Xenophobia:
A new pathology for a new South Africa?

by

Bronwyn Harris

Bronwyn Harris is a former Project Manager at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

Introduction

In 1994, South Africa became a new nation. Born out of democratic elections and inaugurated as the 'Rainbow Nation' by Nelson Mandela, this 'new South Africa' represents a fundamental shift in the social, political and geographical landscapes of the past. Unity has replaced segregation, equality has replaced legislated racism and democracy has replaced apartheid, at least in terms of the law. Despite the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, prejudice and violence continue to mark contemporary South Africa. Indeed, the shift in political power has brought about a range of new discriminatory practices and victims. One such victim is 'The Foreigner'. Emergent alongside a new-nation discourse, The Foreigner stands at a site where identity, racism and violent practice are reproduced. This paper interrogates the high levels of violence that are currently directed at foreigners, particularly African foreigners, in South Africa. It explores the term 'xenophobia' and various hypotheses about its causes. It also explores the ways in which xenophobia itself is depicted in the country. Portrayed as negative, abnormal and the antithesis of a healthy, normally functioning individual or society, xenophobia is read here as a new pathology for a 'new South Africa'. This chapter attempts to deconstruct such a representation by suggesting that xenophobia is implicit to the technologies of nation-building and is part of South Africa's culture of violence.

The chapter will provide a brief history and critique of the ways in which xenophobia has been understood in South Africa. Building on these understandings, it will contextualise xenophobia as a current and arguably socially located phenomenon, one which is framed as pathological. It is important to mention that, within the chapter, xenophobia is not understood as a typical form of psychopathology. This is because psychopathology is usually constituted as an individual rather than social difficulty and is usually located in terms of disjuncture with society rather than vice versa. Both of these premises are contestable in an examination of xenophobia. Despite this, there is political value in framing xenophobia as a pathology, even if it is not properly psychological (i.e. psychopathological), because it allows for critical reflection on the discursive tropes that construct pyshopathology and the implications that these have at a social, as well as, individual level.

Xenophobia: A Violent Practice

In the dictionary, the term 'xenophobia' is defined as a 'hatred or fear of foreigners' (*South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1994). More commonly, the term is used to denote a 'dislike of foreigners'. In this understanding, xenophobia is characterised by a *negative attitude* towards foreigners, a *dislike*, a *fear*, or a *hatred*. By framing xenophobia as an attitude, however, there is no comment on the *consequences* or *effects* of such a mind-set. This is misleading, because xenophobia in South Africa is not restricted to a fear or dislike of foreigners. Rather, as the following interview extracts reveal, it results in 'intense tension and violence by South Africans towards immigrants' (Tshitereke, 1999: 4).

A man from the Congo was attacked and he cried but no-one helped him. And after the thief had gone, the people on the sides said that 'because you are crying in English, we didn't help you. If you are crying in Zulu, we will help you'. Then he went to the police and was told that 'you are not our brother, we can't help you' (Focus Group with foreign students, 25/10/1999).

Four guys put a gun to my head and told me to get in the car. They told me that *makwerekwere*[1] have got bucks and that I must give them money. They took my three hundred rand and those shoes I bought. And then they were beating me. And one stabbed me here [points to scar on left side of the abdomen]. Then they told me that they would let me live on one condition: 'each and every month we gonna come and fetch three hundred rand …' I went to the police but they didn't even ask me questions. They just took my refugee papers and tore them up. Then they arrested me, saying that I'm illegal in the country, that I don't have a paper. They put me in jail for the weekend. They told my friends to bring money so that I can be freed … . And those men came every month for the money. They threatened me that they would kill me and I did it for three years (interview with Rwandan refugee, 30/11/1999).

Kollapan (1999) warns that xenophobia cannot be separated from violence and physical abuse. In this sense, a rewriting of the dictionary definition of xenophobia is necessary. 'Xenophobia' as a term must be reframed to incorporate *practice*. It is not just an attitude: it is an activity. It is not just a dislike or fear of foreigners: it is a violent practice that results in bodily harm and damage. More particularly, the violent practice that comprises xenophobia must be further refined to include its specific target, because, in South Africa, not all foreigners are uniformly victimised. Rather, black foreigners, particularly those from Africa, comprise the majority of victims. It is also important to explore why 'the unknown' represented by (largely black) foreigners should necessarily invite repugnance, fear or aggression. These questions and a revised definition of xenophobia must be borne in mind throughout the chapter. They must inform an explanation for the phenomenon and must underpin issues regarding why, how and whom xenophobia targets.

