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“No Colonial Baggage”: Imagining a Decolonised Australia-Africa Relations

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As part of its strategy to win African votes for election to the UN Security Council (2008–12), Canberra sought to leverage its soft power potential by presenting Australia as having “no colonial baggage” in Africa while framing Australia as “a country from the Global North, located in the Global South,” and one that would “work with other small and middle powers.” Ultimately, the campaign was successful, including up to 50 of Africa’s 54 countries voting for Australia. This paper considers this framing in the context of a shared but differentiated colonial history, including its contradictions, given that Australians fought several wars on African soil on behalf of the British Empire, supported white minority regimes and anti-communist movements on the continent, and maintained the white Australia policy until the 1970s. The paper deploys decoloniality theory to engage Australia’s lack of a neat fit within a historicised articulation of a “coloniser-colonised” relationship between Europe and Africa. We show that, despite this lack of fit, Australia’s relations with the countries of Africa reinforce long-standing of patterns of knowledge, power, and being associated with colonialism. Accordingly, the paper makes three recommendations for cooperation and innovative thinking in foreign policy and diaspora diplomacy between Africa and a more independent and multicultural Australia based on the “equality of being.”

In Australia’s last campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) (2008–12), the government knew it needed to win African votes to have any chance of election. So, as part of its strategy, Canberra sought to leverage its soft power potential by presenting Australia as having “no colonial baggage” in Africa.¹ Ultimately, the election campaign

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¹ David Mickler and Nikola Pijović, “‘There are No Votes in Africa’?: Australia, Africa and the UN Security Council,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol 66, 1 (2020), pp. 130–48; Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia: Candidate for the United Nations Security Council 2013–14* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

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was successful, with up to 50 of Africa's 54 countries voting for Australia.² Canberra's courting of Africa in this way was not limited to political leaders but also a range of strategic commentators. For example, in arguing for strengthened Australia's economic engagement with Africa, Anthony Bergin of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute maintained, "We're in a unique position with Africa because we don't carry any baggage of the colonial past."³ In 2009, Greg Hull, Austrade's senior trade commissioner in Africa, maintained that "Australians are well respected and viewed favourably by Ghanaians: there is no colonial baggage."⁴ In a 2012 interview, Elizabeth McGregor of the Defence Department maintained that one of the factors that facilitated trust and engagement between Australia and many African states was that Australia had a relatively more informal approach to the continent and carried "no colonial baggage."⁵ There appears to be some consensus that Australia's engagement with Africa is qualitatively different from that of European countries due to the absence of a history of direct colonial exploitation. In turn, it is suggested that this untarnished reputation is a pillar upon which contemporary relations may flourish based on equality and mutual respect.

However, modern Australia is a historical product and instrument of British colonialism, which makes the mantra of "no colonial baggage" problematic. For instance, "Australia's first organised foreign policy contacts with Africa came in the guise of imperial military expeditions."⁶ Australians fought several wars on African soil for the British Empire (in Sudan and South Africa pre-Federation and North Africa during the First and Second World Wars). Moreover, long-standing bipartisan support for the foundational white Australia policy largely barred non-white Africans from entering Australia; until the policy was eventually abated in the 1970s. In addition, during post-War era of conservative rule, the Australian government generally sided with the United States and European (ex-)colonial powers worldwide during the Cold War, including support for the Apartheid regime in South Africa until the 1970s. The Commonwealth — which evolved from British colonialism — has also remained a core forum for Australia's ongoing and direct engagement with Anglophone Africa.⁷ To some, the Commonwealth is a useful forum for international cooperation in which some African countries have influence they would not otherwise have.⁸ While this argument is potentially subjective, the former hardly counters other arguments that the

² Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia: Candidate for the United Nations Security Council 2013–14*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/international-organisations/un/unscc-2013-2014/Pages/australia-on-the-united-nations-security-council-2013-2014>

³ Anthony Bergin, *Africa Is Open for Business, But Where's Australia?* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 28 November 2012), <https://www.aspi.org.au/opinion/africa-open-business-wheres-australia>

⁴ Dynamic Export, "Doing business in Ghana: a golden opportunity," 29 April 2009, <https://www.dynamicexport.com.au/export-market/articles-export-markets/doing-business-in-ghana/>

⁵ Author interview with Elizabeth McGregor, Director Europe, United Nations, Africa and Peacekeeping, International Policy Division, Department of Defence, Canberra, Australia, 7 August 2012.

⁶ Nikola Pijović, "From the Boer War to the End of Apartheid," in *Australia and Africa* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 19–49; Matthew J. Cuttell, *AFRICOM and Australian Military Engagement in Africa* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army Command and General Staff College, 2008).

⁷ Nikola Pijovic, "The Commonwealth: Australia's Traditional 'Window' into Africa," *The Round Table*, Vol 103, 4 (2014), pp. 383–97.

⁸ See Ali A. Mazrui, *The Anglo-African Commonwealth: Political Friction and Cultural Fusion* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013).

Commonwealth is, according to Richard Drayton,⁹ a “relic of empire, if not the instrument of a latter-day neo-colonialism”. For example, the non-governmental organisation War on Want notes that Britain controls more than 1 trillion dollars worth of resources of Africa.¹⁰

More generally, Australia has centred its foreign policy on close alignment with its “great and powerful friends”: the United Kingdom and the United States. Since the First Fleet arrived in 1788, Australia has evolved into an “immigrant nation, a settler colonial society that is located in the South and yet problematically dominated by ontological and epistemological orientations towards the North.”¹¹ Tensions between Australia’s “geography versus history” have shaped debates about Australia’s national and strategic identity, including potential deeper integration with Asia. Indeed, there are no perceived traditional security threats to Australia emanating from Africa, and there is less obvious trade compatibility with Africa. However, a consideration like Australia-Asia relations in framing Australia’s national identity and interests in relation to the African continent is needed. This is in the context of both evolving global geopolitical dynamics and Australia’s (potential) evolution towards more meaningful reconciliation, multiculturalism, and national independence. As part of this, this paper examines what decolonised Australia-Africa relations might look like.

This paper aims to fill this gap by pursuing three objectives. First, it examines relevant decoloniality theory to identify analytical tools that help us to understand what decolonisation might mean in international relations (IR) thinking and practice. Second, it applies these analytical tools to an empirical overview of Australia-Africa relations to test the claim that Australia does not have colonial baggage in Africa. Third, the paper identifies and argues for more tangible policy actions to support a more equitable and productive series of relationships between Australia and Africa that might help transcend past and extant colonial dynamics. It is important to emphasise that our goal here is to imagine a decolonised relations between Australia and Africa, Africans, and African countries. Accordingly, our arguments are reflective and intended to start a conversation as part of extant efforts to ensure the recognition and respect that Africa, Africans, and African states deserve in Australia on domestic and international levels.

Australia has made efforts in improving its relations with Africa, including through government inquiries like the one into Australia’s relationship with African states.¹² Historically, it is notable that the formal end of the white Australia policy, and the 1967 referendum, were seen by the government as at least partly responding to the Afro-Asian bloc’s anti-colonial imperative.¹³ However, when introducing a 2011 *Inquiry into Australia’s relationship with the countries of Africa*, Minister for Foreign Affairs

⁹ Richard Drayton, “The Commonwealth in the 21st Century,” *The Round Table*, Vol 105, 1 (2016), pp. 21–27, DOI: [10.1080/00358533.2015.1126964](https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2015.1126964)

¹⁰ War on Want, “New colonialism: Britain’s scramble for Africa’s energy and mineral resources,” 2016, <https://www.waronwant.org/resources/new-colonialism-britains-scramble-africas-energy-and-mineral-resources>

¹¹ Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes and Baden Offord, “Decolonizing Human Rights Education: Critical Pedagogy Praxis in Higher Education,” *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol 17, 1 (2018), pp. 24–36.

