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Race and International Politics

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INTRODUCTION

In any attempt to understand the role of race in international politics it is important to remember that the problems of identification are great because there is no pure racial type and most so-called races are hybrids; also race and colour are often seen as inter-changeable terms in daily life and common language, and an additional complication is that advocates of race or colour as a criterion for differentiating between peoples reinforce their arguments by scientific and theological elements. In spite of the cogent case presented in the Unesco Statements on Race that gene make-up accounts for differences in physiognomy rather than achievement potential and intelligence,¹ genes have been given scientific significance by those who argue for racial discrimination. An added dimension is the implicit or explicit adherence to a kind of Social Darwinism in which the white peoples have been seen as the fittest human beings who are here to rule or lead the non-white in his own interest. And, particularly in Southern Africa, a 'magical' or divine rationalization of race prejudice and differential rights based on race or colour has been a powerful force for many decades.

Thus, whilst one cannot talk of 'biological race' or 'scientific race' in Southern Africa, the really important fact is the commanding pre-

sence of what might be called 'psychosocial race'. More than 'biological race', 'scientific race' and 'divine race' it is the 'psychosocial race' which is critical in understanding values, behaviour and policies. The former three kinds of 'races' are at best to be properly seen as nothing more than rationalizations of the latter, the 'psychosocial race'.

Briefly, international politics may be regarded as an arena of human activity involving a complex of relationships in which the actors are different states, international agencies such as the United Nations, and movements, whether inter-state, intra-continental or inter-continental, of ideas and actions. Thus when one talks of the impact of race on international politics one has to bear in mind that it involves a kaleidoscope of the whole history of race relations, of international politics, of nationalism and the search for and movement towards independence by the so-called Third World. This, of course, makes an enormous field and this article restricts itself to a study of certain authentic voices from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the United States to illustrate the impact of race on international politics.

Mazrui, a very creative and often controversial African thinker from Kenya, has suggested that race has historically intruded into Western scholarship. He has argued that a whole series of important Western philosophers, economists,

writers, sociologists and social anthropologists have engaged in looking at the wider world outside Europe in perspectives which are anything but flattering.²

EUROPEAN EXPANSION

For our purposes the contemporary scenario in which race has become so critical a factor finds its antecedents in Western scholarship and is taken up and brought further into focus by the fragments of Europe which left Europe from the fifteenth century onwards and settled in various parts of the world. These fragments, over time, put down roots in different parts of the world and by and large took over local control from indigenous populations and engaged in a series of exercises and rationalizations which we call the 'Colonial Experience'. In this expansion and consolidation of the European fragment, a superior technology merged with whiteness and a potent chemistry was effected whose consequences are still in evidence around the globe.

The European migration was a signal event in world history. Pannikar, a noted Indian diplomat and historian, has commented on its significance for Asia:

The period of maritime authority over Asia, beginning with Vasco da Gama's arrival and ending with the departure of the Western fleets from their bases on the Asian continent, covers an epoch of the highest significance to human development. The changes it directly brought about and the forces it generated in the countries of Asia in contact with Europe for a period of 450 years, and subjected to Western domination for over a century, have effected a transformation which touches practically every aspect of life in these countries . . . The period of European control over the states of Asia is a dividing line in history, for both by resistance and by adaptation they have had to call forth new vitality and consciously adapt themselves to new ideas by which alone they were able gradually to recover their independence and strength.³

The conjoining of whiteness with superior technology was one of the critical visible aspects of this worldwide phenomenon. And its implication for future race relations was not lost sight of by some observers. Gardiner, a noted Afri-

can scholar and international civil servant, put forward the African perspective:

Even while Europe's pre-eminence lasted it was far from monolithic. The clash of the separate nationalisms was seen most clearly in what has been described as 'the scramble for Africa'. But one feature applied to all of Europe. The expansionist and colonizing powers were white men ruling a world of coloured men. The coloured peoples soon began to notice that the thrustful foreigner who dominated the evolution of the world with his superior fire-power and his superior organization was always a white-skinned European. Once articulated, this realization was to affect profoundly the development of international relations in the twentieth century.⁴