Hypotheses of Xenophobia

Various explanations for xenophobia have been offered in the literature and popular culture (magazines, speeches, documentaries, etc.). For the purposes of this chapter, these explanations have been grouped into three hypotheses, namely, 'the scapegoating hypothesis', 'the isolation hypothesis', and 'the biocultural hypothesis'. It is important to

recognise that these hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, but rather offer different levels of explanation for xenophobia within contemporary South Africa. They operate as straightforward theoretical descriptions that do not interrogate the term 'xenophobia' itself, as much as look at its background, symptoms and indications. Through their presentation, I consequently note with irony that the following section serves much the same purpose as a textbook discussion of 'schizophrenia' or some other diagnostic syndrome.

The scapegoating hypothesis of xenophobia

The scapegoating hypothesis has largely emerged through sociological theory. It locates xenophobia within the context of social transition and change. Hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris, 1998; Tshitereke, 1999). Tshitereke suggests that

> In the post-apartheid epoch, while people's expectations have been heightened, a realisation that delivery is not immediate has meant that discontent and indignation are at their peak. People are more conscious of their deprivation than ever before … . This is the ideal situation for a phenomenon like xenophobia to take root and flourish. South Africa's political transition to democracy has exposed the unequal distribution of resources and wealth in the country (1999: 4).

In this context, Tshitereke notes, 'people often create a "frustration-scapegoat"' (1999: 4), i.e. they create a target to blame for ongoing deprivation and poverty. Foreigners, this theory suggests, often become such scapegoats. This is because they are interpreted as a threat to jobs, housing, education and health care (Morris, 1998; Tshitereke, 1999). Morris comments that '[r]esearch and historical events have indicated that if a majority group is in a perilous economic position they are more likely to feel threatened by minorities, especially if they are foreign' (1998: 1125).

Generally, scapegoating theory explains xenophobia in terms of broad social and economic factors. Tshitereke (1999) introduces a psychological level of explanation to supplement this sociological interpretation. He conceptualises xenophobia in terms of frustration and relative deprivation. Relative-deprivation theory suggests that 'a key psychological factor in generating social unrest is a sense of relative deprivation. This arises from a subjective feeling of discontent based on the belief that one is getting less than one feels entitled to. When there is a gap between aspirations and reality, social discontent is likely to result' (De la Rey, 1991: 41). Tshitereke states that violence is not an inevitable outcome of relative deprivation.

The anger caused by deprivation and perceived or real threats from immigrants as it relates to resources does not directly cause the nationals to commit violence, but it frustrates them. Political scientist Annette Seegers says, 'frustration breeds anger, yet angry people do not always commit violence'. They could turn their anger inwards and commit suicide. Alternatively, people release their anger on that 'frustration-scapegoat', usually non-national minorities (1999: 4).

Here, Tshitereke draws on psychological theories of aggression and frustration to explain that there is a 'causal link between relative deprivation, xenophobia and collective violence' (1999: 4). This link is forged through scapegoating the foreigner.

Relative-deprivation theory offers a psychological explanation for scapegoating. Concepts of frustration and aggression are interpreted as subjective, intrapsychic processes. In this way, the theory understands xenophobia from the inside out. Psychoanalytic theory similarly offers an intrapsychic explanation of scapegoating as a projective and defensive process. For both these theories, De la Ray points out that 'The cause of social unrest cannot be simply located within subjective perceptions of reality. The search for causes of social action must extend beyond the subjective psychological realm to include its complex inter-relatedness with objective social reality' (1991: 41).

Tshitereke's (1999) psychological interpretation of scapegoating must not be divorced from the socio-economic realities of contemporary South Africa. He reminds us that the psychological process of relative deprivation rests on social comparison. This takes place at the level of jobs, houses, education and even women, such that foreigners are scapegoated for taking our jobs, taking our houses and stealing our women. Politics, economics and patriarchy impact on the scapegoating process.

The isolation hypothesis of xenophobia

The scapegoating hypothesis of xenophobia states that the foreigner is used as a scapegoat, someone to blame for social ills and personal frustrations. In this way, the foreigner becomes a target for hostility and violence. Here, however, there is an implicit assumption that foreigners automatically become scapegoats. The hypothesis does not clarify *why the foreigner*, and not another social group or individual, comes to signify unemployment, poverty and deprivation. It does not explain why nationality is the determining feature of such scapegoating. In contrast, the *isolation hypothesis of xenophobia* situates foreignness at the heart of hostility towards foreigners.

