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# Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust in partnership with Wits University Press and Book Lounge

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Topic:

**SOUTH AFRICA AND INDIA: IMPERIALISM AND /  
OR CO- OPERATION IN THE INDIA OCEAN ARENA?**

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The aim of these dialogues is to create a space for open and informed dialogue and debate around key local and global political, social and economic issues facing South Africa.

Who would have believed it? Leon Schuster's recent films *Mr Bones I* and *Mr Bones II* have proved runaway successes in India. Translated into a range of Indian languages, the films were enthusiastically received on cinemas and TV.

What is going on between South Africa and India? We thought it was all Gandhi, Mandela and cricket? Leon Schuster? Surely not?

A recently published book *South Africa and India: Shaping the Global South* explores the extraordinary range of relations between South Africa and India. It also helps us to make sense of the Leon Schuster link.

The book argues that we are entering a post-American world in which the global South will become more important. To make sense of this emerging world, we need to make sense of the full range of interactions between places like South Africa and India.

The book looks at the dense and often unknown network of relations that have linked the countries (like lascars [black sailors]) and what comparisons between the two regions reveal for example, similar but differing ideas of citizenship and migrancy.

The introduction to the book which draws on research produced by the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA – [cisa-wits.org.za](http://cisa-wits.org.za)) suggests the following ideas:

Pick up any South African newspaper or tune in to any broadcast programme and before long one is likely to come across some item on India. Whether an advertisement for a particular model of Tata or Mahindra motor car, or a report on the growing trade and investment links between the two countries, every day brings mounting evidence of the marked intensification of relations between South Africa and India.

This Indian presence in the South African media may seem unremarkable. As a rising world economic power, India probably now features more in most international media than it used to. South Africa has one of the largest Indian diasporic populations and one may hence expect India-related stories. However, the Indian presence in the South African media is noteworthy in two respects: firstly, the reporting on India appears in the mainstream media rather than those aimed specifically at South African Indian communities and, secondly, the discussion of India in the South African media tends to explore the economic synergies that exist between the two countries rather than discuss India's rise in general.

This focus on these new economic possibilities in turn forms part of a series of state and public policies which specifically seek to bolster South African-Indian interactions. Prior to South Africa's political transition in 1994, there were no formal economic ties between the two countries. By last year, trade amounted to over US\$ 4 billion. Since 2001, it has grown at a phenomenal rate of 22% per annum, and the two governments had set a target of US\$ 10 billion by 2010.

Investment has grown almost as rapidly, and by last year there were at least 50 major corporations from each country operating in the other, and as many as 20 or 25 others exploring the possibility of investing from one to the other. Both states are committed to increase these figures making use of their increasing number of bilateral agreements as well as the trilateral possibilities opened up by the India-Brazil-South Africa initiative (IBSA). The growth in commercial ties has seen the establishment of bilateral business associations

and similar bodies, but has also stimulated the expansion of linkages in other social arenas beyond the market.

Other factors promote closer South Africa-India exchanges. There are long-standing historical links between the two countries inaugurated by 17<sup>th</sup>-century slavery at the Cape where about one-quarter of slaves were from South Asia and then from the 1860s by the arrival of indentured labourers, followed by merchants. The two countries share cross-cutting anti-colonial histories in which the figure of Gandhi has been central. The African National Congress and South African Communist Party drew on ideas and strategies from Indian nationalist struggles. India was one of the first countries to provide support for the anti-apartheid movement.

Both countries are middle-ranking powers in the South and both are vibrant democracies with strong traditions of public debate and press freedom. In addition to facing similar social issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment, both states are characterized by extreme linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. Both are grappling with the issues presented by a rapidly rising middle class characterized by a mixture of high-minded political ideals encountering new modes of materialism and consumerism.

For some commentators, we are beginning to move towards a 'post-American world' in which the unilateral dominance of the US will wane. The rise of India and China most powerfully signals this shift and raises pressing questions for what the shape of such a 'post-American' world – and the 'global South' within – might be.