¹² The Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into Australia’s relationship with the Countries of Africa* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2011), https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Completed_Inquiries/jfadt/africa%2009/report/index

¹³ Jennifer Clarke, *Aborigines & Activism: Race, Aborigines & the Coming of the Sixties to Australia* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2008).

Stephen Smith, admitted in a speech to the South African Institute for International Affairs that for “too long Australia did not give Africa the priority it required and deserved.”¹⁴ Besides, as other papers in this collection note, a decolonial perspective must acknowledge the ubiquitous nature of coloniality and its impacts on all sectors of the human experience. It covers how coloniality operates overtly and subtly beyond government inquiries, peace interventions, and policy documents. It also considers the interests and systems of representations that underlie political decisions and actions and the everyday issues of cultural, epistemic, and symbolic violence.

Decoloniality Theory

As this collection’s introduction notes, “any suggestion that Australia remains a colonial society is met with a fierce political backlash.” For many, however, Australia’s colonial reality is not in doubt. This is not only due to its settler-colonial status, and the concomitant direct and structural subjugation and annihilation of Indigenous peoples and the taking of their lands; but also in preserving its “proud” connection to the British Empire as one of latter’s southern outposts. Despite this, it has been politically and economically useful for Australia to claim a clean sheet regarding colonial exploitation in Africa. However, this claim assumes a semblance of credibility only when we consider colonialism in the formal sense of territorial domination, which Australia did not pursue in Africa independently of Britain. Decoloniality theory, however, looks beyond territorial domination and, instead, targets coloniality — as an “ethic that renders massacre and different forms of genocide as natural,”¹⁵ and not just formal colonisation. As such, while colonisation concerns territorial administration, coloniality entails the “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that [continue to] define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.”¹⁶ For us, colonialism includes “imperialism without empire” and there is “colonialism without colonies.”¹⁷

To be sure, the concern of decoloniality theory is de-linking ex-colonial societies and the people who identify with them from colonial matrices of knowledge, power, and being.¹⁸ Decolonising knowledge interrogates why we see the “West as the epistemic locale from which the world is described, conceptualised and ranked.”¹⁹ Decolonising knowledge means reversing a mode of knowing Africa through learning, thinking, and explaining Africa which create and perpetuate the façade African inferiority. Decolonising knowledge entails “teasing out epistemological issues, politics of knowledge generation as well as questions of who generates which knowledge, and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; The Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into Australia’s relationship with the countries of Africa*.

¹⁵ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. xi.

¹⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, 2–3 (2007), pp. 240–70, 243.

¹⁷ Zubairu Wai, “The Empire’s New Clothes: Africa, Liberal Interventionism and Contemporary World Order,” *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 41, 142 (2014), pp. 483–99, 492.

¹⁸ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books, 2013); Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, 2–3 (2007), pp. 168–78; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” p. 177.

¹⁹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” p. 243.

for what purpose.”²⁰ As April Biccum in this collection argues, this will involve decolonising the methodology of knowing away from Empire. In the African context, this means unchaining and de-marginalising global Africa and black movements and ethno-philosophies such as pan-Africanism as a way of reading, knowing, and doing I/international R/relations. As Zondi puts it, it means “unthinking methodology and positionality in IR” and “unmasking of coloniality at the heart of the epistemological making of IR as a discipline.”²¹

The coloniality of power operationalises the coloniality of knowledge. Power, in a Foucauldian sense,²² is and has been vital in the cultural negotiations of Africa. Imagining, representing, and performing Africa in both domestic and foreign policy of the metropole or the colony (or their residues) always become possible through the economic, political, and hence cultural hegemony. From this, decolonising the coloniality of power involves “investigat[ing] how the current global political space was constructed and constituted into the asymmetrical and modern power structure.”²³ In addition, it should ask why Africa, a continent of 54 countries that constitutes more than one-fourth of the United Nations membership, does not have a permanent seat at the UNSC. This is the case even as much of that Council’s agenda is focussed on Africa. Other questions include asking if Africa’s overrepresentation in the global distributions of conflict and insecurity is the fault of African countries or that of an asymmetric global political and economic structure that oppresses, erases, excludes, and disadvantages the continent.

Inventing and processing a façade of African inferiority cascades into a “coloniality of being” through which this façade gets normalised, naturalised, or idealised,²⁴ leading thereby to the misrepresentation effects of coloniality in lived experience.²⁵ It is due to the coloniality of being that “the history and memory on which students of the world including African students are meant to remember their place in the world are those of the [same] region of the world that recently dismembered, denigrated, underdeveloped, and oppressed Africa and other continents in the first place.”²⁶ Coloniality of being is, thus, the thingification of being: a process in which the colonised are “drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out.”²⁷ Decolonising being, therefore, means interrogating “how whiteness gained ontological density far above blackness [...] and the production of ‘coloniser and colonised,’ and the articulation of subjectivity and being,”²⁸ leading to the bifurcation of the world into “Zone of Being” and “Non-Being.”²⁹ This

²⁰ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa. Myths of Decolonization* (Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, 2013), p. 11.

²¹ Siphamandla Zondi, “Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory: A Critical Conceptual Meditation,” *Politikon*, Vol 45, 1 (2018), pp. 16–31, 20.

²² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

²³ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*, p. 11.

²⁴ Ama Mazama, “The Afrocentric Paradigm,” in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed., A. Mazama (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), p. 4.

²⁵ Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” p. 242.

²⁶ Zondi, “Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory,” p. 22.

²⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press: 1972).

²⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*, p. 12.

²⁹ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*; Fanon Fanon and Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

interrogation is vital because it assists in investigating how African humanity was questioned through objectifying, thingifying, and commodifying Africa and Africans.³⁰

The three levers of coloniality do not exist independently of one another. Maldonado-Torres argues that “while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with the impact of colonisation on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonisation and its impact on language.”³¹ Decoloniality also seeks “interventions at the level of power, knowledge, and being.”³² It sets out to eliminate coloniality’s control of the economy, authority, gender, and knowledge and subjectivity,³³ and sees whiteness as “a normative structure, a discourse of power and a form of identity.”³⁴

Colonial Baggage in Australia-Africa Relations

The connection between Africa and what is today called Australia dates back centuries. During the Second World War, a Royal Australian Armed Forces serviceman, Morry Isenberg, found a twelfth-century coin from a medieval African sultanate in the Northern Territory.³⁵ Historical records also show that 12 black Africans arrived in what is now called Australia with the British First Fleet in 1788, with 11 settling after one drowned on arrival.³⁶ These Africans were formerly enslaved people who had escaped to London during the American Revolution.³⁷ They were convicted of petty crimes and sentenced to transportation. The contribution of these “Black Founders”³⁸ of Australia was so profound that Blues Point in Sydney is named after the black African, Billy Blue.

However, the number of black African arrivals in Australia reduced with the enactment of the 1901 Immigration Act (known as the “White Australia Policy”), a racist and discriminatory regime through which the Australian government determined which people could migrate to and live in the country. Pybus contends that because the white Australia policy did not recognise non-white people as citizens, the few black Africans in Australia integrated with Indigenous communities, and their African lineages disappeared into mixed marriages.³⁹ This trend was significantly reversed with the recognition of Indigenous people in 1967 and the Whitlam government’s

³⁰ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*, p. 12.

³¹ Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, p. 242.

³² Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” p. 262.

³³ Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.”