The isolation hypothesis understands xenophobia as a consequence of apartheid South Africa's seclusion from the international community. Morris (1998) argues that apartheid insulated South African citizens from nationalities beyond Southern Africa. In this hypothesis, foreigners represent the unknown to South Africans. With the political transition, however, South Africa's borders have opened up and the country has become integrated into the international community. This has brought South Africans into direct contact with the unknown, with foreigners. According to the isolation hypothesis, the interface between previously isolated South Africans and unknown foreigners creates a space for hostility to develop: 'When a group has no history of incorporating strangers it may find it difficult to be welcoming' (Morris, 1998: 1125).

The isolation hypothesis suggests that suspicion and hostility towards strangers in South Africa exists due to *international* isolation. The hypothesis also explains contemporary xenophobia by recourse to *internal* isolation, the isolation of South Africans from South Africans, as a consequence of apartheid: 'There is little doubt that the brutal environment created by apartheid with its enormous emphasis on boundary maintenance has also impacted on people's ability to be tolerant of difference' (Morris, 1998: 1125).

Due to the creation of strict boundaries between South African citizens, as well as between the country and other nations, South Africans are unable to accommodate, and indeed, *tolerate* difference. According to the theory of isolation, South Africans find difference threatening and dangerous (Morris, 1998). In this theory, xenophobia exists because of the very foreignness of foreigners. It exists because foreigners are different and unknown.

Complementing the hypothesis of South African isolation is Hobsbawm's attempt to explain xenophobia in contemporary European societies. He conceptualises the phenomenon in terms of change, as something that works parallel to rapid social transition. For him, the 'old ways of life [in Europe] have changed so drastically since the 1950s that there is very little of them left to defend' (1996: 264). Because old, traditional ways of life have corroded, he argues, xenophobia, separatism and fundamentalism 'are comprehensible as symptoms of social disorientation, of the fraying, and sometimes the snapping, of the threads of what used to be the network that bound people together in society. The strength of this xenophobia is the fear of the unknown … .' (1996: 264--5). In Hobsbawm's reading, 'xenophobia' is understood as the product of social transition, as a defence against the anxiety induced by 'the unknown'.[2] This applies directly to the isolation hypothesis, which situates xenophobia in the South African context of change and a large 'unknown world out there'. However, it must be acknowledged that this hypothesis does not explain why 'the unknown' produces anxiety and why this automatically results in aggression.

The biocultural hypothesis of xenophobia

The isolation and scapegoating hypotheses of xenophobia provide a general explanation for the phenomenon. In the latter, foreigners are scapegoats for social ills, and the difference (or foreignness) engendered by foreigners accounts for violence and hostility. In both theories, the foreigner is treated as a homogeneous category, and there is no scope for differentiation between various types of foreigner. However, xenophobia in South Africa is not applied equally to all foreigners. Some foreigners are at greater risk than others. African foreigners seem to be particularly vulnerable to violence and hostility (Human Rights Watch, 1998; Human Rights Commission, 1999). The biocultural hypothesis of xenophobia offers an explanation for the asymmetrical targeting of African foreigners by South Africans. The biocultural hypothesis locates xenophobia at the level of visible difference, or otherness, i.e. in terms of physical biological factors and cultural differences exhibited by African foreigners in the country. For example, Morris suggests that Nigerians and Congolese, 'are easily identifiable as the 'Other'. Because of their physical features, their bearing, their clothing style and their inability to speak one of the indigenous languages, they are in general clearly distinct and local residents are easily able to pick them out and scapegoat them' (1998: 1125).

In this example, Nigerian and Congolese foreigners are scapegoated due to biocultural factors such as physical appearance and the 'inability to speak one of the indigenous languages'. These factors apply to the identification of Africans from Southern Africa too. Consider, for example, the 'identificatory' methods purportedly used by the Internal Tracing Units of the South African Police Service:

> In trying to establish whether a suspect is an illegal or not, members of the internal tracing units focus on a number of aspects. One of these is language:

accent, the pronouncement of certain words (such as Zulu for 'elbow', or 'buttonhole' or the name of a meerkat). Some are asked what nationality they are and if they reply 'Sud' African this is a dead give-away for a Mozambican, while Malawians tend to pronounce the letter 'r' as 'errow' … . Appearance is another factor in trying to establish whether a suspect is illegal -- hairstyle, type of clothing worn as well as actual physical appearance. In the case of Mozambicans a dead give-away is the vaccination mark on the lower left forearm … [while] those from Lesotho tend to wear gumboots, carry walking sticks or wear blankets (in the traditional manner), and also speak slightly different Sesotho (Minaar and Hough, 1996: 166--7).