The perception that European expansion was not just a geographical enlargement nor simply a technological superiority of one people over another nor merely an interpenetration of ideas and behaviour patterns but was uniquely a *racial expansion* and as such resisted in anti-colonialism is echoed by Edmundson, a noted West Indian political scientist:

It is race which has become the common denominator in the diverse forms of the mid-twentieth century anti-colonial struggle. It was race, under the banner of 'Social Darwinism', which furnished a powerful common foundation for the thrust of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century imperialism. If there were cases where colonial expansion was not initially motivated by racism and colonialism in practice was not intended to exhibit racism, the fact remains, in Nehru's words, that 'the idea of a master race is inherent in imperialism'. Lord Rosebery would have applauded this statement. 'What is Empire', he asked, 'but the predominance of race?'⁵

This European expansion was to sow the seeds for our current world-wide preoccupation with race. It led Du Bois to prophesy that the central problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the colour line, meaning that racial conflict was to be one of the characteristic features of our time. The movement of the fragments of Europe out of Europe in search of profit, adventure, heroism and glory, and of

civilizing the rest of mankind led to a two-fold process of discovery. On the one hand Europe 'discovered' other regions of the world and also discovered itself. Mazrui argues that if social purpose is used as a criterion there were three kinds of exploration of the wider world:

There was the *evangelical exploration*, pursued by either secular or religious missionaries, and inspired by such goals as the spread of civilisation, the suppression of the slave trade, or the propagation of the new creed. Then there was *scientific exploration*, often sponsored by learned societies and inspired by the scientific ideal of pushing the curtain of darkness further and further back. And, thirdly, there was *exploitative exploration*, undertaken for reasons of commerce, of exploring new markets or possible new sources of raw materials.⁶

On the other hand, the indigenous peoples, mainly as a result of contact with European exploration, began to discover a new identity of their own. Particularly for Africa, Mazrui argues, the interaction between the early European explorers and Africa not only led to a new sense of an African identity in that Africa began to engage in a process of self-discovery but also put Europe within the map of Africa and led Europe to rediscover itself in the language of its own explorers.

But of course the sense of self-discovery and re-discovery was not confined to Europe or Africa. The European expansion also fed the fires of a new consciousness on a global scale and brought forth a new kind of unity among mankind in general. Indeed a new world was in the making. Senghor, the poet-President of Senegal, speaks of a new relationship which develops out of this thrust of European expansionism and the subsequent non-European need to reassert itself in relation to the former:

But it exported not only merchants and soldiers; with professors, physicians, engineers, administrators and missionaries, it also exported ideas and techniques. It not only destroyed, it built; it not only killed, it cured and educated; it gave birth to a new world, an entire world of our brothers, men of other races and continents.⁷

Thus European expansion brought forth not only disunity and destruction but also unity

and construction. A new world was indeed in the making particularly for those persons in Afro-Asia, an immense part of the playground of the European fragment, who went overseas and acquired a new measure of their countries' histories and a new dimension of their own personal identities. In America, Britain and France they mixed with colleagues from other subjugated areas of the world and imbibed, generated and fertilized a new language of defiance which was to be used later to roll back the curtain of domination blanketing their lands:

African nationalists first subscribed to liberal values of individualism and free speech as they carried on the struggle against colonialism. Socialistic values of development and centralism then became goals of many African governments after independence. Liberalism, coupled with some Leninist language served the cause of Africa's political emancipation. Socialism as an internal structure is now being made to serve the cause of Africa's economic liberation.⁸