³⁴ Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Colour, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

³⁵ Mike Owen, “Unravelling the mystery of Arnhem Land’s ancient African coins,” *Australian Geographic*, 7 August 2014, <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2014/08/mystery-of-ancient-african-coins-found-in-australia/>

³⁶ Cassandra Pybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia’s First Black Settlers* (Kensington, Australia: University of New South Wales, 2006).

³⁷ Pybus, *Black Founders*; A. Yussuf, “Did you know there were Africans on the First Fleet?,” *SBS The Feed*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/did-you-know-there-were-12-africans-on-the-first-fleet>

³⁸ Pybus, *Black Founders*.

³⁹ Cassandra Pybus, *A Touch of the Tar: African Settlers in Colonial Australia and the Implications for Issues of Aboriginality* (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2001).

acceptance of other cultures in the 1970s.⁴⁰ Over the years, African migration to Australia has been intermittent, but since the 1990s has expanded considerably in both volume and diversity of countries of origin. The figures from the 2016 Census show over 600,000 first- and second-generation Africans in Australia, equalling around 2.6 per cent of the population.⁴¹ This figure represents approximately 5.1 per cent of Australians born overseas. However, more significant here is that, from 1788 at least, Africans have been in Australia for over two centuries, longer than many in mainstream Australia.

From a decolonial perspective, whether Australia has colonial baggage in its relationship with diasporic and continental Africa is a question of assessing the relationship between Australia and Africa against the levers and controls of coloniality outlined above. Here, we can look inward at Australian society's relationship with migrants of African origin and outward, at Australia's strategic relationship with Africa in the international system, for traces of coloniality of knowledge, power, and being in Australia-Africa relations.

The "Burden" of Blackness, Racism, and Othering the African

In 2021, One Nation politician Pauline Hanson introduced a motion in the Australian Senate to reject a proposal to introduce critical race theory (CRT) into Australia's national curriculum,⁴² which was supported by the Coalition Government. Proponents of CRT believe the curriculum would have offered a more accurate record of the experience of First Nations people with colonisation and called the British arrival an "invasion."⁴³ This was a missed opportunity for a more reconciled, diversified, inclusive, and decolonised way of nurturing the next generation of Australians. Nevertheless, this proposal was rejected at the highest level of Australian society which, as Gatwiri and Mapedzahama contend, shows "the omnipresence of Western thought systems in the academy" and the disciplinary practice of positioning race as "marginalised knowledge."⁴⁴ Meanwhile, as Sales wrote in 1974, black people and people of colour arouse "a more fundamental predilection, a bigotry lurking deeper within the popular mind and based upon a mixture of curiosity about the exotic, a sense of threat and a fear of the unknown, as well as on preconceived."⁴⁵ Accordingly, the black person in Australian society becomes a "victim of crass ignorance, exposed to naked hostility and identified as a member of an inferior race [... but who ...] was

⁴⁰ Kirk Zwangobani, "From Diaspora to Multiculture: In Search of a Youthful Pan-African Identity," *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol 29, 1 (2008), pp. 51–65.

⁴¹ Farida Fozdar, Sarah Prout Quicke, and David Mickler, "Are Africans in Australia a Diaspora?," *Diaspora Studies*, Vol 15, 1 (2022), pp. 87–117.

⁴² CRT was developed and led by Black academics and scholar-activists to expose systemic and institutional racism. See Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Critical race theory — what it is not!," in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 32–43.

⁴³ Eve Bodsworth, "Breaking the back of persistent disadvantage," *The Conversation*, 12 July 2013, <https://theconversation.com/proposed-new-curriculum-acknowledges-first-nations-view-of-british-invasion-and-a-multicultural-australia-16001>

⁴⁴ Kathomi Gatwiri and Virginia Mapedzahama, "Pedagogy or 'Trauma Porn'? Racial Literacy as a Prerequisite for Teaching Racially Dignifying Content in the Australian Social Work Context," *Journal for Multicultural Education*, Vol 16, 3 (2022), pp. 272–82, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-11-2021-0205>

⁴⁵ Peter Sales, "White Australia, Black Americans: A Melbourne Incident, 1928," *Australian Quarterly*, Vol 46, 4 (1994), pp. 74–81.

nevertheless admired for an entertainer.”⁴⁶ Several decades later, the black person is a “burden” to white Australia,⁴⁷ because Blackness is “too un-assimilable, too different, too foreign, too dangerous, too visible, *too everything*.”⁴⁸

The experience of a 19-year-old African Australian is illustrative: “white Australians tend to assume I don’t have a car, that I’m on welfare, that I can’t read or express myself well. After they get to know me, they learn to see the person and not the race.”⁴⁹ Similarly, a 27-year-old black Australian lamented that “we get told that we cannot be trusted, that we are lazy. This is much harder to fight than looking for work or houses.”⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly then, a recent report found that 91 per cent of African Australian students witnessed racism and are victims of the n-word.⁵¹ One of the results of this systemic racism and discrimination is that “despite variations in country of origin, social class, political affiliation, education or income,” Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo find that “Australia’s dark skinned African migrants experience racialised treatment in subtle ways owing to their melanin content.”⁵² Consequently, other researchers conclude that skin colour still matters in the life chances of black Africans in Australia.⁵³ In the end, the Afrodiasporic experience in Australia is one in which black people are simultaneously subjected to racialised invisibility and hyper-visibility.⁵⁴

White Australia’s racism against Africa and Blackness sometimes reflects in the statements of top government officials, demonstrated by comments from Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton in 2018. Indeed, the “Sudanese gang”/“African gang” fiasco in 2018 was a gross manifestation of white Australia’s diminutive knowledge of Africa and African migrants’ diversity and contribution to Australia. After an incident involving Sudanese youth in Melbourne, Dutton concluded that people were “scared to go out to restaurants” because of “African gang violence.”⁵⁵ Mainstream Australia responded to such claims coming from the top echelons of Australian society. For

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Virginia Mapedzahama and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo, “Blackness as Burden? The Lived Experience of Black Africans in Australia,” *Sage Open*, Vol 7, 3 (2017), p. 2158244017720483.

⁴⁸ Kathomi Gatwiri and Claire Moran, “How young Black African Australians use social media to challenge anti-Black narratives and reclaim racial dignity,” *The Conversation*, 24 June 2022, <https://theconversation.com/how-young-black-african-australians-use-social-media-to-challenge-anti-black-narratives-and-reclaim-racial-dignity-185504>

⁴⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission, “Who experiences racism,” n.d., <https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/whoexperiencesracism.pdf>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Mary Lloyd, “African Australian students are subjected to the n-word and racism in the classroom, according to report,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 19 October 2022.

⁵² Virginia Mapedzahama and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo, “Negotiating Diasporic Black African Existence in Australia: A Reflexive Analysis,” *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol 34, 1 (2013), pp. 61–81.

⁵³ Hyacinth Udah and Parlo Singh, “Identity, Othering and Belonging: Towards an Understanding of Difference and the Experiences of African Immigrants to Australia,” *Social Identities*, Vol 25, 6 (2019), pp. 843–59. Hyacinth Udah and Parlo Singh, “‘It Still Matters’: The Role of Skin Colour in the Everyday Life and Realities of Black African Migrants and Refugees in Australia,” *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol 39 (2018), pp. 19–47.

⁵⁴ Kathomi Gatwiri and Leticia Anderson, “Boundaries of Belonging: Theorising Black African Migrant Experiences in Australia,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol 18, 1 (2012), p. 38.

