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A Critical Examination of Anti-Indian Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Abstract:

This dissertation is a critical examination of anti-Indian racism in post-apartheid South Africa. While racism presents an intractable problem for all racial groups in South Africa, this dissertation will show that Indian South Africans are especially framed by a specific racist discourse related to broad perceptions of economic exploitation within the context of redistributive and resource-allocation conflicts, political corruption, insularity and general lack of a socio-cultural 'fit' with the rest of South African society. This is not unique to present day South Africa and is (albeit in evolving ways) a long standing phenomenon. Key concerns addressed by the dissertation are: the lack of critical attention to the matter of anti-Indian racism, the historical origins of anti-Indian racism, the characteristics and dynamics of anti-Indian racism and its persistence in post-apartheid South Africa despite an avowed commitment of South Africa's new post-apartheid dispensation to a non-racial society.

This dissertation argues that a particular set of structural circumstances largely due to the confluence of the 'racial state' (Goldberg, 2001) with social forces of culture and identity have located Indian South Africans in a space of 'in-betweenity' (Bulhan, 1980) and that anti-Indian racism is promoted and continually reproduced by the status of Indian South Africans as 'in-betweeners'. The idea of 'in-betweenity' used in this dissertation is an adaptation of Bulhan's concept of 'cultural in-betweenity' in order to describe the different aspects (political, economic and socio-cultural) of the

intermediary role played by Indian South Africans in South Africa's socio-political order. The space of 'in-betweenity' occupied by Indian South Africans is seen to be one which is characterised by uncertainty, ambiguity and a perpetual testing of Indian South Africans in terms of their loyalty to South Africa as well as their authenticity in relation to indigenous South Africans.

Within the constraints of the methodological challenges posed by investigating sensitive research terrain, certain data sources were deployed in order to help critically understand and analyse anti-Indian racism in post-apartheid South Africa. The data sources help to support the overall argument advanced by this dissertation, i.e. that a set of structural circumstances engineered by the 'racial state' (Goldberg, 2001) in combination with forces such as identity and culture, have trapped Indian South Africans into a state of 'in-betweenity' (Bulhan, 1980) which has contributed to the continued development of anti-Indian racism in post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore the dissertation argues that a general environment of hostility and threat has forced Indian South Africans to imbibe negative perceptions and stereotypes in ways which reinforce a 'vicious cycle' of racism and continues to imprison Indian South Africans into the space of 'in-betweenity'.

A phenomenological approach was used in the dissertation to guide the methodology and ensure a commitment to qualitatively understanding the subjective nature of anti-Indian racism.

This dissertation contributes to the state of academic knowledge on anti-Indian racism by illuminating the historical origins of anti-Indian racism, the dynamics of contemporary anti-Indian racism and the reasons for its continued persistence in post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, the findings in this dissertation about the extent to which negative perceptions and stereotyping shapes and continues to sustain anti-Indian racism is an original contribution to academic knowledge about racism.