A new interconnection grew up between the language of Europe and the mind and heart of Afro-Asia. The resultant chemistry was to be used by Afro-Asia in its rise to self assertion. Europe's language was to be thrust back at its own heart! European expansion was to be met head-on by Afro-Asian patriots some of whom were paradoxically to be nurtured in the heartland of Europe. In the very act of nurturing lay the seeds for conflict. The umbilical cord was to be later cut precisely because the consequence lay in the original seed. And the basic European contradiction between its language and its practice was laid bare by these patriots. Abraham, the well-known Ghanaian philosopher, has commented:

The end of the second world war is a convenient dating point for the political future of Africa. One must admit without reservation that the Africans who came to Europe and America for their education turned up a number of African patriots. Africans who had been in Europe had already pointed out the discrepancy between declarations concerning liberty and democracy on the one hand and on the other the realities of Colonialism.⁹

SELF-DISCOVERY

Nationalism, anti-colonialism and the search for independence, especially in the Afro-Asian states, may thus be seen as the developing race assertiveness on the part of subject races of the world and a direct challenge to the dominant race, which in contemporary times has been the white race. Another way of substantiating this statement is to take a look at and understand the personal experiences of some Afro-Asian leaders. The yearning for self-respect, the search for dignity and the bubbling forth of a reactive race-consciousness is illustrated by these personal experiences which were to shape the destiny not only of subject races and states but were also to transform the nature of international politics.

Nkrumah left the Gold Coast in 1935 to study in America under trying economic circumstances. Later, from 1945 to 1947, in London, the halfway house to Ghanaian independence, he came into contact with, and deliberated and planned policy with, a variety of West Indian, Black American and African leaders and movements. In London he became the organizer of the Sixth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945 which marked the shift from Black Nationalism to African Nationalism. And what was the meaning of his multifaceted experiences? Ultimately it lay in his successful struggle for Ghanaian independence.

Nkrumah was not unaware of racism when he went to America. He had travelled widely and in Philadelphia he had conducted a survey of a few hundred Black American families. But the critical experience undergone by Nkrumah, which really starts him on his journey to self-realisation, is related thus:

I well remember my first experience with active racialism below the Mason Dixon line. I was travelling by bus on one of my lecture tours from Philadelphia to Washington and the bus stopped en route at Baltimore for the passengers to refresh themselves. I was parched from thirst and I entered the refreshment room at the terminal and asked the white American waiter if I could have a drink of water. He frowned and looked down his nose at me as if I was something unclean. 'The place for you, my man, is the spittoon outside,' he de-

clared as he dismissed me from his sight. I was so shocked that I could not move. I just stood and stared at him for I could not bring myself to believe that anyone could refuse a man a drink of water because his skin happened to be of a different colour. I had already experienced racial segregation in the buses and in the restaurants and other public places, but this seemed to be stretching it rather far.¹⁰

In this understatement of a burning, emotion a whole world had changed for Nkrumah. Earlier he had had first-hand experience of racial discrimination but it is this crude denial of water, the essential element for keeping life together, which starts Nkrumah on his long journey to self-realization and explodes in 1957 in the Ghanaian independence celebrations.

At the other end of the globe, in Africa, Gandhi experienced a similar heart-rending experience which set the stage for the immense drama of Indian independence. Born in Western India Gandhi came from local ruling stock. His father, uncle and grandfather had been prime ministers of a princely state in India. His thought was much influenced by the Gita, Bible, Ruskin, Thoreau, Tolstoy and the English suffragette movement. Having trained in England as a lawyer he arrived in South Africa in 1893 and was to permanently leave for India in 1914. But in this African interlude of Gandhi's life world history was being prepared for a cataclysmic change; a style of politics and a way of life which, nurtured and tested in the African soil, would shatter the British Empire in years to come! And what was the experience which was to have such a profound impact on world events? Gandhi relates his critical point when a man becomes aware of his own deficiency in the wider world and tries to recreate the world in a new framework:

I recall particularly one experience that changed the course of my life. That experience fell to my lot seven days after I arrived in South Africa . . . On the train I had a first-class ticket, but not a bed ticket. At Maritzburg, where the beddings were issued, the guard came and turned me out and asked me to go to the van compartment. I would not go, and the train steamed away, leaving me

in the shivering cold. Now the creative experience comes there. I was afraid for my very life. I entered the dark waiting room. There was a white man in the room. I was afraid of him. What is my duty? I asked myself. Should I go back to India, or should I go forward, with God as my helper, and face whatever was in store for me? I decided to stay and suffer. My active non-violence began from that date.¹¹

The train from Durban to Pretoria was to be transformed into a journey to Indian independence. Racism had reared its ugly head but for Gandhi it paradoxically brought him nearer to God and the fact of Indian subjugation. The next day Gandhi was physically assaulted during a stage-coach journey between Charlestown and Standerton. But this was only to be the second incident, in a long series of personal hardships and trials which led to the perfection of Satyagraha.

For Nkrumah it was a restaurant and the denial of elemental water; for Gandhi it was a train journey and the denial of his seat in a compartment — elementary necessities whose denial perhaps inexorably led to the transformation of international politics. How strange and unimaginable that water and a train seat, when intertwined with the race factor, could produce such immense changes in the map of the world. It was as if the British Empire had begun to totter in a restaurant in America and on a train seat in South Africa!

A similar experience, this time one which was rooted in the situation in India itself, was undergone by Nehru, a high-caste Brahmin educated in England and surrounded by luxuries, who need not have given up all his possessions for the personal deprivations which he underwent on the road to self-realization. On a night-train to Delhi Nehru began to understand, perhaps for the first time, the full significance of the British Empire and its disastrous meaning for India:

Towards the end of that year (1919) I travelled from Amritsar to Delhi by the night train. The compartment I entered was almost full, and all the berths, except one upper one, were occupied by sleeping passengers. I took the vacant upper berth. In the morning I discovered that all my fellow-passengers were military officers. They conversed with

each other in loud voices which I could not help overhearing. One of them was holding forth in an aggressive and triumphant tone and soon I discovered that he was Dyer, the hero of Jallianwala Bagh, and he was describing his Amritsar experience. He pointed out how he had the whole town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained. He was evidently coming back from Lahore after giving his evidence before the Hunter Committee of Inquiry. I was greatly shocked to hear his conversation and to observe his callous manner. He descended at Delhi station in pyjamas with bright pink stripes and a dressing gown.¹²

The striped pyjamas, the dressing gown and the bravado displayed by Dyer merely became the inadequate camouflage which hid the impact of Jallianwala Bagh. The massacre became a painful living fact not only for Nehru but for all Indian nationalists. Another nail in the coffin of Empire was laid in Amritsar! A kind of race arrogance was to result in a reactive race-consciousness.

Historically, black consciousness was fed by persons, ideas and movements in a triangular relationship involving America-Caribbean, Britain and Africa. This Pan-African movement later became dominated by African patriots who took the lead in advancing a new African consciousness as a necessary pre-condition to African independence.¹³ But in the America of the early 1950s an event took place which was to shatter the continuing myth of racial equality, enshrined in the Emancipation Proclamation. Many a 'hot summer' followed and a new vibrant 'civil rights' movement was set in motion. Martin Luther King described the seminal event which took place in 1955:

On December 1, 1955, an attractive Negro seamstress, Mrs. Rosa Parks, boarded the Cleveland Avenue Bus in downtown Montgomery. She was returning home after her regular day's work in the Montgomery Fair — a leading department store. Tired from long hours on her feet, Mrs. Parks sat down in the first seat behind the section reserved for whites. Not long after she took her seat, the bus operator ordered her, along with

three other Negro passengers, to move back in order to accommodate boarding white passengers. By this time every seat in the bus was taken. This meant that if Mrs. Parks followed the driver's command she would have to stand while a white male passenger, who had just boarded the bus, would sit. The other Negro passengers immediately complied with the driver's request. Mrs. Parks quietly refused. The result was her arrest.¹⁴

This historical event, understated in the narrative, started a year-long bus boycott in Montgomery and propelled Martin Luther King into the leadership of the civil rights movement in America.