⁵⁵ Paul Karp, “Peter Dutton says Victorians scared to go out because of ‘African gang violence,’” *The Guardian*, 3 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jan/03/peter-dutton-says-victorians-scared-to-go-out-because-of-african-gang-violence>

example, after these claims, south Sudanese youth “reported increased surveillance, such as having to leave school bags at the door or counter of shops, or people on public transport filming them ‘just in case’ they did something wrong.”⁵⁶ Stories such as these are anthologised in *Growing up African in Australia*,⁵⁷ a book which is as much an anthology of racism as it is of stories of young black people in Australia. Andrew Jakubowicz sums up how mainstream Australia has come to view Africa and Africans:

To most Australians who are not of African origin, Africa is a map composed of stereotypes; South Africa’s sportsmen; the civil wars of the Congo and Burundi; the dictatorships of Zimbabwe and Liberia; the famines of Ethiopia and Eritrea and the world’s response in “Live Aid”; the murderous rampages in the Darfur region of Sudan; “Black Hawk down” and the conflict in Somalia; the ancient history of Egypt; and the recent emergence of Islamist political movements.⁵⁸

These “momentary glimpses”⁵⁹ become the lenses through which most of Australia engages with modern Africa, leading to the creation of an “invisible border wall”⁶⁰ between African migrants and Australian citizenship and residency. As Dagbanja demonstrates, one way of doing this is by imposing bizarre English language requirements on prospective African migrants to Australia.⁶¹ He notes that, that despite many migrants coming from Commonwealth countries where English is the language of instruction from primary school to university, these language requirements prevent migrants, many of them Africans, from entry into or staying in Australia.⁶² Elsewhere, Dagbanja pointed to how discretionary the Australian government’s English language requirement for visa applicants is by showing that the “definition of what it takes to prove competent English under sections 54(1) and 55(1) of the Migration Act”⁶³ is not exhaustive. This may not be unique to Australia because; Andrew Rosenberg (2019) generally finds a racial bias against African migration as “migrants from majority black states migrate far less than we would expect under a racially blind model.”⁶⁴ However, what Dagbanja points out shows that Australia seldom differs from other places where the racial bias and discrimination inherent in coloniality exist. Indeed, a ten-day official visit to Australia by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on people of

⁵⁶ Luke Henriques-Gomes, “South Sudanese-Australians report racial abuse intensified after ‘African gangs’ claims,” *The Guardian*, 4 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/04/south-sudanese-australians-report-abuse-intensified-after-african-gangs-claims>

⁵⁷ Maxine Beneba Clark (with Magan Magan and Ahmed Yussuf), *Growing up African in Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Black Inc., 2019).

⁵⁸ Andrew Jakubowicz, “African Australians Project: Australia’s migration policies: African dimensions Australia’s migration policies: African dimensions,” *Australian Human Rights Commission*, May 2010, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/african-australians-project-australias-migration-policies-african-dimensionsaustralias>

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Dominic Npoanlari Dagbanja, “The Invisible Border Wall in Australia,” *UCLA Journal of International Law & Foreign Affairs*, Vol 23, 2 (2019), pp. 221–65.

⁶¹ Dominic Npoanlari Dagbanja, “A Gamble to Take? Visas and Delegated Legislative Power on English Language in Australia,” *Statute Law Review*, 42, 2 (2021), pp. 156–75; Dagbanja, “The Invisible Border Wall in Australia.”

⁶² Julie Robinson, “Sudanese Heritage and Living in Australia: Implications of Demography for Individual and Community Resilience,” *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol 32, 2 (2011), pp. 25–56.

⁶³ Dagbanja, “A Gamble to Take?”

⁶⁴ Andrew S. Rosenberg, “Measuring Racial Bias in International Migration Flows,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 63, 4 (2019), pp. 837–45.

African Descent found that people of African descent live under siege of racism. They found that black Africans in Australia face “racial profiling, racial slurs, abuse of authority, over-policing, under protection, targeting and violence.”⁶⁵

Similarly, in line with this issue’s focus on how IR is studied and what constitutes it, it is notable that Africa has yet to receive much attention in Australian classrooms despite, as we will show later, Australia’s commercial footprints across the continent. For example, research conducted in 2021 to examine the extent of Africa-focussed teaching in Australian universities found that only 12 individual university units, collectively offered at only five universities, had “Africa” in their titles across the over forty universities in Australia.⁶⁶ Thus, not only does the number of African courses taught in Australian universities indicate how unimportant Africa is in tertiary education; it is also evidence of the use of the practice in IR of Africa as a site of case studies to test Western theories and concepts.⁶⁷ Here IR becomes another site of a “give-take” colonial relationship in which Europeans commanded, and Africans obeyed.⁶⁸ This evidence of discrimination and racism against Africans betrays the long history of black Africans’ presence in Australia, counting from the First Fleet at least. This undermines the claim that “Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world,”⁶⁹ and suggests that it indeed carries significant colonial baggage.

Black (Gangs) and White (Farmers): Engaging with Africa through Whiteness, Exploitation, and Ad Hocism

How Africa is known in white Australia and by white Australia speaks of Africa’s and Africans’ place in Australia’s national and international politics. While migrants from black Africa deal with racism, stigma, and discrimination in Australia, the same generally does not apply to white South Africans. For example, 58 per cent of African migrants to Australia are white South Africans.⁷⁰ This could never be due to geography or strategy alone. Australia’s relationship with continental Africa is, thus, arguably shrouded in whiteness. In many instances, Australia has come to the aid of white people in countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe when they are involved in resource-driven conflicts with black Africans who have been dealing with centuries of coloniality that exacted violence on them and their lands. Australia’s interest in black South Africans’ call for the return of their lands following “extreme dispossession”⁷¹ of

⁶⁵ United Nations Human Rights, “Australia: people of African descent living under siege of racism, say UN experts,” *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 21 December 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/australia-people-african-descent-living-under-siege-racism-say-un-experts>

⁶⁶ UWA Africa Research & Engagement Centre, *Mapping Africa in Australia (A Multi-Institution Collaborative Project across Academia, Government, Community and Industry)* (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2021).

⁶⁷ George M. Bob-Miller, “Introduction: Methodologies for Researching Africa.” *African Affairs*, Vol 121, 484 (2022), pp. e55–e65.

⁶⁸ Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997). pp. 597–612.

⁶⁹ Australian Government, “Australia’s Multicultural Statement,” n.d., <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/Statements/english-multicultural-statement.pdf>

⁷⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), “Migration, Australia: Statistics on Australia’s international migration, internal migration (interstate and intrastate), and the population by country of birth,” ABS, 23 April 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/migration-australia/latest-release>

⁷¹ Giovanni Arrighi, Nicole Aschoff, and Ben Scully, “Accumulation by Dispossession and Its Limits: The Southern Africa Paradigm Revisited,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol 45, 4 (2010), pp. 410–38.

Indigenous lands is one such instance. The dispossession of Indigenous lands was occasioned by the Natives Land Act of 1913, which has been the institutional harbinger of much of the racialised economic and political inequalities in the country which remain after apartheid.

