Nehru explained the nature of this victory: 'The only possible real objective that we, common with other nations, can have is the objective of co-operating in building up some kind of world structure, call it "One World", call it what you like.' Although the organization was 'feeble yet' with 'many defects', India had begun the process of creating a truly equal 'world structure'.²²

Rethinking the Third World

1960 marked the 'Year of Africa', and the sudden proliferation of nation-states through the Black Atlantic changed the tone of the apartheid conversation. In a subtle swipe at India's approach toward South Africa, one U.N. delegate claimed that year that the 'policy of racial discrimination and segregation [was] much more than the denial of

19 Lloyd, 'A Most Auspicious Beginning', 136-8.

20 General Assembly Official Records, 50th Plenary, 1016-9.

21 Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *Scope of Happiness* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), 210-11.

22 Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume II, 22 January 1947, available at: <http://164.100.47.132/Issnew/constituent/vol2p3.pdf>.

human rights. ... It [was] the prelude to the most hateful kind of war: a war between races.²³ For African leaders, apartheid was an affront to the very notion of liberation; it challenged directly the presupposition that native Africans could belong to the international community without European tutelage. Not all African leaders adhered to the same brand of nationalism in these years – indeed sharp disagreements emerged almost immediately over the plan to create a single African state, and governments clustered into rival blocs during the Congo crisis in 1960 – but most black elites framed Africa’s political relevance in similar terms, and embraced a common coda to explain the continent’s role in the world.

The nature of this coda was on display at the United Nations in 1960. In a prominent speech to the General Assembly in September, Kwame Nkrumah – introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois as ‘the undisputed voice of Africa’ – reiterated India’s claim that ‘the United Nations [was] the only organization that [held] out any hope for the future of mankind.’ However, his arguments were more confrontational than the rhetoric of India’s leaders. While ‘the flowing tide of African nationalism’ had the potential to ‘sweep away’ everything in its path, new African nations wanted only one thing – the elimination of white racism from their continent. This imperative took precedence over other political issues. Referring specifically to South Africa, the Ghanaian leader argued, ‘The interest of humanity compels every nation to take steps against such inhuman policy and barbarity and to act in concert to eliminate it from the world.’²⁴ The recent events at the South African township of Sharpeville – where police had killed sixty-nine protesters during a peaceful, nationalist-led protest event – were tragic, but they provided evidence that the ‘wall of intense hate’ that protected South Africa was beginning to crumble. Apartheid, the epitome of white colonial racism, was now untenable.

This fight against racism oriented African politics, and shaped how African diplomats viewed the United Nations. The organization was a tool to end white rule in Africa. While Indian nationalists saw the United Nations as the embodiment of a postimperial ‘One World’ – one that could be influenced by Indian notions of morality and interdependence – their African counterparts approached the organization as a political instrument to be employed to combat this specific political issue. The differences here were subtle, but they stemmed from tensions over the meaning of and relationship between nationhood and statehood. For Indian nationalists, the United Nations was an invaluable superstructure that safeguarded the rights of Indian people outside the authority of the Indian state.²⁵ In contrast, African intellectuals emerged from a milieu that imagined nationhood in terms of racial solidarity and continental unity – and treated the state as the panacea of underdevelopment and military weakness. Africa’s postcolonial leaders, educated mostly in American and European cities during the interwar years, were acutely aware of their continent’s beleaguered place in the British imperial world. For many, the future belonged to strong and unified states and federations – United States and the Soviet Union, for instance – that controlled large territories, abundant resources, and diverse populations. Apartheid loomed large not only because of the killings at Sharpeville, but also because it rested upon a vision of paternalism that rejected such ambitions as beyond the capabilities of African people.

23 Excerpts of the Statements in the U.N. Resolution on South Africa, 1 April 1960, *New York Times*, 4.

24 Osagyefo at the United Nations, 23 September, 1960; full text available at www.nkrumah.net, accessed on 12 January 2006.

25 Itty Abraham, ‘Bandung and State Formation in Post-colonial Asia’, in See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore, 2008), 48-67.