The biological-cultural features of hairstyles, accents, vaccination marks, dress and physical appearance can be read as indexical markers or signifiers. They signify difference and point out foreignness in a way that is immediately visible. As signifiers, these features do play a common role in prompting xenophobic actions. For example, a report by the South African Human Rights Commission on the arrest and detention of persons in terms of the Aliens Control Act observes that 'at least ten percent' of the subjects[3] interviewed in the study were apprehended 'on the basis of appearance, with nothing more' (1999: xxii). Similarly, Boullion reports that for French-speaking Africans language is a 'handicap, as they feel hostility in the way people react when they realise their inability to speak any African South African languages … . *Dress and hair* are [also] handicaps in the context of rife street crime on the one hand and the "sniffing out" methods adopted by the Internal Tracing Units of the South African Police … on the other hand' (1996: 10; my emphasis).

Reading physical features as signifiers of foreignness offers a valuable framework for understanding the significance of these features in xenophobic actions. Biological-cultural markers are significant in generating xenophobia because they point out *whom* to target, i.e. they indicate which particular group of foreigners the South African public dislikes and initiates violent practice against. However, *what* they signify and *how* they have come to signify this must also be explained in order to comment on reasons for xenophobia and its asymmetrical application to certain (black) foreigners. Although the visible otherness of foreign Africans seems to be an important factor behind local hostility, this is not a sufficient explanation for the asymmetrical xenophobia directed towards this group. Biological-cultural factors may stand as indexical markers of difference, but then so do the language, accent, clothing and physical features of white and Asian foreigners. This is not to suggest that these groups are automatically immune to xenophobia, but, relative to African foreigners, they do appear to be at a lower risk for violence.

While the three hypotheses discussed above offer important insights into xenophobia, they do not properly account for why the (black) foreigner -- as the unknown other -- evokes violence and aggression in South Africa. Similarly, unless they are read as an interconnected series of explanation, they risk presenting xenophobia as uniform or monolithic, whereas it is usually black foreigners who bear the brunt of this phenomenon. They do not allow for degrees of hostility or foreignness. Taken together, these hypotheses do not explain the 'whys' of xenophobia.

One possible way of understanding why black foreigners are targets of violence is to postulate a new hypothesis, one that situates xenophobia within South Africa's transition

from a past of racism to a future of nationalism. At a most basic level, this involves looking at the role of broad social institutions, such as the media, in generating specific images of African foreigners in the country. More theoretically, this involves looking at the mechanisms of nationalism and the ways in which xenophobia itself has been represented.

Representations of Africa and African Foreigners

To understand why African hairstyles, accents and vaccination marks take on xenophobic significance, i.e. why African foreigners are specific targets of violence, it is important to consider how foreign Africans are represented in society. The generalisations and stereotypes that are commonly offered regarding Africa and African immigrants offer insight into the hostility that meets this group. Consider the following media representations:

- Illegal immigrants from war-torn and poverty-stricken parts of Africa are flooding into most SA cities (Natal Witness, 94/11);
- In one of the biggest apartment blocks in Jo'burg, notices in English and Afrikaans have taken a second place to signs in French and Portuguese as thousands of new migrants from Africa pour into the city … (Sunday Times, 93/06/06);
- Foreign influx: citizens fear for their job prospects after hordes descend on the country from the troubled north (Sowetan, 93/07/29);
- * Xenophobia rife as Africans flood SA … (Sunday Times, 94/08/28);
- City haven for victims of Africa's wars and woes (Argus, 97/04/26);
- As citizens of neighbouring countries flood the home affairs department with applications for legal residence … (Sunday Independent 96/09/29);
- [F]low of job-seekers from neighbouring countries (Electronic Mail and Guardian, 97/02/05);
- Illegals are helping to turn SA into a banana republic … I want to say that even under the most oppressive conditions we endured under apartheid, our economic conditions were never as bad as in the rest of Africa (Weekend Star, 95/02/19, letter: S. Modise).

