An Archival Turn for International Relations: Interrogating India’s Diplomatic History from the Postcolonial Archive

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This paper considers the ways in which postcolonial archives shape the writing of India’s foreign policy. It does so through analysis of both the ‘archival turn’ in cultural history, and a personal narrative of research at archives in London, Ottawa, Canberra and Delhi. While Western diplomats fought the Cold War, their Indian counterparts sought nonalignment, decolonization and resisted racist policies. Due to the structure of information and level of documentation at these postcolonial archives, work on Indian foreign policy has often reinforced the idea that India’s foreign policy was mediocre, weak, and even child-like. This is further buttressed by the comparative scarcity of sources at their equivalent in Delhi. I argue that this empirical void has led historians and IR theorists to maintain Eurocentric visions of global history by emphasizing the sources of the ‘North’ over the ‘South’, the colonizer over the colonized.

Introduction: ‘Global IR’ and North-South Relations

In recent years, IR scholars have recognised the need to ‘decolonize’ the discipline, or to make IR ‘global’ and to bridge the ‘North-South’ divide. These are all immensely worthwhile causes, and I am broadly supportive of all of them. Little, however, has been written on how this can methodologically be achieved, and few scholars have analysed the specific limitations that prevent IR being a global discipline. Here, I seek to address only one small element of this matter by looking at the ways in which diplomatic histories are written. In order to redress this imbalance within IR and its historical variant: diplomatic history, we need to document north-south interactions, bridge cultural differences and consider issues beyond the Cold War and top-level ‘hard’, militaristic diplomacy. This is a crucial element of any new global IR: writing histories which emphasize different issues, rather than assume, as IR generally has, that decolonization, race discrimination and colonialism is not part of the discipline. In order to achieve this, I analyse here my own ‘archive story’ of research in Ottawa, London, Canberra and Delhi, while seeking to explore the postcolonial issues between India and Australia and India and Canada. Before this,

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1 Paper presented at the ISA Global South Caucus in Singapore, January 2015. I am particularly indebted to my
2 For one of the first examples, see the collection: B. G. Jones (ed) Decolonizing International Relations
   (Lanham, 2006).
3 This is the theme for 2015’s ISA Global conference, suggesting strongly that ‘Global IR’ is one of the
dominant issues of this moment.
however, I will examine recent work predominately from cultural history, on the ‘archival turn’, to consider how archives shape knowledge and the experience of research.

**The Archival Turn and Diplomatic History**

Despite shifts in other forms of history, particularly cultural history, which I will consider below, for diplomatic history the perceived purpose of archival research has remained solely to read, photograph, copy and quote. This denies the position of the researcher as contemplative: considering their personal motivations for and experiences of writing history. A diplomatic historian or IR scholar visiting an archive, then, should not be thought of as simply accessing diplomatic information. Archives are sites of knowledge production rather than places where knowledge is stored and ‘discovered’.\(^5\) When writing global IR, cross-cultural experiences of diplomatic history are essential. Researchers cannot simply rely on American and British documentation as the ‘official’, most detailed record. Rather, writing global histories itself as an act is itself one such cross-cultural experience. This brings us to a rather uncomfortable matter: for all sorts of historical, economic and political factors, the documentation in ‘Northern’ archives, those in the US, Canada, Australia, the EU tend to be far better stocked, more ‘complete’, and with greater access for researches. As a result, writing global diplomatic histories armed only with a barefooted empiricism has tended to overemphasize the sources of the ‘North’ over the ‘South’, the colonizer over the colonized.

This is, in many ways, a personal essay: an attempt to consider and undermine assumptions about diplomatic history and IR through a consideration of my own time in Delhi, Ottawa, Canberra and Kew performing archival research into India’s unwritten relationships with Australia and Canada. This was a research project in which I looked into little known Indian diplomats and the ways in which they perceived these Others, how they experienced these countries and how they sought to challenge such assumptions about India. Few traces of these diplomats exist at the National Archives of India (NAI) leaving them out of diplomatic history and their work has generally been dismissed by IR theory as part of Nehruvian ‘moralizing’. My self-reflexive approach to writing here is unusual in IR and diplomatic history because it is assumed that the author is not or should not be part of the story. And yet, because it needs to encompass so many languages and cultures, global IR

and its researchers surly cannot assume that they simply transcend them. As such, when writing new diplomatic histories the researcher should not pretend to float above archival material as an objective arbiter of historical fact. This is particularly important because, as will be seen, the material circulation of dusty diplomatic paperwork not only shapes what history can be written, it can be understood as sites where international relations are performed, past and present. In order to achieve this goal, I first examine the archival turn in the contexts of both international relations and diplomatic history. Following this, I consider the ways in which the nature and structure of particular archives creates our historical knowledge of international politics.