North of the Zambezi River, the 'battle-line' between black and white nationalisms in Africa, stands President Kaunda of Zambia. Kaunda was born in 1924 in Lubwa in the then Northern Rhodesia. His father was a missionary from the Livingstonia Mission of Nyasaland who had died when Kaunda was eight years old. As a youth Kaunda was often ill with sores and malaria and the family finances being meagre he had to work in his holidays to pay for his schooling. Educated at Munalili, teacher at Lubwa, worker-member of the Chinsali African Welfare Association, Kaunda was to become an important organiser-leader of the Nationalist movement in Northern Rhodesia.

No doubt he was aware of colour discrimination in Northern Rhodesia but, it was in Mufulira that he came face to face with the indignities of the colour bar and conducted a personal 'civil-rights' challenge to a system which denied dignity to his race and his people; a challenge, which set the stage for the eventual success of African Nationalism in Northern Rhodesia:

In Mufulira, for the first time, I found myself suffering the indignities of the colour bar. Africans were not permitted to enter the European shops by the front door. If they wanted anything, they had to go to a hole in the wall at the side of the shop to ask for it. I determined to expose this system for what it was, an insult to my race and my people . . . I intended to challenge the colour bar and I chose a certain chemist's shop in town which was notorious for its

treatment of Africans. As well as medicines, this shop sold toys and books. While my boys waited outside on the pavement, I went inside and asked politely for a book . . . the girl behind the counter . . . motioned me over to the chemist . . . Pointing to the door, he said viciously, 'Get out of here . . . You can stand there till Christmas and you'll never get a book from me' . . . two white miners in their overalls walked into the shop. Hearing the proprietor say again, 'Get out', they took me by the arms and frogmarched me to the door. They were met by seventeen angry schoolboys who objected strongly to their schoolmaster being treated in this manner and they said so in no uncertain terms. A vigorous slanging match followed . . .¹⁵

This was in the late 1940s. It was not until 1957 that Kaunda challenged the issue again. This time it was an incident in Kitwe and the challengers were Kaunda and Harry Nkumbula and whereas before the issue was joined in a chemist's shop in search of a book to read this time the place was a café and the search was for some sandwiches to eat. As before, the incident ended in a physical fight. Later in the Charge Office Nkumbula was to be given a beating by a police officer!

All the above experiences have a common denominator. They are starting points, catalytic moments, of confrontation. Elemental and brutal situations, from the bus ride to the massacre, they explode into conflict between white and non-white and eventually transform domestic and international politics. The world would never be the same again — names of places and countries and the colouring of areas of the global map would, in time, change completely. And new loci of power would arise in former subject territories.

At the Northern Gate of Africa stood Egypt, a pawn in the rivalries and ambitions of Europe. Control of Egypt and thus the Suez Canal was critical in the search for the safety of the Imperial connection between Britain and India. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 had begun to add new tensions in the Middle East—tensions which were to explode in the Partition of Palestine. For a relatively unknown soldier it was the Palestine Campaign of 1948 which added urgency to the desire for the self-determination

of Egypt. Nasser, who was later to be part of the 'Non-Aligned Trinity' (of Nehru, Nasser and Tito), probably faced his moment of truth in the siege of Falluja. The bitter defeat in the desert sands of the Middle East spurred the formation of the Free Officers Movement which toppled Farouk in a relatively bloodless coup in July 1952.