In these newspaper extracts, Africa and the foreign African are represented negatively. 'Africa' appears as a homogeneous, undifferentiated place. There is no recognition that this is a large continent comprised of many different interests and nations, including South Africa. Rather, it is seen as 'the troubled north', a vague space marked by wars, woes and poverty. In this way, South Africa is divorced from the rest of the continent. Africa appears as a negative space 'out there', totally separate from the space 'in here'. This affords an interesting link back to the scapegoating hypothesis and the notion of the 'unknown', because Africa is portrayed as a negative collective force without specific form or identity thereby representing an easy object of blame and anxiety.

Similarly, African foreigners are pictured as masses *flooding* into South Africa illegally. Words such as 'flood', 'descend' and 'pour' create the impression of an uncontrollable, unstoppable process (Sontag, 1988). Here, African foreigners are linked to chaos and disorder. They are also presented as illegal and therefore, as criminal. Peberdy suggests that

> the depiction of African migrants as 'illegals', 'illegal aliens', and 'illegal immigrants' implies both criminality and difference. The persistent use of

'illegals' to describe undocumented migrants suggests a close connection with crime and criminal acts. The SAPS [South African Police Service] also provide the number of 'illegal aliens' arrested in crime swoops, or stop and search operations. Although these figures may improve the arrest rates of the SAPS, the conflation of arrested criminals and arrested undocumented migrants creates spurious links between crime and undocumented migrants (1999: 296).

Alongside representations of criminality and illegality, the quotes from the newspapers given above also paint African foreigners as a disease or a plague descending onto the country. Peberdy explains that the language of 'contamination' permeates national discourse: 'The state's negative attitudes to both immigrants and migrants is most evident … in the ways it argues non-South Africans threaten the nation by endangering its *physical health*, its ability to provide resources, employment and levels of crime. The language of the department is replete with images of Africans as carriers of disease (1999: 298; my emphasis).

This language expands beyond the state and the Department of Home Affairs to include the media and the public. Through the image of contamination, Peberdy suggests, the African foreigner is generated as a disease, a physical threat to the body politic. As an example of this, she highlights the ongoing HIV/AIDS scare surrounding foreign mineworkers as carriers and spreaders of the disease.

In this process, the African foreigner is represented as a physical disease that literally threatens the body politic with contamination. The African foreigner also represents a symbolic threat to the South African nation. Peberdy links the images of physical contamination and criminality to a threatened nation state:

The focus of the state on what it sees as the parasitical relationship of non-South Africans to the nation's resources, and the way that the state criminalizes them, suggests that the state sees immigrants, and particularly undocumented migrants, as a threat to the nation and the post-1994 nation building process. The language of the state, which rarely attaches the prefix African, shows that it conceptualizes most immigrants as Africans, and Africans as potentially the most dangerous of all 'aliens' (1999: 296).

Peberdy makes two important points here. Firstly, she comments that foreigners in South Africa are represented as a threat to the nation. Secondly, she explains that these threatening, dangerous foreigners are African, even although this is rarely stated explicitly in public discourse.

A similar position is adopted by Morris , when he claims that 'foreign black Africans, especially those originating from countries north of South Africa's neighbours, are being portrayed as a major threat to the success of the post-apartheid project' (1998: 1117).

The Post-apartheid Project

The term 'post-apartheid project' is a general, blanket term that covers a range of policies, objectives and discourses in post-1994 South African society. Due to its breadth and all-encompassing nature, it can be read in a variety of ways and in relation to many aspects of

society. One such way involves considering the post-apartheid project through two monolithic discourses, namely discourses of the 'New South Africa' and the 'African Renaissance'. Broadly, a discourse of the 'New South Africa' involves concepts such as democracy, deracialisation, reconciliation and unity. Economically, it conveys notions of reconstruction, development and upliftment. Socio-politically, it is aligned with building the nation, and nationalism is a vital element of the discourse. Indeed, the 'New South Africa' is often used interchangeably with the term 'rainbow nation' (Durrheim, 1997; Hook and Harris, 2000). By contrast, a discourse of the 'African Renaissance' underplays national boundaries and emphasises regional and pan-African cohesion in terms of economics, culture, growth and development (cf. Makgoba, 1999).