**What is the Archival Turn?**

Though the ‘archival turn’ is relatively new, the examination of archiving is less so. Marxist historians have argued for the need to read against the ‘archival grain’, suggested the archive led the historian in a particular direction – the wrong direction. Those influenced by political economy and Marxism felt the need to write history ‘from the bottom up’. In such studies, archives are understood as sites that need to be breached. Rather, I draw influence primarily from Anne Stoler and Carolyn Steedman. Stoler argues for the need to read ‘along the archival grain’ and consider the structure of the archives and the direction in which they take historians, while Steedman considers the epistemology of the western archive.\(^6\)

Diplomatic history, by virtue of it being about ‘official’ events is particularly prone to assuming that its authors should be outside the text. Diplomatic history has generally been limited to the official archive, with the exception of some oral histories, and, of course, diplomat’s personal narratives. Social and cultural historians, however, have found exceptional resources outside of the official archive. As Antoinette Burton has suggested, the official archive inside the modern nation-state has been a key part of national security since the modern process of ‘archive rationalization’.\(^7\) The experience of the diplomatic historian, even though it is the most tethered to official archives, is yet to be thought of in this context.

Burton summarizes this issue succinctly when she writes:


\(^7\) Antoinette Burton, * Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing house, Home and History in Late Colonial India* (New York, 2003), p. 139.
at issue in the project of interrogating archival evidence – what counts, what doesn’t, where it is housed, who possesses it, and who lays claim to it as a political resource – is not theory, but the very power of historical explanation itself.\(^8\)

Burton speaks of a battle between the empiricist historian at the official archive as opposed to the social and cultural historian finding material in less ‘official’ archives everywhere. Given diplomatic histories tethering to the state, this battle is rarely played out. ‘Archive’ is used in many different ways, but it now commonly refers to the way the system of material objects and the system of knowledge/power operates together.\(^9\)

**Historical and Epistemic Anxieties**

In her consideration of archival epistemology, Carolyn Steedman focuses not the archival turn as much as Dust. Dust is ‘the immutable, obdurate set of beliefs about the material world, past and present, inherited from the nineteenth century, with which modern history-writing attempts to grapple; Dust is also the narrative principle of that writing; and Dust is the joke’.\(^10\) It originates from the 19\(^{th}\) century development of scientific, rationalist history and the development of the state. I am now allergic to this dust in both the literal and theoretical sense, yet still work through it.

Derrida first considered the archive as a site of state power in the 1980s and 1990s.\(^11\) For all their influence in critical, poststructuralist thought, Foucault and Derrida have long been critiqued by postcolonial theorists for their limited discussion of colonialism and colonial histories of the state.\(^12\) Derrida did occasionally discuss his Algerian heritage, but never quite explored it in his writing. He describes the sickness of the archive as to do with its foundation and the rationalising power of the state. It is the decision to hold each and every dull piece of bureaucracy of the state, lock it away for 30 years and index and arrange it meticulously (whether anyone is interested enough to read it or not).\(^13\) Steedman describes it vividly as the

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\(^8\) Ibid.


\(^10\) Steedman, *Dust*, pp. ix.


\(^12\) For this critique in IR, see S. Krishna, ‘Review: The Importance of Being Ironic: A Postcolonial View on Critical International Relations Theory’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 385-417

\(^13\) Derrida, *Archive Fever*. 
feverish desire as ‘a kind of sickness unto death… for the archive… not so much to enter it and use it, as to have it, or just for it to be there, in the first place.’

Much of the literature on the archival turn, though, has been written in the context of studying western archives. It is argued, as originally suggested by Foucault and Derrida that the western states rationalism has led to a desire to collect and store everything produced by the state. Foucault and Derrida themselves, however, in looking at the development of the state ignored colonial histories. Most of the authors who have considered the archival turn in the past decade have likewise focused on European subjects. Most, including Stoler also performed their historical research on the colonial period, rather than the postcolonial encounter.

Stoler has written primarily on the ways in which the Dutch archived their time in Indonesia, rather than the way Indonesia picked up archival practices from the Dutch and implemented them after independence.

Derrida’s archive fever was not so much something experienced by the historian, but a function of the state. The ‘fever’ lies in the impulse to collect everything. For Steedman, though, the historian suffers a different form of archival fever, a similar anxiety to read and find everything. She describes her own fever, lying awake at night in a ‘cheap’ London hotel room, unable to sleep due to her meagre surroundings and the anxiety brought on by a sense that she could not afford to stay long enough to read everything. I have had similar experiences in London and elsewhere, feeling that missing the crucial text may render research a failure. This was not the case in Delhi.

Only a small portion of this work has considered non-western archives. Self-reflexive archival analyses have been common in feminist history. In an excellent analysis, Jeff Sahadeo has considered the post-soviet politics of access to information in Uzbekistan, and the ways in which Western and Uzbek historians experienced this transition.