Nasser, the Hero of Falluja and the first indigenous ruler of Egypt for over two thousand years, was deeply concerned with Egypt's self-determination and clearly understood that his dream could not be realised without a proper understanding of Egyptian history. He states:

Fate has decreed that we stand at the world's cross-roads. We have often been the invaders' passage-way and the adventurer's target . . . How similar our nation today to a caravan which should have taken a certain route! The route was long, thieves and highwaymen attacked the caravan; it was led astray by a mirage; and finally dispersed, each group wandering off to a different place and every individual taking a different direction.¹⁶

At the Southern Gate of Africa stands South Africa. Southern Africa is often seen by its critics, particularly in the Afro-Asian world, as the archetypal example of surviving race supremacy, a white fortress in a sea of seething black discontent. In theory the Portuguese could at least claim a policy of assimilation and relatively free racial mixing; the Rhodesians could at least in theory claim a policy of advancement on merit within the context of 'one nation, one economy and one people'. And yet in practice life for the non-white has not been idyllic. But what distinguishes South Africa is both its theory and its practice. South Africa stands alone in the world state system in having elevated racism to the plane of a high moral principle guiding all policy. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that in South Africa the full weight of State power aids and abets racism — this in an age when the 'rights of man', the 'right to self-determination of colonial peoples' and the 'elimination of racial discrimination' have become generally accepted as international norms!

In 1960 Chief Luthuli went to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech Luthuli laid bare the full

meaning of South Africa:

a country where the brotherhood of man is an illegal doctrine, outlawed, banned, censured, proscribed and prohibited; where to walk, talk or campaign for the realization in fact and deed of the brotherhood of man is hazardous, punished with banishment, or confinement without trial, or imprisonment; where effective democratic channels to peaceful settlement of the race problem have never existed these 300 years; and where white minority power rests on the most heavily armed and equipped military machine in Africa . . . It is a museum piece in our time, a hangover from the dark past of mankind, a relic of an age which everywhere else is dead or dying. Here the cult of race superiority and of white supremacy is worshipped like a god.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The South Africa of Sharpeville and the India of Jallianwala Bagh, however else one may see them, have one thing in common. At one level of perception and analysis both events represent the dominance of white over non-white. And Sharpeville has evoked nationalist feelings among Africans not entirely different from the feelings generated in Indians by Jallianwala Bagh. In contemporary times India led the fight for independence from the British Empire and set in train a new sense of self-confidence among non-white races. The Afro-Asian challenge to South Africa may well be the final stages in the fulfilment of this self-confidence.

Racism is not a monopoly of white peoples. Nonetheless the contemporary preoccupation with the relevance of race as a factor in international politics may be seen as the consequences arising from the expansion and global transplantation of European fragments during the last few centuries. As such the contemporary relevance of race is essentially in terms of relations between Whites and Non-Whites.

Seen in this light white Southern Africa, and South Africa in particular, has become the cockpit of racial tensions which have drastically affected domestic and international politics. The degree to which racism, seen in terms of white/non-white relations, survives and continues to infect Southern African, Pan-African,

Afro-Asian, and international politics will be determined by the extent to which the necessary and inevitable transfer of power from White to Black is effected peacefully or violently.

An important possibility for peaceful change in Southern Africa lies in the sentiments expressed in the Lusaka Manifesto of 1969. The Manifesto is a critically important document in the history of contemporary decolonization and especially in the history of African Nationalism because among other things:

- i. it preferred the road of peace rather than war,
- ii. it accepted the need of transitional arrangements on the march toward equality,
- iii. it stated that there was no hostility to white people who were to be regarded as another 'African tribe',
- iv. it rejected a reverse racialism and an African Imperialism,

v. it admitted that there were deficiencies in independent African states.¹⁸

These offers and statements were on condition that governments in white Southern Africa were genuinely interested in peaceful change, the eradication of apartheid and the elimination of minority power monopoly. If not then the alternative was to continue and intensify violent change.

Prime Minister John Vorster of South Africa and Prime Minister Ian Smith of Rhodesia seemed to have thrown away the opportunity presented by the Lusaka Manifesto. However, sooner or later, both leaders will have to confront, comprehend and utilize the Lusaka Manifesto because therein lies a unique mood for peaceful change in Southern Africa. If the Manifesto is grasped then the often-predicted fullscale race war, detonated in Southern Africa, may yet be avoided for the benefit of all the people in Southern Africa and beyond.

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