Nevertheless, in 2018, then-Home Affairs Minister and now-Opposition Leader Peter Dutton suggested introducing fast-track visas for white farmers in South Africa who he claimed were facing “persecution” at the hands of a black majority government. He maintained that if Australia opened its arms to white South Africans, they would “abide by our laws, integrate into our society, work hard [and] not lead a life on welfare.”⁷² Such deliberate interventions to ease the migration of white people into Australia have a long history embedded in coloniality. Reynolds and Lake argue, in *Drawing the Global Colour Line*,⁷³ that following the rise of anti-colonial nationalism around the world, Australia worked in solidarity with other “white men’s countries” to ensure that non-white people, including Africans, were kept away. Australia’s assistance to white South Africa goes as far back as, at least, the Second Boer War when Australians, who stayed in South Africa, helped form the South African Labour Party (SALP) in 1907.⁷⁴ The SALP introduced militant Australian trade union perspectives into South African politics. It was argued to be “the first party to advocate a strongly racist social policy, mirroring union attitudes in Australia.”⁷⁵

Contemporarily, there is a consensus that Australia’s foreign policy priorities and strategic bearings do not look too favourably at Africa and that Australia’s foreign policy outlook on Africa has been geographically restricted. However, the Australian resource sector’s presence and interest in Africa have been consistent, such that the number of Australian mining companies in Africa keeps growing. Australia’s commercial footprints in Africa should be a welcoming development given Africa’s level of development and economic challenges, as it ensures foreign direct investment in the continent. However, the track record of Australian mining in Africa shows evidence of exploitation reminiscent of imperial Europe and North America. A 2015 report by Oxfam Australia estimated that “Australian mining companies funneled over \$1 billion in profits out of Africa through the use of tax havens,” amounting to “over \$300 million that should have been paid in taxes to the governments in the poorest region in the world.”⁷⁶ Around the same time, Australia started cutting development “assistance” to Africa so that, by 2021–22, aid to sub-Saharan Africa had dropped by 48 per cent.

⁷² The Hon Peter Dutton MP, “Interview with Miranda Devine, Miranda Devine LIVE,” 14 March 2018, <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/peterdutton/Pages/Interview-with-Miranda-Devine,-Miranda-Devine-LIVE.aspx>

⁷³ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

⁷⁴ David Tothill, “Early Australian–South African Connections up to the Establishment of Official Relations in 1945,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 54, 1 (2000), pp. 63–77, cited in Andrew Jakubowicz, “Australia’s migration policies: African dimensions,” 2010, http://www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/papers/africanaus_paper_jakubowicz.doc

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Roger Bell, *In Apartheid’s Shadow: Australian Race Politics and South Africa, 1945–1975* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2020).

⁷⁶ Lisa Lee et al., “Buried treasure: the wealth Australian mining companies hide around the world,” *Oxfam Australia, Tax Justice Network Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*, 2019, https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-AC-007-Make-Tax-Fair_FA-non-embargoed_FINAL.pdf

It is important to note that the idea of foreign aid remains questionable from a decolonial perspective. According to some scholars, it weakens African economies rather than aids them.⁷⁷ In many respects, foreign aid to African countries is steeped in the coloniality of power. Foreign “assistance” can become a means of domination, in which Africa is subjected to international interventionist norms which are wrapped “in tropes of altruism.”⁷⁸ Foreign aid can be a vehicle for pursuing geopolitical interests such as influencing UNSC votes and fighting terrorism.⁷⁹ This includes the case of Australian spending in Africa leading up to the UNSC seat win. However, reference to Australia’s reduction in Official Development “Assistance” (ODA) to Africa is against the fact that while this reduction was taking place, Australia’s profit-making interests in the continent were increasing. In 2010, over 170 Australian companies were “involved in mining projects in nearly 40 African countries, with this footprint covering involvement in nearly 500 mines and exploration projects.”⁸⁰ More than 20 ASX-listed companies were added to the list in 2010 alone.⁸¹ As of January 2022, “over 670 Australian ASX-listed companies had equity in mining in Africa, investing over AUD 40 billion.”⁸²

Evading tax is not the only way that Australian mining has been implicated in the situation where foreign investors become “looters” in Africa.⁸³ Australian mining corporations have also been involved in conflicts with local populations. For example, since the early 2000s, the Xolobeni community in Eastern Cape, South Africa, has resisted the grant of a licence to Australian mining company Minerals Commodities Resources (MCRs). While MCRs fights for this licence, a subsidiary of MCRs in the Western Cape, Mineral Sands Resources, has left massive environmental damage and breached the terms of its licence, despite making huge profits.⁸⁴ This is a routine practice of economic imperialism and the coloniality of Capital, through which the Global South becomes a site of extraction. Similarly, foreign companies sometimes present their “corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions and community expenditure payments as proof of their positive social contributions.”⁸⁵ However, as an Oxfam report asserts, CSR contributions are “not a replacement for payments to

⁷⁷ See, for example, Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (Cham: Macmillan, 2009).

⁷⁸ Wai, “The Empire’s New Clothes,” p. 490.

⁷⁹ Sarah Rose, *Linking US Foreign Aid to UN Votes: What Are the Implications?* (Washington, DC: Centre for Global Development, 2018); Kwesi Aning, “Security, the War on Terror, and Official Development Assistance,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol 3, 1 (2010), pp. 7–26; Rita Abrahamsen, “A Breeding Ground for Terrorists? Africa & Britain’s ‘War on Terrorism,’” *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 31, 102 (2004), pp. 677–84; Ilyana Kuziemko and Eric Werker, “How Much Is a Seat on the Security Council Worth? Foreign Aid and Bribery at the United Nations,” *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol 114, 5 (2006), pp. 905–30.

⁸⁰ The Sydney Morning Herald (TSMH), “Australian miners flock to Africa,” 1 September 2010, <https://www.smh.com.au/business/australian-miners-flock-to-africa-20100901-14n07.html>

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Australian Trade and Investment Commission, “Events: Australian mining in Africa program,” ATIC, <https://www.austrade.gov.au/event/AMIAP2023/0x0/y#/event>

⁸³ Gift Mupambwa and Mzingaye Brilliant Xaba, “‘Investors’ or looters? A critical examination of mining and development in Africa,” in *Grid-Locked African Economic Sovereignty: Decolonising the Neo-Imperial Socio-Economic and Legal Force-Fields in the 21st Century* (Oxford: African Books Collective, 2009), pp. 292–312.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁸⁵ Lee et al., *Buried Treasure*, p. 35.

government that are required by local laws.”⁸⁶ Indeed, even CSR contributions sometimes come with colonial condescension, as corporations from former colonial countries come to help formerly colonised societies in their development agenda in ways that reproduce the hierarchical colonial relationships between the metropole and the colony.⁸⁷

Notably, while Australia maintains a consistent approach in its private commercial engagement with African states, it retains an *ad hoc* and episodic approach in its broader foreign policy engagement. While the latter approach allows Australia to give more attention to its relationships within the “Anglosphere core of British settler states,” as Clayton and Newman argue in this collection, the latter allows it to engage with the countries and spaces on the periphery, such as in Africa, in ways that serve private commercial interests and avoid long term commitment and responsibility. As diverse a grouping as Africa is, the continent is still tied to the Middle East in Australia’s diplomatic outlook, following the example of the United States until AFRICOM was set up as a separate US military-strategic command post for Africa. Indeed, an Australian military officer, for instance, has argued that the “Australian military may be able to use the creation of AFRICOM to improve military engagement with African nations.”⁸⁸ Yet, African Union rejected the initial proposal for AFRICOM to be located in the continent, citing sovereignty concerns. Australia is also a global partner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation that intervened in 2011 in Libya against the objection of the African Union.

Australia’s lack of non-commercial interest in Africa is sometimes explained in geopolitical terms. Africa’s lack of political relevance to Australia is communicated in high-level political statements such as “we are focused on our region.”⁸⁹ This echoed an “uptight backbencher’s” statement in 1979 when queried about Africa’s relevance to Australia that there were “no votes in Africa.”⁹⁰ Thus, “apart from mining, the relationship between Australia and the nations of Africa is pretty underdone.”⁹¹ While the African continent and its countries have remained irrelevant primarily to Australia, Australia has won a UNSC seat by courting and winning the support of African countries. This irony was exposed in the speech of then-Foreign Minister Julie Bishop at the 2015 annual Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) national conference. Not once was Africa mentioned in her long speech, as the Minister espoused what she called “economic diplomacy,” focussing on prosperity, as opposed to traditional diplomacy, which focusses on peace and security.⁹² However, in the same speech, the Minister celebrated Australia’s pride in “our distinguished record on the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Zoe Pearson, Sara Ellingrod, Emily Billo, and Kendra McSweeney, “Corporate social responsibility and the reproduction of (neo) colonialism in the Ecuadorian Amazon,” *The Extractive Industries and Society*, Vol 6, 3 (2019), pp. 881–88.