Durba Ghosh has described her experiences studying Indian women’s intimate relationships with British men in the 18th century through. Archivists in Delhi and Calcutta denied that any such

15 Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.
relationships existed. She recounts being asked by archivists in Calcutta if, as she was a young, single, high-caste Indian woman, her parents knew what she was up to. In the UK, examination of the Indian Office Records found little trace of such relationships, showing how little the colonial administration cared for the subaltern Indian woman. She argues that:

In their own ways, Britain’s and India’s archives produce silences that reinforce each other on a topic that is, if nothing else, a history of transgresive behaviour that threatens the… racial purity of the family and the nation.\(^\text{18}\)

The research was deeply politicized in both India and the UK, as was my own. In Australia, Canada and the UK, conservative politicians seek to engage India all emphasize liberal values and visions of shared history to tie these states together. They do so without a sense of irony or self-awareness. Narendra Modi has begun to use the same language, but in Australia at least, drew his example from the ‘First War of Independence’.\(^\text{19}\) Before Modi, Manmohan Singh began to talk of India as part of the ‘English Speaking world’.\(^\text{20}\)

I had a decidedly different experience working in Delhi to elsewhere. The Indian state and the NAI do not have quite the same affliction as that identified by Derrida. This anxiety of storing everything may exist now in India, but given the lack of materials saved in the past, does not seem to have existed in the decades immediately after independence. Such is the secrecy of the MEA today that it is impossible to tell. If the traditional, western, diplomatic historian feels the desire to find and read everything so as to reconstruct the past as truthfully and fully as possible, they surely struggle with writing detailed diplomatic histories of India. Even though the ‘great man’ of India’s foreign policy Jawaharlal Nehru’s thoughts are extremely well-documented,\(^\text{21}\) he could not be everywhere, and his private papers are largely unexplored by researchers due to secrecy. That Nehru did not ensure his private files would be made available is somewhat unusual. Most diplomats from western backgrounds who feel they played a key role in international politics ensure that their work can be read after a certain period of years. As a result, hosts of lesser diplomats have left only minor traces, depriving us of the nuances of Indian foreign policy. I find this lack of archival history to be


\(^{21}\) See the many-volume collection: J. Nehru, Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru.
complicit in the construction of the narrative that Nehruvian foreign policy was weak, too focused on immaterial things, or, as Ganguly implies, childlike.\textsuperscript{22}

The transition from WWII to Cold War, we are told, was the central shift in world order in the 1945. This is an absurdly Eurocentric reading of world history. The Cold War, we are taught, might best be thought of as a ‘Cold peace’ (at least Europe was finally stable).\textsuperscript{23} Decolonial violence in South Africa, Algeria, Vietnam and Korea are silenced by this discourse. The transition from colonial world to postcolonial world was ongoing at the time of the Cold War, but this was not ‘hard power’ enough for us to study at the time. As Nicholas Guilhot has argued, though, that by writing decolonization out of IR, realism intentionally silenced colonial issues from international politics.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, we cannot make IR global just by tweaking it, we need to rewrite the discipline. As Sabaratnam has argued, now that we are aware of our Eurocentric discipline and the theoretical constructs which define it, we must have the courage to abandon them.\textsuperscript{25}

Nehru’s foreign policy has been deeply politicized in contemporary India. It has been dismissed for it is so-called pointless moralizing and neglect of hard power and material capabilities by IR theorists\textsuperscript{26} and Hindu nationalists alike. Jaswant Singh’s vivid interpretation stands out:

The weight of so many centuries of servitude has imparted to India such an acute sense of hearing that quite often it hears insults where none exist, or are even implied… India has tended to carry many chips on its shoulder, almost always moralistic, needlessly arrogant, argumentative, mistaking such attitude as being an assertion of national pride.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} S. Ganguly, ‘Indian Foreign Policy Grows Up’, \textit{World Policy Journal} (2003/4), 20, 41-46
  \item \textsuperscript{27} J. Singh, \textit{In Service of Emergent India: A Call to Honour} (Delhi, 1998), pp. 276-277.
\end{itemize}
Researching India’s diplomatic history with its former colonizers and its settler-colonial Commonwealth partners in the NAI on foreign policy runs into archival secrecy, the mismanagement of information and, for the western researcher, different assumptions about what archives are supposed to do. This is further convoluted by the ways in which empirical diplomatic history and much of IR theory suggest that examination of India’s diplomacy with these states is either too lost to examine, or simply not part of the story.

The Archival Turn and International Relations Theory

Although there has been a general ‘archival turn’ across the social sciences and humanities, but also in everyday perceptions and interactions (ie. Internet). That the archival turn, and, indeed self-reflexive storytelling has not influenced IR is not immediately surprising, as its implications and modes of analysis at first glance appear detached from the ways in which states relate to one another. The structure of these various archives is complicit in the histories which have been written. Diplomatic history and IR theory are intertwined. Both began with the rationalist assumptions of realism and empiricism – scientific historical knowledge and positivist assumptions about world order.