The underlying differences between Indian and African nationalists came into focus slowly during the early 1960s. As the number of African nation-states swelled from nine to twenty-two, African diplomats set themselves first to passing General Assembly resolution 1514(XV), entitled the Declaration of Independence to Colonial Peoples and Territories. The document – which received support from India and other Asian nations – asserted both that European paternalism was an impediment to social, cultural and economic development, and that friendly relations between nations could flow only from universal equality and self-determination. Such pronouncements encoded a conceptual map of global affairs that linked human rights to racial equality directly and equated freedom with territorial autonomy.²⁶ The distinctions were important, for as Alex Quaison-Sackey, Ghana's top diplomat, explained, '[W]hat prompted the Declaration of 1960 was the so-called "Sharpeville incident"'.²⁷ South Africa's system of apartheid – associated widely with racial paternalism and segregation – represented the conceptual antithesis of African freedom. And so long as Europeans ruled in Pretoria, Africa's freedom would be incomplete.

Simultaneously, African diplomats broke precedent at the United Nations and began work to pass sanctions against South Africa. India's U.N. delegation balked immediately. On the one hand, Indian leaders had genuine reservations about the tactical wisdom of such ambitions. According to New Delhi, it was better to pass widely supported moderate resolutions than a divisive, partially supported punitive measure. 'We do not want any resolution in this Assembly this time to receive even a single vote less than last year,' India's U.N. Ambassador explained at the General Assembly.²⁸ At the same time, however, Indian leaders expressed deeper reservations about the tone and implications of African nationalism. Sanctions were 'not child's play', India's representative said during the political committee debate, and the United Nations should not be tempted by 'remedies which do not lie entirely within the four corners of the Charter'. Referring to the specific declarations of the African resolution, he went on, '[W]e feel we would not be right in our relations with other countries to say that they must break off diplomatic relations, that they must close their ports, that they must enact legislation, that they must boycott South African goods, that they must refuse landing facilities and so on.'²⁹ In 1961, the majority of nations from Latin America and Asia agreed, throwing the General Assembly's support behind India's comparatively weak resolution, which called vaguely on states to 'consider taking such separate and collective action' that would 'bring about the abandonment of [apartheid] policies'.³⁰

The setback did not halt the African group's political advance. In March 1961, African diplomats set preconditions on South Africa's membership in the British Commonwealth. According to Ghana, Nigeria and Tanganyika, the Commonwealth could only be 'effective' if the 'racial policies of the member-governments [were] consistent with the multiracial character' of the organization.³¹ Pretoria's subsequent withdrawal marked the first time a nation was forcibly removed from an international institution in the post-war era – but it would not be the last. At the annual confer-

26 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV), Declaration of Independence to Colonial Peoples and Territories, December 1960, United Nations Document Center (UNDC), text available at www.un.org/en/documents/index.shtml.

27 Alex Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 140.

28 Statement in the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly, 4 April 1961, BTS 14/11, volume 5, ASAMFA.

29 Ibid.

30 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1663 (XVI), The Question of Race Conflict resulting from the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Union of South Africa, UNDC, text available at www.un.org/en/documents/index.shtml.

31 Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 226.

ence of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 1961, African diplomats again used their numbers to pass a resolution that declared apartheid ‘incompatible’ with the organization’s founding documents and called upon the Republic to leave the organization immediately.³² Later that month, when South Africa’s Foreign Minister gave a speech at the General Assembly that outlined the importance of article 2(7) – reiterating themes that had animated South African addresses since 1946 – the representative from Liberia motioned to delete his comments from the U.N. records. The unprecedented gesture sent shockwaves through the Assembly, and while the motion was not accepted because of the precedent it would set, the African delegates nonetheless gained enough political support to censure formally South Africa’s comments by a vote of 67 to 1 with 20 abstentions.³³ In explaining the move to the General Assembly in October, the Nigerian delegate commented,

I want to warn South Africa once more. We have managed to get it out of the Commonwealth. If South Africa persists in this behaviour we may have to get it outside this world. ... We are opposed to everything that the present South African Government stands for.³⁴