⁸⁸ Cuttell, *AFRICOM and Australian Military Engagement in Africa*.

⁸⁹ The Hon Julie Bishop MP, “What the White Paper Reveals about Australian Values,” *Global Citizen*, 19 December 2017, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/fr/content/australia-julie-bishop-health-aid-water-sanitation/>

⁹⁰ Mickler and Pijović, “‘There Are No Votes in Africa?’”

⁹¹ Helen Ware and David Lucas, “Africa ‘Pretty Underdone’: 2017 Submissions to the DFAT White Paper and Senate Inquiry,” *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol 39, 1 (2018), pp. 130–43.

⁹² The Hon Julie Bishop MP, “Australian Foreign Policy: Regional or Global?,” *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 19 October 2015, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/minister-for-foreign-affairs-the-hon-julie-bishop-mp-address-to-the-aiia/>

2013–2014 UN Security Council.” However, winning the “big, juicy and decisive”⁹³ 2013–14 UNSC seat, to use the words of then Foreign Minister Bob Carr, had African fingerprints all over it.

The historical parallel here is notable: ignorance of Africa’s efforts in Australia’s UNSC seat win reminds of the ignorance of African countries by Allied Forces in the Second World War in the sharing of the trophy of the war (permanent membership of the UNSC), which still reflects “the alliance of victors dating from the end of the Second World War in 1945.”⁹⁴ Africans played critical roles in this victory, only to be ignored in many colonial administrations.⁹⁵ Against this background, the absence of Africa in Bishop’s speech made the courtship of Africa, leading to the UNSC seat, too opportunistic. Indeed, while Bob Carr maintained that the win “encouraged and impacted on the country’s engagement with Africa,”⁹⁶ he also admitted that Australia was “forced to intensify diplomacy”⁹⁷ with Africa because Australia wanted to win a seat (emphasis added).

Meanwhile, the (British) Commonwealth remains Australia’s “window” into Africa, not the UN.⁹⁸ In personal communication with one of the authors, former Foreign Minister Carr placed the Commonwealth alongside the UN, conjointly forming the biggest bloc of African countries that Australia could leverage.⁹⁹ However, the Commonwealth forum would provide more leverage to Australia than the UN: Australia is a middle power in the latter — indeed, in the said bid for a UNSC seat, Australia presented itself as a “middle power.” However, in the former, Australia asserts its position as “a relatively ‘big player,’” where it “could influence things and therefore have more than marginal importance.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, the Commonwealth “is, at least nominally, a remnant of a long-lost allegiance and adherence to the British Crown.”¹⁰¹ The Commonwealth is a crucial institution in Australia’s strategic culture which, as Clayton and Newman argue (in this issue), shapes foreign policy decisions regarding its relationship with Western powers. It is safe to assert that Australia engages with Africa through whiteness, snippets of exploitation and *ad hocism* because it offers the best approach that least unsettles this strategic culture in an increasingly multipolar international system.

Much of Australia’s foreign policy engagement with Africa has been through connections to Empire, first through the (British) Commonwealth and second through the United States. Accordingly, whereas Australia is not directly visible when territorial subjugation of Africa is discussed, looking at the relationship between Australia and continental and diasporic Africa through the lens of decoloniality theory exposes Australia’s more subtle forms of “colonial baggage” in Africa.

⁹³ Tony Eastley and Lisa Millar, “Australia Wins Seat on UN Security Council,” *ABC News*, 19 October 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-19/australia-wins-seat-on-un-security-council/4321946>

⁹⁴ Adekeye Adebajo, *The Curse of Berlin: Africa after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 59.

⁹⁵ David Killingray and Martin Plaut, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2012).

⁹⁶ Mickler and Pijović. ““There Are No Votes in Africa?”” p. 130.

⁹⁷ Eastley and Millar, “Australia Wins Seat on UN Security Council.”

⁹⁸ Pijovic, “The Commonwealth.”

⁹⁹ Personal conversation with author (Muhammad Dan Suleiman), 15 March 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Pijovic, “The Commonwealth,” p. 385.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

“Equality of Being” in Australia-Africa Relations

There are many ways of working towards unthinking and undoing traces of coloniality in Australia-Africa relations. Generally, it will involve searching for areas and approaches through which Australia could resist ethics and practices that invent, operationalise, internalise, and perpetuate a colonial worldview of the continent's people, institutions, and cultures. It would involve fomenting a relationship based on mutual respect and equality of being instead of the coloniality of the African being. This concept of equality of being ought to acknowledge, as Mafeje insists, that “Africans would not be advocating for Africanity if their African-ness and humanity had not been denied and negated.”¹⁰² Accordingly, equality of being is for “the creation of a human world”¹⁰³ or, in Césaire framing, a battle towards a new society¹⁰⁴: one where African peoples, societies, and institutions are emancipated — not at the expense of other cultures — but in harmony with them. It is a world where the self is not lost either through a “walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the ‘universal.’”¹⁰⁵

Equality of being in Australia-Africa relations implies treating African countries as equal partners in diplomatic relations and trade agreements without patronising or exploitative behaviours or imposing one side's agenda on the other. An extension of this would be the commitment to encouraging mutually beneficial trade agreements, following ethical guidelines and respecting local labour rights, environmental standards, and community interests. Culturally, Australia must acknowledge and celebrate the cultural richness and diversity of African nations and migrants rather than stereotyping or marginalising them. Here, equality of being would include promoting inclusivity in education, media, and public life to foster a broader understanding and appreciation of African cultures in Australia. As visa and immigration policies play gatekeeper roles in who comes to Australia and what rights they have, visa and immigration policies must not unduly disadvantage African applicants and migrants.

Specifically, we identify three ways through which Australia can work towards equality of being in its relationship with Africa, Africans and African countries: (1) Australia should move to become a Republic, including a formal Treaty with Indigenous Australia; (2) Australia should develop a comprehensive strategy that meaningfully integrates the growing African diaspora into Australian foreign-policy making concerning Africa and cross-cutting issues affecting the African continent; and (3) the Australian government and resources companies should use their outsized influence in the African mining industry to ensure that activities in that sector contribute to meeting Africa's human, economic, and environmental development needs.

A Republic of Australia with a Formal Treaty with Indigenous Australia

Works such as Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking after Empire* demonstrate that not all self-determination campaigns bring an end to Empire.¹⁰⁶ However, formally decoupling Australia from its imperial connection to the British Metropole would accelerate the reconciliation process between Indigenous Australia and white Australia.

¹⁰² See Abstract, William Mfumu, “Decoloniality as a combative ontology in African development,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development*, eds. S. O. Olorunfoba and T. Falola (Cham: Springer, 2018).

¹⁰³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), p. 170.

¹⁰⁴ Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*.

¹⁰⁵ Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” *Social Text*, Vol 28, 2 (103) (2010), p. 152.