Where diplomatic historians turn to the archive, IR scholars turn to theory. After all, if all states behave in the same, self-interested manner, as our traditional disciplinary heavyweights have generally held, why bother going into detail about what an individual diplomat or leader thought of the state they were working with? Theoretical knowledge has been seen as a more than ample substitute for the knowledge produced by the state. Even then, most archival research has been performed by diplomatic historians has been thoroughly influenced by the empirical tradition in history. If historians have an empiricist archive fever, IR has a theoretical fever. Like the state seeking to hold all its information and arrange it perfectly, whether no one visits it or not, positivist IR has long sought the perfect theory to explain the world in abstraction, not so much to apply it as to have it. Much of this theorizing though, as Sabaratnam has argued, has privileged a ‘Western distinctiveness… which takes Western agency and ideas as the only serious site of politics’. 28

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Only recently has the ‘cultural turn’ become influential in diplomatic history, though it has existed elsewhere in history for some decades. However, as the various forms of constructivist IR grow, and are further influenced by postcolonial critique and perspectives from the ‘Global South’, the idea that all states act in the same manner has become increasingly unstable. As IR reaches out to the ‘Global South’, seeks new and more inclusive visions of international politics, we need to write new and better diplomatic histories and, at the same time, think critically about the ways in which these histories are best written. Here, though, we run into a serious impediment: historical sources in the ‘Global South’ tend to be seen as less ‘complete’ and ‘difficult’ to work with, rather than examples of different practice. To write a new global, decolonized IR, our sense of history must be as inclusive as possible, which means refusing to allow the level of documentation available in the traditional bastions of IR overwhelm the scarcer and more ‘difficult’ sources in the Global South.

The failure to critically consider the archive, and failing to realize that the state archive was originally a western creation, and that the ‘archive fever’ of the state is a particularly western affliction, leads to particular problems. This has led much IR theory to accept uncritically deeply problematic visions of postcolonial India. I argue here that drawing a connection between the ‘archival turn’ and writing a decolonized, global IR can allow us to write more inclusive histories of international relations. In doing so, I will rely on examples from my own archival experiences when researching India’s relationships with its colonial powers and its settler-colonial ‘siblings’ following its independence in 1947. This is illustrated particularly clearly when examining India’s efforts to resist racial discrimination in the postcolonial era. The NAI hasn’t set out show discrimination. They haven’t tried to archive it, keep it in a way that makes it traceable. This historical issue has largely been ignored, which I see as caused by the lack of Indian archival sources, the overwhelming availability (and ease of access) of western archival sources and particularly western, rationalist assumptions about what IR and diplomatic history are supposed to be. I do not seek to narrate these relationships, rather, I seek to narrate my experience pursing the history of these relationships.

The National Archives of India and the writing of India’s diplomatic history

Several western historians had warned me about the NAI. Some suggested I not bother. Every working day for three months, the same man signs me into the reading room. Every day, he asks my name, my address and my purpose. I am never quite sure if he recognizes me, because he says my name as slowly and carefully on the last day as he does the first. Inside, two battered old computers allow me to search the catalogue. It is not possible to search the catalogue from elsewhere. I felt a sense of anxiety much of the first week, just hoping to receive some relevant documents. This was the empirically trained historian within me, believing a lack of documents to be a research failure (perhaps on my part). An archivist speaks to me each day and answers my questions as briefly as she can, and does so in Hindi (a language I sadly have not yet had time to study). Only after the first week, does she begin to answer me in English. Often, the archival staff chatters in the reading room, drinking cups of tea, and occasionally allow more important researchers to photograph documents (which the institution explicitly forbids). In this sense, the culture of the NAI reflects Indian society: a faint veneer of chaos hides from the untrained eye strict rules and hierarchies, in which those far enough up the hierarchy can transgress. As a slightly scruffy-looking, white PhD student, I was not allowed such transgressions.

The perusal of the original MEA indexes from the 1940s and 1950s provides a list of each file produced and archived by the Indian High Commission in Australia and Canada. Based on my own searches, only about 10 per cent of the documents listed in these indexes are available to researchers. Several files which are available have a ‘destroy after x date’ written on their cover, which has then been crossed out, and the files saved. It is only possible to search one word at a time: a search for ‘white Australia’ comes up with every document with either ‘white’ or ‘Australia’ in the title. I doubt it is possible to piece together which files have been destroyed, which simply remain classified, and which have simply been lost. Several documents which have been listed by the MEA as available were also not provided to me upon request, and may have been misplaced or misfiled.\(^{30}\) Perhaps most North Indian researchers would have been able to challenge these non-findings, but there existed a language barrier between myself and the archivists, making it difficult to complain. Fortunately for myself, however, there was no language barrier between myself and the diplomats: all the diplomatic documents were produced in English.

\(^{30}\) For a full list of which files are declassified at by the MEA, and open at the NAI, see: 
http://www.idsa.in/resources/ListofdeclassifiedfilesoftheMinistryofExternalAffairsfrom19031972.html,
Doing archival research in Delhi is much slower than it is in other archives, but it is, of course, not impossible. After a few weeks of work, an Indian researcher tells me that he once saw Ramachandra Guha – perhaps India’s best-known historian – at the NAI, and he was given the entire staff’s attention. With the right contacts, also, scholars have a stronger chance of accessing the private files held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library: those of Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon, which require approval from the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Culture, or even Sonia Gandhi.\textsuperscript{31} Foreign researchers require a letter from their government’s mission to Delhi and from their home institution to access the NAI at all. India’s past, amidst the rise of Hindu Nationalism and particularly the position of Jawaharlal Nehru’s foreign policy, is deeply politicized. This can be most clearly viewed in the effort of Hindu Nationalists to discredit and ban work perceived as critical of Hinduism, most notably Wendy Doniger.\textsuperscript{32} These checks place a sense of surveillance over the researcher, albeit not nearly to the level of those described by Sahadeo in post-Soviet Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{33} Numerous other figures of Indian diplomacy have their private papers closed by their family. This process requires the scholar to be an ‘insider’ to access certain information, which again shapes what can be written and would surely be very different experience of research, one I am not well connected enough to attempt.