Yet, as we start to feel some of the changes precipitated by the rise of Asia, questions about the idea of the 'global South' move to the fore insistently. Can this category hold together as India and China strive for superpower status? What are the limits and possibilities of this concept as we move forward? Can the idea of the 'global South' with its roots in third worldist discourses of solidarity speak to the ambiguities and complexities of a changing world order?

The term itself has become common currency but its genealogies and lineages are less clear. The term 'South' initially emerged in the 1980s from the Brandt Commission on international development which popularized a North/South or rich/poor vocabulary. The collapse of the Eastern bloc and Soviet Union in 1989 precipitated a shift from a Cold War three-worlds model towards a division of developed and developing nations, the 'North' and the 'South'.

In this context, the term 'global South' came to stand in as a proxy for the term 'third world'. In a post-Cold War order, older ideas of the third world and non-alignment appeared to have become redundant but these nations continued to share strategic objectives and interests. In recognition of this imperative, the Non-Aligned Movement called its tenth summit in September 1992 in Jakarta, Indonesia which discussed how the developing nations might regroup in the changed geopolitical order.

The summit affirmed the importance of a North-South axis as opposed to the East-West Cold War axis. Clovis Maksoud, the eminent diplomat and longstanding permanent observer of the League of Arab States at the United Nations has commented: "The Jakarta Declaration implicitly recognized the dawn of a new era, in which the terms 'Third World' and 'non-

aligned' have been subsumed by the term 'Global South'". The persistence of the Non-Aligned movement and the growing importance of the G-77 group (which focuses on a unitary voice for the 'developing nations' in the United Nations) points to the continued need for a collective action amongst these nations.

The idea of the 'Global South', then, will continue to be an important concept that will shape intergovernmental activity, NGO priorities and trade agendas. What will its role be in setting academic and research priorities? This book provides some answers to this question by probing the limits and possibilities of one set of axes in the 'global South' namely the links between South Africa and India.

On the possibilities side of the equation, the essays point to the productive and as yet unexplored histories and comparative possibilities within the global South. The pieces point to new histories of linkage and circulation whether these be Goan migrants, lascars or typographers moving in and around the Indian ocean. The comparative possibilities point to new historiographical insights as histories of labour, social movements and urban governance are placed side by side and as social theory from different parts of the 'global south' are brought into conversation.

Yet, at the same time, these pieces also point to the growing contradictions within the category of 'south' and its earlier incarnations. Gandhi's cosmopolitanism met its limits in ideas of civilizational hierarchies between India and Africa. While ideologies of third worldist solidarity and Afro-Asian co-operation have obscured such divisions, new histories of the 'global south' are starting to reveal the complexities and struggles within and between different players, ideologies and interests and how these shaped the contours of these movements.

In some cases, the gaps of power between different parts of the global south are considerable and can constitute what some have termed 'semi-imperialisms'. These fault-lines and semi-imperialisms will continue to play themselves out especially as new alliances and competitions emerge in the 'post-American' Indian Ocean. In this changing arena, unexpected 'lateral' cultural forms will take shape. Hindi film continues to make its way to many parts of Africa and finds new audiences there. *Mr Bones* has proved popular in India..

In some senses, the travel of *Mr Bones* is to be expected: slapstick stereotypes travel easily. Yet such examples also seem counterintuitive; they unsettle the elevated older moral agendas of south-south co-operation in which slapstick does not really belong. Equally out of place would be the growing trend of south-south spying, a phenomenon that is now routine in the Indian Ocean: since 2007 India has opened up listening posts in Madagascar and Mozambique to track shipping lanes and keep an eye on the Chinese. As a post-Cold War and possibly 'post-American' world coalesces, understanding south-south slapstick and south-south spying will become increasingly important. The book lays the ground work for an environment in which we can start to make sense of such new phenomena which will speak to the complexities of a new and confusing world order.