¹⁰⁶ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

Moreover, it would align with pan-Africanism's quest for the decolonisation of the world. No gesture would ensure this more than making Australia a Republic.¹⁰⁷ In this vein, historical flashpoints in contemporary Australia, such as abolishing the white Australia policy, the Mabo Decision and Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology to Indigenous Australians and the Stolen Generations, are essential, but insufficient. Here, we must acknowledge the role that African migrants inadvertently play in legitimising, hence perpetuating, the settler colonial status of Australia, a country that thrives on a "stolen land of Indigenous people."¹⁰⁸

Indeed, pan-Africanism, a transcendental African ethno-political philosophy, eschews the coloniality of continental and diasporic Africa. African Australians must therefore be aware of the space they have come to call home, including its history of colonisation and its current settler-colonial status. Lest they become accomplices in the evil that they rejected in homes of origin. Thus, to stay true to their anti-colonial convictions, the occasional greeting of "hello brother" that Africans receive from Indigenous Australians in the streets — and the feeling of acceptance that comes with it — should not end there. Instead, it must translate into African migrants' spirited commitment and deliberate involvement in the struggle for Indigenous independence. In this sense, this article is a self-reflexive exercise meant to purge Australia of coloniality, along with any tendency of Africans in Australia to be oblivious to the fact of Australia's settler colonial status. For us, and indeed for scholars in this collection, the call to decolonise IR in Australia is a critique of "a structure that one cannot not (wish) to inhabit."¹⁰⁹ It is a saying "an impossible 'no' to a structure which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately."¹¹⁰

Comprehensive Domestic Programs and Foreign Policy on Africa and Africans

The dominant view among scholars on Australia-Africa relations is that Labor governments are much better with Africa than Coalition governments. However, it does depend on which Labor or Coalition government one has in mind. The Fraser coalition government (1975–83) had far more interest in Africa than its successor, the Labor government under Bob Hawke (1983–91).¹¹¹ Still, Labor governments have appeared to generally have much more sustained interest in Africa than Coalition governments, at least recently.¹¹² One example is the Rudd-Gillard government (2007–13) which had a much more significant presence in Africa than the subsequent Coalition governments (2013–22). Another is that since the Labor Party came to power in 2022, Africa has returned to Australia's foreign policy radar, with Assistant Foreign Minister Tim Watts visiting several African countries.

However, both Labor and Coalition parties have had somewhat inconsistent approaches that travelled similar patterns. Indeed, Australia longest-serving Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has argued that Australia's relationship with Africa has been episodic and not strategic.¹¹³ Australia's political parties could leverage the

¹⁰⁷ Teela Reid, "Recognising Symbolism: Why a Republic Is Part of the Resolution," *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, Vol 8, 16 (2015), pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁸ Laura J. Shepherd, "The Future(s) of International Relations" (speech) (Canberra: Australian National University, 23 May 2022), <https://www.anu.edu.au/events/the-futures-of-international-relations>

¹⁰⁹ Ilan Kapoor, "Hyper-Self-Reflexive Development? Spivak on Representing the Third World 'Other,'" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 25, 4 (2004), pp. 627–47.

¹¹⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 60, cited in Kapoor, "Hyper-Self-Reflexive Development?"

¹¹¹ We thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for pointing this out.

¹¹² Pijovic "The Commonwealth."

¹¹³ David Mickler, "Building the Infrastructure for Sustainable Engagement," *Australia's Paydirt*, Vol 1, 307 (2022), p. 38; Pijović, *Australia and Africa*.

increasing number of people of African origin in Australia. Australia should develop a comprehensive strategy for meaningfully integrating representatives of the African diaspora living in Australia into Australian policy concerning Africa and issues affecting the African continent. This would further conceptualise Australian national identity in multicultural, rather than white monocultural, terms and shape Australia's "national interests" in Africa. This would likely result in international relationships grounded in better understanding and mutual respect rather than narrowly conceived interests and policies. The idea of Australia's relationship with the whole continent is based, arguably, on a racialised colonial assumption. However, in line with the pan-African ideal espoused above, doing so is in solidarity with pan-Africanism's commitment to transcendental Africanity.

The comprehensive strategy of engaging Africa and the African diaspora should start with "securing the base" by granting racial dignity to African Australians. Racial dignity, as defined by Gatwiri and Mapedzahama,¹¹⁴ is "the immutable, unconditional worth of Blac/k people as human beings. To be racially dignified is to be seen through a humanised lens, and to be afforded basic respect, compassion and recognition in interpersonal and systemic contexts." Just as authentic African history written and practised from the ground up is necessary for a decolonised Africa that is "visible in the globe,"¹¹⁵ so should a respected and dignified African in Australia be a foundation for a decolonised Australia-Africa relations. Racial dignity for African-Australians and Indigenous Australians must be pursued across all sectors and levels of Australian society.

It must, however, start with knowing Africa, by making Africa more visible in classrooms and lecture halls as part of the broader agenda for CRT into national curricula. This will make room for more diversity in schools and universities. Racial dignity must also include a commitment to "both-ways acculturation" (transculturation),¹¹⁶ (cultural export and import), including admission of Africa's contribution to a better Australia through ideas. Establishing a national centre for African research and engagement and a national-level Australia-Africa council will be crucial in building the necessary national social and policy infrastructure. Racial dignity will also entail a decolonised tertiary education. Decolonising international relations means decolonising International Relations as a discipline towards epistemic justice. IR in Australia must move away from its Western-centric episteme towards epistemic humility by de-silencing Africa's voice in knowing itself. Much as a subset of indigenising the academy, as Cueva et al. and Clapton in this collection argue, this will bring Africa in when teaching and studying IR.

Nevertheless, as Branwen Gruffydd Jones notes, decolonising IR "cannot be construed only in terms of seeking non-Western narratives and elements. IR's imagination and mythological foundation involves a double manoeuvre of silencing and denying the historicity of non-Western societies and idealising a distorted history of the West — more specifically Europe."¹¹⁷ It also involves failing to acknowledge that it originates from the "Rest." As a foremost African-African scholar of

¹¹⁴ Gatwiri and Mapedzahama, "Pedagogy or 'Trauma Porn'?"

¹¹⁵ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Securing the Base: Making Africa Visible in the Globe* (London: Seagull Books, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Catherine Manathung, "Moments of Transculturation and Assimilation: Postcolonial Explorations of Supervision and Culture," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, Vol 48, 4 (2011), pp. 367–76.

¹¹⁷ Branwen Gruffydd Jones, "Introduction: International Relations, Eurocentrism and Imperialism," in *Decolonizing International Relations*, ed., B. G. Jones (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 8.

international relations and security, Samuel Makinda argued,¹¹⁸ when Africans have come out with novel ideas, hegemonic IR has failed to acknowledge them. He cites the case of Ali Mazrui, who, he argues, was the first scholar to use eclecticism in IR.¹¹⁹ However, Mazrui is hardly acknowledged. Thus, a part of the problems of IR is its failure to acknowledge African intellectual contribution. While the exposition of the myths of the origin of IR continues to get exposed,¹²⁰ a commitment against epistemic fundamentalism in IR requires a confrontation with “the hegemonic perspective with unassimilable difference, one that cannot be rendered compatible or incorporated but that, if accepted, makes it impossible to retain the dominant account.”¹²¹ Admitting, as we do, that IR is an “imperial discipline”¹²² is a first step towards forcing the discipline to shun the façade of its “universal” and admit that there are other ways of knowing. This ensures IR’s move towards what Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to as “pluriversal epistemology”¹²³ which will allow the discipline’s “diversification and Africanisation in fundamental ways.”¹²⁴ As IR scholars, this means a self-reflection on any iota of epistemic arrogance in us by finding ways to blend with the depth and diversity that makes up Australian society based on respect.