Despite the many difficulties of access, the material held at the NAI sheds important light on Indian diplomacy. Its sources paint a picture of Indian diplomats grappling with a fearful, racist Australia, which, though connected to India through the dying imperial link, was unwilling to engage it. Similarly, they show an India impressed with Canada’s willingness to be open, but frustrated by its ignorance of India. At a time when India-Australia and India-Canada relations are framed in a discourse of shared history with one another, this is an important reminder of the colonial past. One high commissioner to Australia, Daya Singh Bedi complained that under the new Menzies’ Government ‘foreign policy will, more or less be dictated by London and they are all out to have the friendliest of relations with the United States of America.’\textsuperscript{34} From the Indian diplomat’s perspectives,

\textsuperscript{33} Sahadeo, ‘‘There is no future’’.
India’s relationships with Canada and Australia were defined by their perceptions of these states as being ignorant about India, and believing that such stereotypes might prevent serious engagement.

India and Australia at this time struggled to understand one another, with each holding very different perspectives on world politics. Australia’s foreign minister under Ben Chifley, Herb ‘Doc’ Evatt’s commented following in Australia’s parliament: So far from Prime Minister India criticized the White Australia Policy he supports it. That is my reading of Mr. Nehru’s statement and I think that is quite clear’. Upon hearing this misinterpretation, a newspaper in Calcutta mocked the Australian external affairs minister interpretation of Nehru’s light criticism of the White Australia policy:

Perhaps it was a telepathic process - the Australian ministers’ mind actioned on the mind of the distant Indian Prime Minister through emotional influence and he perceived that his precious policy found an echo in the mind of Pandit Nehru. The latter part of his statement suggests that he might have arrived at his wonderful conclusion through a negative process. Pandit Nehru, Dr. Evatt said, had not criticized the Australian policy. So the Doctor concludes he supports it. How infallible the argument is…. So the conscience is clear and the country is safe. An irreproachable logic indeed!

The sense of incredulousness at how Nehru could be so thoroughly misunderstood comes through most strongly here.

Elsewhere, India’s General Kodandera Cariappa, new to the game of professional diplomacy, and so spoke out against the White Australia policy. He did so only private at first, writing in an annual report that: ‘Australia, as far as I could gather… seems to be obsessed with the fear that Communism is almost at her door-steps and her security, therefore, is very gravely in danger.’ He continued:

In everything they say or do, I frequently hear, to the extent of being tired or hearing, such expressions ‘we must maintain our high standards of living and therefore we must have only such people living with us who have our high

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35 Telegram from Hicomind, Canberra to Foreign, New Delhi, February 15, 1949, at National Archives of India, White Policy of Australia, File No. 208(2) – L.A.N.Z, p. 27
standards ... I have often asked Australians what exactly this means ... no one has given me a satisfactory answer.\textsuperscript{38}

Cariappa, having stayed in Australia for three years after creating a considerable press furore after he was (perhaps erroneously) reported in the Queensland press as having argued regarding the White Australia policy, ‘what you people are doing is driving the people of India and Pakistan away from the British Commonwealth and into the arms of Communism.’\textsuperscript{39}

His remarks were greeted with considerable anger in the Australian press, which ran amok with accusations of his meddling in Australia’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{40} A week or so later, an editorial in the Argus argued that now that some time had passed there might be a discussion on the White Australia policy without ‘wanting to fling off our coats and punch General Cariappa and other critics on the nose.’ The editorial continued that ‘...it is about time that Australians, like any family which is doing something to irritate the near neighbors, took a good look at the White Australia policy in the light of today’s realities.’\textsuperscript{41} This column was saved by Cariappa, and placed in with his personal papers. It shows us both the defensive attitude of Australia towards is policy, and the sense of fury Cariappa’s comments received.

Several years after his public critique of the white Australia policy, Cariappa departed Australia, having travelled far and wide trying to raise the profile of India. He wrote a public message to the Australians who had so frustrated him, to argue that: ‘India is not the land of snakes, mosquitoes, beggars and rope-tricksters only, as some imagine it to be, as Australia is not merely a land of Kangaroos and Koala Bears.’\textsuperscript{42} The Australian diplomats in India, as I had read already in Canberra, sometimes found the Indians to be difficult to deal with, perplexing and irrational: tinged with colonial stereotypes. I found such words from a long-

\textsuperscript{38} Cariappa, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{39} On the copy of the Indian Archives, General Cariappa has placed brackets over this part of the quote and written “I did not say this” after it. Though I cannot confirm this, I find it highly unlikely that Cariappa would have made this comment. Kodandera M. Cariappa, quoted in The Courier-Mail, June 23 1954, at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 2.
\textsuperscript{41} “White, or ‘Off-White’ – It’s Vital Now”, in The Argus (Melbourne), 2 July 1954, at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 1.
\textsuperscript{42} K. M. Cariappa, ‘A message to Australians by General K. M. Cariappa, on the Eve of his Departure from Australia to India’, 15 April, 1956 at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 55A, pp. 310-311.
departed diplomat to be deeply heartening, but such stereotypes have yet to dissipate, and can even be reinforced by the failure to work at the NAI.