Both discourses have economic, political and social development at their roots. However, they contradict each other at the point of nationalism. The 'New South Africa' is defined in terms of national borders, as the new nation. Nationality is a fundamental feature of this discourse and a *South African* identity prevails. In contrast, the 'African Renaissance' is defined in terms of continental borders, rather than national barriers. In this discourse, an *African* identity, and not a South African identity, predominates.

Discourses of the 'New South Africa' and the 'African Renaissance' offer but one way to describe the post-apartheid project. They are significant for this chapter because both are in common circulation and yet they contradict each other at the point of nationalism. This is important for understanding the post-apartheid phenomenon of xenophobia, particularly because it is the African foreigner who appears most vulnerable to hostility and violence. To understand xenophobia in relation to these discourses, it is important to introduce the way in which xenophobia itself has been represented in South African literature and media.

Xenophobia as a Pathology

The word 'xenophobia' describes violent actions against foreigners, as well as negative social representations of immigrants, refugees and migrants. Through the application of this word, it is possible to develop hypotheses, such as the scapegoating, isolation and biocultural hypotheses, regarding relations between South Africans and foreigners. While these hypotheses suggest certain reasons for xenophobia, they do not interrogate the term itself. That is, they accept and present the term as a given, as a neutral term of description. Contemporary language theory teaches that words and texts are not, however, neutral (Wilbraham, 1994; Fairclough, 1995). Rather, words are 'multifunctional, always simultaneously representing the world (ideational function) and enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function)' (Fairclough, 1995: 25). In Fairclough's (1995) terms, the scapegoating, isolation and biocultural hypotheses of xenophobia function at the 'ideational' level. They engage with the phenomenon as representative and descriptive of the South African world. To better understand xenophobia, however, it is also necessary to consider the social relations and identities that are reproduced in the term itself.

Reflect on the following media representations of xenophobia:

- Cosatu and ANC are determined to stem the rising tide of xenophobia (*Mail and Guardian*, 94/09/29);
- Unknown irrational fear of 'uitlanders' is not new to SA (*Sunday Independent*, 97/05/04);

- The old laager mentality is raising its ugly head again in the form of xenophobia (*Mail and Guardian*, 95/02/09);
- Learning to cope with the irresistible human tide … . Violent public outbursts and the constant arrest-and-repatriation routine of the government illustrate the rise of a xenophobic mentality in SA and the failure of current immigration policy -- rooted in a 'fortress SA' mentality -- to deal with the issue (*Financial Mail*, 97/10/03);
- SA must not develop a hatred of foreigners because of the illegal immigrant problem, Acting President Thabo Mbeki said … (*Argus* 94/11/03);
- Alien has become almost a swearword in this country, used by xenophobes to describe those who have come to take our jobs, our homes, our women; conmen from Nigeria who've come to steal our money and feed us drugs … (*Star*, 95/08/14);
- We did not expect national chauvinism and xenophobia as the outcome of the national liberation struggle (*Star* 94/09/27; letter).

There are two striking features in these media headlines. Firstly, xenophobia is presented as something negative, ugly and unwanted. It is a cause of worry and concern, and it is something that must be eradicated from South African society. Secondly, xenophobia is presented in the same way as that which it denotes. This means that xenophobia, as a term, is described with the same language and images that are used to describe foreigners in xenophobic language. Indeed the word 'xenophobia' is easily substitutable for the word 'foreigner' in many of these representations. For example, a xenophobic portrayal of the foreigner reads as 'stemming the tide of illegals', while a depiction of xenophobia itself reads as 'stemming the tide of xenophobia'. There are close parallels between the xenophobic depiction of foreigners and the depiction of xenophobia.

Just as African foreigners are criminalised and tainted, so xenophobia is presented as a contaminant in South African society. It appears as an unstoppable and irrational fear or plague, sweeping across the country. Through metaphors of disease, floods and the laager mentality, xenophobia is pathologised. That is, it is represented as a pathology, as something abnormal and unhealthy. This notion of pathology is strengthened by the phonetic confusion of xenophobia with the psychological phobias. The suffix 'phobia' is regularly used in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th edition) (DSM-IV) by psychology and medical practitioners (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1994). In this manual, a range of anxiety-depression disorders are listed under the phobias, e.g. agoraphobia, social phobia, and simple phobias such as claustrophobia and arachnophobia. A psychological 'phobia' is diagnosed if exposure to the object of phobia results in 'intense anxiety' (APA, 1994). Xenophobia, as a violent practice, does not have the characteristics of psychological phobias. Yet, although it is not listed in DSM-IV, it has the phonetic potential to be associated with the phobias, as a psychological pathology (Dutton, 1999; personal communication).