On the international level, Australia must look beyond foreign policy and strategic culture based on ideology (affiliation with the West) and geography (its location in Australasia), as espoused in statements like the AIIA speech by Julie Bishop in 2015.¹²⁵ However, issues like climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of China have exposed the tenuous nature of Australia’s relationship with its traditional allies and neighbours. For instance, as Former Foreign Minister Bob Carr asserts, Australia is “challenged” in Asia-Pacific as China comes too close for comfort.¹²⁶ In response, he advocated for Australia as a “creative middle power” with many friends, including in Africa. However, given current regional and global circumstances, this statement implied the need for some novelty in Australia’s foreign policy, including interventions that decolonise Australia-Africa relations. High-level political statements and decisions indicate that this is possible.

¹¹⁸ Samuel M. Makinda, “Reading and Writing International Relations,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 54, 3 (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2000), pp. 389–401; Samuel M. Makinda, “Eclecticism as a theoretical approach: the pillar of Ali A. Mazrui’s intellectual legacy,” *Critical Perspectives on Culture and Globalisation: Intellectual Legacy of Ali Mazrui* (2017), pp. 213–26.

¹¹⁹ See Ali A. Mazrui, “Eclecticism as an Ideological Alternative: An African Perspective,” *Alternatives*, Vol 1, 4 (1975), pp. 465–86.

¹²⁰ See Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501701887>

¹²¹ Sandra Halperin, “International Relations Theory and the Hegemony of Western Conceptions of Modernity,” in *Decolonizing International Relations*, ed., B. G. Jones (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 44.

¹²² Davis, Alexander Davis, Vineet Thakur, and Peter Vale, *The Imperial Discipline* (London: Pluto, 2020); Zondi, “Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory.”

¹²³ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century,” *The Thinker*, Vol 48, 10 (2013), pp. 10–15.

¹²⁴ Zondi, “Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory,” p. 18.

¹²⁵ In her address at the 2015 AIIA National Conference in Canberra, Hon. Julie Bishop declared that Australia tended “to be internationalist in pursuit of our (Western) values, regionalist in terms of our interests.” See The Hon Julie Bishop MP, “Australian Foreign Policy: Regional or Global?”

¹²⁶ Personal conversation with author (Muhammad Dan Suleiman), 15 March 2022.

Australia has increased its diplomatic missions in Africa from five, starting with South Africa in 1946, to nine presently.¹²⁷ In 1973, after Labor took office following 23 years in opposition, Prime Minister Whitlam accused the previous government of giving Australian foreign policy and racist and militarist outlook and wanted to change things.¹²⁸ Similarly, the Australian Greens, although yet to form a government, appear to favour a more comprehensive foreign policy that includes Africa and aligns with African concerns such as UNSC reform.¹²⁹ Advisory bodies such as the Advisory Group on Australia-Africa Relations (AGAAR), which was considered “a new paradigm for Australian-African relations,”¹³⁰ were also established to advise the Commonwealth on African issues. This means Australian foreign policy could be malleable enough to make room for Africa on Australia’s strategic priorities list. Several Australian prime ministers have also tried to take Africa more seriously, although inconsistently.

However, the above evidence shows that Australia still carries colonial baggage to Africa, hence the need to decolonise the above relations with the continent. Decolonised Australia-Africa relations should look beyond engagements that see Africa as a site for occasional diplomatic handshakes. As recent developments in globalisation, immigration, technology, economic crises, and transnational crime continue to bring Africa closer to Australia,¹³¹ a foreign policy tilt towards the Indo-Pacific will open Australia up to the numerous opportunities that Africa brings to the world while at the same time remaining a key player in “our region.” As a sign of solidarity in Africa’s quest for equality in the international system, Australia should support Africa’s agenda for equal representation in the UN system, and continental African frameworks such as Agenda 2063 in an environment of mutual respect and equability of being.

Mining Sector Reform for Ethical Human Development in Africa

Despite *ad hocism* in Australia’s interest in Africa, the resource sector has been one area where there has been greater consistency. There are many reasons not to glorify mining in Africa by foreign companies due to the history of exploitation, some of which have been outlined above. Some mining companies are involved in the destruction of Indigenous lands and cultural heritage while undermining environmental concerns. However, in an increasingly globalised economy, even as nationalistic tendencies are on the rise, foreign commercial interests are expected to continue to grow in African countries, given the continent’s vast mineral deposits. While many mining companies have been agents of destruction and exploitation in African countries, Australia could leverage its vast experience and some elements of good practice in this field to its and Africa’s favour. The Australian government and

¹²⁷ Tanya Lyons, “Australian Foreign Policy towards Africa,” in *Middle Power Dreaming: Australia in World Affairs 2006–2010*, eds. J. Cotton and J. Ravenhill (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 186.

¹²⁸ J. D. B. Miller, “Australian Foreign Policy: Constraints and Opportunities-II,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)*, Vol 50, 3 (1974), pp. 425–38.

¹²⁹ Senator Scott Ludlam, “Australian foreign policy: the greens approach,” *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 3 June 2016, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australian-foreign-policy-the-greens-approach/>

¹³⁰ Dominic Piper, “AGAAR: A New Paradigm for Australian-African Relations,” *Australia’s Paydirt*, Vol 1, 232 (2015), pp. 20–5.

¹³¹ Nikola Pijović, “What does Australia want in Africa?,” *African Portal*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.africanportal.org/features/what-does-australia-want-africa/>

Australian-listed companies should use their outsized influence in the African mining industry to ensure that activities in that sector contribute to meeting Africa's human, economic, and environmental development needs, in line with the African Mining Vision and other mining regulatory programs such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Convening the West Africa Mining Security (WAMS) Conference in Accra since 2019 by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Australian Mineral and Energy Group shows that Australia is considering consolidating its interest in mining in Africa. As part of interventions such as WAMS, Australian resource companies operating in the continent must be committed to good practices consistent with Africa's ongoing search for human development, economic emancipation, and agency in the international system.

Conclusion

In this reflective and imaginative article, we have argued that despite Australia claiming to have “no colonial baggage” in its relations with Africa, a critical reading points to the contrary. We have used decoloniality theory to show this by exposing long-standing patterns of the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being in Australia's relationship with continental and diasporic Africa and Africans. We have demonstrated coloniality in Australia-Africa relations by focussing on dominant white Australia's relations with diasporic Africa as burdens of Blackness subjected to racism, discrimination, and othering. On the international level, we have demonstrated how Australia and Australian actors relate to Africa through whiteness, exploitation, and *ad hocism*. While acknowledging Australia's recent attempts to engage Africa more, we also provide ways that Australia could decolonise and move towards decolonising its relationship with Africa, its people, cultures, and institutions. We suggest Australia should relate with the countries of Africa in the spirit of “equality of being” devoid of the long patterns of coloniality that continue to shape social, economic, and political relations both at the domestic and international levels.

We note here the potential role of Africans in legitimising Australia's settler colonial status and its continuing dispossession of Indigenous Australians' dignity. Here, we argue for an Australian Republic, signing a formal treaty with Indigenous Australians and the abolition of 26 January as a national day to be celebrated. While this gesture alone will not remove the disparity between First Nations people and the violation of their “Being” immediately, it will help facilitate reconciliation between them and white Australia. Since decolonisation is about the creation of a human world for all,¹³² First Nations people's independence and decolonising Australia-Africa relations serve the same agenda: creating a world devoid of the coloniality of knowing, doing, and being black people.

The “equality of being” in Australia-Africa relations we imagine here would require a profound shift in attitudes, policies, and practices, recognising the intrinsic worth and contributions of African countries and migrants and engaging with them in a spirit of partnership, respect, and shared humanity.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No conflict of interest.

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¹³² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 170.