Indian depictions of Canada are somewhat different, albeit they are still framed within the same discourse of ignorance, education and fear of the Other. Apart from Ryan Touhey’s excellent work on Canadian perceptions of India and Pakistan, little has been written on the perception of India and its role in the relationship. Even this work, though, is predominantly on Canadian stereotyping of South Asians, rather than Indian perceptions of Canada.

Hardit Singh Malik was the first Indian High Commissioner to Canada, although there is barely a trace of his time there at the NAI. He went on to a fine career at the UN. His finest achievement in Canada, though, was negotiating a citizenship for people of Indian origin in Canada, but to read about this one must come across his recently published autobiography, or travel to the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. Generally speaking, the sentiment of Canadians towards India is one of friendliness and this has been enhanced by the fact that India is now a dominion and so a member of “the family”.

Malik had cut his teeth in the Indian Army, and flew planes over WWI with Lester Pearson who went on to become Canadian external affairs minister while Malik was stationed at Ottawa.

He was appalled by racial discrimination, friendly to Canada and believed in the ideals of a multi-racial Commonwealth.

Santdas Kirpalani argued commented that ‘[t]he ignorance regarding us in Canada is, of course, abysmal and the process of education has to be a continuous one.’ He continued:

It is amazing how little knowledge of India there is in this country even amongst the intelligent and educated people. But there is today a great desire to gain more knowledge of India. It is not curiosity over what had come to be known as a Land of Mystery or Mysticism. It is a genuine desire to get to know her great people.

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44 H. S. Malik, A Little Work, A Little Play (Delhi, 2010).
45 H. S. Malik, ‘Political Summary, October 1947’, in ‘High Commissioner for India in Canada, Monty Reports for 1947’ at NAI, F 20/47-05III.
Kirpalani, like Cariappa, was deeply aware of the perception of India as mysterious or unknowable. His thoughts on the country were nuanced, commenting that Canada was unsure of exactly how postcolonial the world had become:

‘It might be said with some truth that while Canada is a member of the Commonwealth, there seems to be a great uncertainty as to the exact nomenclature: some say Commonwealth, some say British Commonwealth and some say the Empire and yet other diehards continue to say British Empire.’

Kirpalani’s later exploits included the negotiation of a deal with the Canadians to allow a small quota of Indians to emigrate to Canada every year. Sadly, very little of this story can be read from India.

Ramji R. Saskena came to Canada not long after the immigration agreement had been agreed, and Indians had been emigrating to Canada. He argued in 1955 that: ‘In view of the democratic traditions of the country, it is natural that her sympathies are on the side of the Western Democracies, but Canada does try to judge each issue on its merits instead of defining its attitude in accordance with preconceived prejudices.’ Canada had become seen in India as a far more open and virtuous society. These statements came at a time when Escott Reid was in India, pursuing what he felt was a ‘special relationship’.

On the Indian side of this relationship, Canada’s liberal internationalism and independent streak in its foreign policy appealed to India. This is quite a contrast with the perception of India in Australia. At least by being willing to learn, the Canadians, despite their ‘abysmal ignorance’ of India had been able to impress India somewhat. Saskena went on: ‘It would be more true to say that Canada to-day is a bridge between the Commonwealth and her American neighbor, and that… the country generally acts boldly, courageously and independently.’

Saskena may have praised Canada here, but he was regarded with caution by the Canadians. He embarked on an attack on elements of the quota system negotiated by Kirpalani. Escott Reid dismissed him as:

…one of those Indians who combines a love of the kind of life he can lead in North America with the most violent criticism of the United States. He could have had the post of head of the Colombo Plan directorate in New Delhi but

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48 Ibid.
he pleaded an ancient lung condition as a reason for not returning to ‘the tropics’.

There is only little available at the NAI on the establishment of the High Commission in Canada. Elsewhere Malik writes of opening an underfunded High Commission just prior to the partition of India, and reading with shock and dismay of the depravity of violence within of his home state, Punjab. He later commented on his shock at the brutality of the Canadian winter. We may not be able to perform as deep and detailed a diplomatic history on the Indian side of these relationships, or even unpack the role of perception but NAI sources reveal Indian diplomats frustrated by their surroundings, hoping to disrupt stereotypes and advance their state’s interest by raising India’s profile, and disrupting colonial stereotypes. These stereotypes of India, though, as mysterious, irrational, have proven far hardier to remove than Saskena, Kirpalani and Cariappa might have hoped. Indeed, were it not for traces of their writing, the NAI would conform to such stereotypes.