Such actions put the rest of the nonaligned world in a difficult position. While apartheid provided Third World diplomats with a rhetorical foil at the international level, many states outside Africa rejected the assertion that South African racism mattered more than consensus at the United Nations. For India, the organization complemented state power by expanding a global rights regime that protected national diasporic communities. Divided by decolonization into dozens of microstates, African nationalists took a different approach, treating the United Nations as a mechanism for action against apartheid. Working from a position of acute economic and military weakness, African leaders embraced the anti-apartheid fight to demonize white supremacy and, in the process, gain power by universalizing their own understandings of race, development and territoriality. By using their numbers to determine literally ‘correct’ opinions at the General Assembly, African diplomats were laying claim to the terms of legitimacy in the nation-state system. ‘Our power comes from history,’ Nkrumah explained in late 1960. And history had coalesced, in his mind, behind the African nationalist vision of the postimperial world.³⁵ By the end of 1962, as it grew increasingly obvious that Africans would not back down from the apartheid fight, nations outside Africa confronted a difficult choice – they could either turn actively against the group’s efforts, thereby eroding the basis of the larger intellectual and political project known as the Third World, or recalibrate their stance toward South African issues.

This impasse resolved itself at the General Assembly in 1962. In November, African diplomats resubmitted their controversial resolution on apartheid. ‘If you find it impossible to go with us, I beg you, in the name of humanity, not to vote against this draft resolution,’ Nigeria’s representative said during the Political Com-

32 ILO and Secretary-General, 25 July 1961, series 286, box 2, file 4, United Nations Record Office (UNRO); similar actions were taken at the Economic Commission for Africa, the World Health Organization, and the conference on International Trade and Tourism in 1962 and 1963.

33 *Yearbook of the United Nations* (New York, 1961), 108–115.

34 Mr. Wachuku (Nigeria), 10 October 1961, 16th session, 1031st meeting, BTS 14/11, volume 8, ASAMFA.

35 Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom*, 231.

mittee debate on November 7.³⁶ The Ugandan diplomat followed suit, explaining, 'We, the people of Africa ... are not going to rest until our people in that country are set free.' He continued, 'The Government of South Africa is engaged actively in torturing – that is the word – the majority of its citizens. If there is one spot on this globe which is pregnant with the dynamic [of] an international time bomb, it is surely the Republic of South Africa.'³⁷ Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala and Great Britain all attempted to remove controversial aspects of the African resolution, but support from India pushed it through the Special Political Committees in its entirety. Resolution 1761 (XVII) passed ultimately by a vote of 67 to 16 with 23 abstentions. The result was a formal U.N. declaration that apartheid 'seriously endanger[ed] international peace and security', and an official call for member-states to break their economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties with the Republic, and to create a permanent U.N. oversight committee to monitor events in South Africa.³⁸

Conclusion

Scholars often discuss the anti-apartheid struggle in terms of justice and oppression –for good reason. However, these two moments, unfolding in the immediate wake of Indian and African independence, reveal much about the Third World. The concept was neither self-evident nor uncontested. Although Indian and African nationalists shared the common experience of European rule, they held disparate views about peoplehood and international order. For its part, New Delhi sought first and foremost to bolster the power of the United Nations and bend U.N. norms away from notions of colonial paternalism. Africans diplomats, in contradistinction, placed the specific task of ending apartheid ahead of India's consensus-building efforts, and advanced a gamut of novel arguments at (and about) the General Assembly.

These differences led to tensions – and they highlight some of the deeper contradictions of the Third World project. Postcolonial nationalism was always a richer discourse than Cold War neutrality. It rested upon a vision of world order that embraced the promise and potential of the United Nations. Indians and African nationalists emerged from alternative milieus and they viewed the United Nations differently. However, they shared a common enemy in South Africa. Apartheid, as such, helped give form to the Third World project. It not only paved over the subtle differences that separated colonialism's many opponents; it provided diplomats and intellectuals with a lodestar – a sense of directionality – on the international stage.

³⁶ United Nations Debate, 7 November 1962, BTS 14/11, volume 7, ASAMFA.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Yearbook of the United Nations* (New York, 1962), 93-99.