These diplomats were engaging in cross-cultural diplomacy, discussing their perceptions of Other, and how they felt their surrounding influences what it was possible for India to do with these foreign places. They sought to disrupt the idea that India was an irrational place, a land of mystics and snake-charmers. This perception existed in the places where these Indian diplomats operated. Uncomfortably, because the NAI does not operate in the manner of a western archive, and as it has lost or hidden much of its material, this institution can lead the researcher towards believing that Indian diplomacy was poor in its early years. The material that is available from India’s high commissions in Australia and Canada, limited as it may be, thoroughly disrupts these stereotype as Indian diplomacy was partly focused on disrupting this particular stereotype. Taken together, these stories do not fully narrate India’s diplomacy with Australia and Canada. They do, however, provide a crucial leitmotif to India’s relationship with the Commonwealth: one in which India’s hopes for a pluralist, post-racial world order ran into serious difficulties in Australia, but played some small role in Canada.

What I found in these archives might not seem entirely ground-breaking. Indeed, I have previously read more documents in a week at the UK National Archives as I did at the NAI in 3 months. Without examining these files, though, we lose a massive part of the
narrative. Indeed, India’s resistance only appears in the files kept by the Australians, Canadians and the British when it is being mocked.

**India at Western Archives**

The sense of India’s frustration at the way it was treated in international politics, and bemusement at Australia’s racial policies is clear. At the archives I have experienced outside Delhi, the level of documentation and the experience is very different. At Kew, the only people I speak to are security staff, who check inside my laptop for stolen documents and tell me off after seeing the tip of a document hang over my desk on a security camera. After the first day, even this interaction is unnecessary. An ID-coded swipe card does all my talking for me. Every document I request appears in a private box labelled with my desk number within the hour. This is the ultimate industrial, rationalist archive. If Delhi’s archives are the ‘worst’, the ‘nightmare’, then Kew is the ‘best’: the empiricist’s ‘dream’.

When searching for evidence from the many Prime Minister’s conferences which took place to determine India’s position in the Commonwealth, it was days before I found a document not written in dull, bureaucratic language. I am forced instead to read the same commentary over and over in multiple files, in case in the second, third, or fourth version contains something more worthwhile. Occasionally, as is the case in colonial archives, something reveals the deep-seated racism of the conduct of international politics of the period appears.52 A frazzled diplomat from the UK, Terrence Shore found India particularly difficult. Shore believed, ironically, that the British experience in ruling India made them well suited to guiding its foreign policy. Shore wrote that the British ‘may indeed be presumed to understand Indian sensitivity and emotionalism better than to other people.’53 Despite Britain’s supposed understanding of India, Shore was deeply confused and frustrated upon arriving in newly independent India. He questioned whether or not Britain and India could have a productive relationship on this basis. After comparing India to a wild racehorse whose new trainers did not know how to handle her,54 he summed up that he feared that ‘objectivity appears to the hypersensitive Indian as partiality’.55

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52 As Homi Bhaba wrote, ‘Colonialism often speaks with a tongue which is forked, not false’, See H. K. Bhaba, *the Location of Culture* (Abingdon, 1994), p. 122.
New visitors to India from the Global North often find it intimidating and confusing. When we think about this from a different perspective, however, the UK National Archives are equally so: the overwhelming mass of information; the obsessive collecting of every piece of bureaucracy; the panopticon-like security system; the total lack of human contact. Researchers are not immune from experiencing India in the same way as Terrence Shore. The assumption that India should have archive fever in the exact manner of the UK only hinders our ability to write inclusive global versions of IR.

In Canberra and Ottawa, delivery is slower, but again, the documentation is overwhelming. The files of Escott Reid contain every piece of correspondence he sent or received while he worked in Delhi. He speaks of India’s hybridity, believing liberal internationalist Canada was specially positioned to ‘translate’ India to the West, and that this could keep the world safe. He believed India to be the most important place in the world. He may be wildly idealistic and a little grandiose, but he does not write like the British or the Australians.

In Canberra, there are no ID cards, but documents appear nearly as quickly as at Kew, and I could speak to a friendly, helpful archivist several times a day. All the documents which are unavailable or are yet to be cleared for security reasons are at least still indexed. Sadly, those which have not been cleared take well over the suggested 3 month period to be made available. It is here that the historian’s desire to read everything becomes difficult. Australian sources do not tell us about the bilateral relationship - they tell us about what the Australians thought about the relationship and, more specifically, India. Public statements, newspaper reports and diplomatic personal narratives are useful sources, but they do not replace the private thoughts of diplomats at the time. I know this, because I have found and read the racist thoughts of these diplomats stationed in Delhi. I know that professional diplomats do not let such language become public easily. Walter Crocker’s biography of Nehru is considered formidable and is still read today. His private dispatches and descriptions of India, however, often relied on colonial stereotypes of Indian irrationality, which I find to be deeply troubling. This was the first archive I had visited, but having been to the NAI, only scraps of

57 In particular, see: Walter Crocker, ‘Indian Feelings on Race Relations’ (1952), at NAA: A462: 618/2/6 “India – International relations policy”; Walter Crocker, “The Long-Term Prospects for Communism in India” (1953),
India’s sense of outrage are kept. These scraps, though, are essential and cannot be overwritten due to the wealth of information stored elsewhere.

There is a sense in some contemporary work that it is sufficient to write histories of India’s bilateral relationships without taking into account private governmental sources from the MEA. Others, who have considered Indian sources, are overwhelmed by the availability of other documentation, say, from Australian or Canadian diplomats and ultimately agree with these diplomats interpretations of events. Andrea Benvenuti’s approach to India-Australia relations after independence argues that different positions on the Cold War kept these two states apart. His work cites nothing from the NAI, only archival documents from Canberra. This, along with his realist framework, leads him to argue that it was just the Cold War which kept these two states apart.

When Crocker met with India’s representative to Australia, Samar Sen about decolonization in Australian New Guinea, he relayed of the Indian position:

It is symptomatic of the lack of understanding and appreciation we are likely to find in the U.N. Meetings, and it is symptomatic of what we will have to expect from the most powerful of the anti-colonial countries, namely India. It is, moreover, worse than just a case of lack of understanding and appreciation. We are up against an emotional attitude so strong as to blind Indians to reality, to say nothing of blinding them to the mote in their own eyes. It is irrational; it seems to be unteachable.

This same prejudice in Crocker’s account is relayed through Benvenuti’s approach to India-Australia relations. Eric Meadows’ work on India and Australia did examine the affect of the white Australia policy on India-Australia relations. His closing argument, and the title of his article, emphasizes an Australian source, arguing that Nehru probably felt offended. From his analytical perspective, Meadows is not wrong. These documents are not ‘complete’ enough to provide a substantial narration of Indian foreign policy with Australia and Canada.

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Rather, they hint at an India struggling against the ignorance and stereotypes amongst their settler-colonial Commonwealth partners. The Indian archives might feel frustrating to the foreign researcher, but, like the prejudices at play in the material contained elsewhere, they reflect different historical imaginaries and relations to time, demonstrating that Steedman’s definition archival fever, is a particularly western epistemology. We must acknowledge that when we go looking, searching, working in archives, we bring epistemic expectations of what they should look like, feel like and how they should function.

Conclusion: The Identity of the Researcher

The empirically-trained western historian is an identity that I have long discarded, but it still lurks somewhere inside me. This must be case, as the limitations on research at the NAI caused me some considerable anxiety. The MEA and the NAI does not seem to care if I find anything or not, whereas London, Canberra and Kew are completely open, with the desire to preserve ‘full sets’ of documents. The instinct of the historian is very much to listen to the available documentation and interpret the evidence. As a postcolonial theorist, I am equally angst-ridden. The remnants of Australian and British diplomats from this time dominate what diplomatic history has been written, yet these perceptions are also visible in much of the scholarship on the relationship. The Indian diplomats are buried under bureaucratic secrecy, or have been lost entirely without particular privileges of access. The individual in the archive matters in this respect. The identity of the researcher (or more accurately the way they are perceived and perceive themselves in archives) matters greatly and cannot be written out of scholarly texts. When studying India’s diplomatic relationships with the colonizer, the postcolonial archive of India silences them, while then buries them under monotonous bureaucracy. The colonizers’ archive mocks them, calling Indians and Indian diplomacy ungrateful, irrational and unteachable. In order to rewrite the world’s diplomatic history, it is insufficiently simple and dangerous to perform empirical research, and float over documents believing ourselves to be simply recreating the past decisions of leaders like Nehru, Churchill, Menzies and St. Laurent. Rather, we need to sometimes pause, read along the archival grain, and view the archive and its exercise of power as a crucial element of the narrative and the creation of states and state identities.

The empiricist’s dream is impossible to fulfil in the Indian archive; it cannot be performed. That does not mean we should then not bother to visit the archive at all. Rather, it
is absolutely crucial to understand, engage with and respect Indian archival practice. Despite this, we will not be able to piece together ‘fully’ the Indian side of this story from the sources available. As Steedman’s classic experience of the foreign researcher in London shows, however, due to the overwhelming documentation, we can’t really do this from any archive. History is dust. Still, the Indian sources will never match the detail of those in Australia, Canada and the UK. We cannot tell adequately the opinions of each diplomat sent to Australia or Canada in the same way we can of the key diplomats send to India from these places. The rationalist version of these histories has been largely to agree with the assumptions of the rationalist diplomats, playing hard-power games in their constructed, hard-power, Cold War world. So many studies of Other places unaware of have said more about the author than the subject. If scholars from the still economically dominant ‘Global North’ wish to be a part of studying the foreign policies and histories of the ‘Global South’, within the broader aim of making IR a more inclusive, global discipline, they need to think of the experience of research and the structure of archives as shaping and sometimes creating the history that we write. If we hope to re-write the Eurocentric global historiographies which IR has produced and relied upon, we will need to emphasize sources from non-Western perspectives and think through the way our selection of sources might shape knowledge/power relations. In order to achieve this, diplomatic historians need to overcome their western archive fever and epistemological vision of the western archive as the repository of all official knowledge.