Xenophobia is portrayed as something abnormal and unhealthy: in other words, it is presented as something separate from the normal, healthy South African nation. In the light of such a position, I would like to speculate on the political interests that are served by treating xenophobia as a pathology. For example, it is important in light of the 'New South Africa' discourse. This discourse privileges concepts of tolerance, harmony and diversity. Although it rests on national barriers, it does not entertain intolerance, violence or chauvinism. Consequently, the hostile practice of xenophobia finds no place in this discourse. By pathologising xenophobia, the phenomenon is effectively quarantined from

the healthy 'New South Africa'; it is isolated from the ideals that comprise the discourse. Similarly, the pathologising of xenophobia serves the 'African Renaissance' discourse. This discourse underplays nationalism and does not allow for hostility towards African foreigners. As a pathology, xenophobia is neatly separated from the healthy objectives of the 'African Renaissance'.

It is postulated that the pathologisation of xenophobia serves to disguise the implicit contradiction that exists at the point of nationalism between the 'New South Africa', on the one hand and the 'African Renaissance', on the other hand. Xenophobia, and not this implicit contradiction, stands as *the* obstacle to realising national ideals, including the ideal of the African Renaissance. This makes it possible for an 'African Renaissance' to co-exist with a nation-building project. It also makes it possible for an 'African Renaissance' discourse to exist while African foreigners are being victimised through xenophobia.

As a pathology, xenophobia is portrayed as a major threat to the success of the post-apartheid project. It is a scapegoat for the intolerance and disunity that threatens the health of the nation. It is represented as a disease and something that must be cured in order for the 'New South Africa' and the 'African Renaissance' to function in harmony. But what if xenophobia is not as easily separable from the strategies and practices that reproduce the 'New South Africa'? What if xenophobia is implicit to the technologies that create South African nationalism?

Wetherell and Potter proclaim that 'patriotism and pride are the "positive" face, and xenophobia and chauvinism the unacceptable face of nationalism' (1992: 141). Here, xenophobia is conceptualised directly in relation to nationalism, and is seen as one side of a nationalism coin.[4] This argument is important because it ties xenophobia to the process of nation-building; it interprets xenophobia as a negative consequence of nationalism and nation-building (1992). As such, xenophobia is not totally divorced from national processes and discourses, as the previous hypotheses have done. However, because they separate the positive face from the negative face of nationalism, Wetherell and Potter (1992) cannot escape the pathologising of xenophobia. It is still seen as negative, unhealthy and different from the positive, healthy functioning of a nation. This approach does not allow for the possibility that xenophobia is part of the 'New South Africa', rather than a parasitic pathology or a negative consequence of nation-building. Such a possibility must, however, be entertained as the following section on South Africa's culture of violence reveals.

South Africa's Culture of Violence

By presenting xenophobia as negative and abnormal, a contrasting comment is made on the normal functioning of the nation. In the South African context, the normal society is not, however, divorced from violence. A solid body of research highlights what has been termed South Africa's 'culture of violence' (Simpson *et al*., 1992; Hamber, 1997; Hamber and Lewis, 1997). The culture of violence can be described as a situation in which social relations and interactions are governed through violent, rather than non-violent, means. This is a culture in which violence is proffered as a normal, legitimate solution to problems: 'violence is seen as a legitimate means to achieve goals particularly because it was legitimised by most political role-players in the past' (Hamber and Lewis, 1997: 8).

The culture of violence is a legacy of apartheid. It finds its roots in the 1980s, when violence was predominantly political in nature. That is, 'where the dominant motivation [for violence was] based on political difference or the competing desire for political power' (Simpson *et al.*, 1992: 202). During this period, violence was utilised and sanctioned across the political spectrum (Hamber, 1997). The politics of the 1980s effectively laid the foundation for an ongoing culture of violence in the 1990s. According to analysts, the form of violence has altered across this period. Hamber explains that 'whilst levels of political violence have generally dropped … the transition has been characterised by dramatic increases in violent crime' (1997: 3). Hence, violence today is described as criminal rather than political in nature. So, although the form of violence may have altered across time, violence itself still persists as the dominant means to solve problems in South Africa. It is in this context of a culture of violence that xenophobia in South Africa must be conceptualised.

Despite the pervasiveness of South Africa's culture of violence, it is ironic that xenophobia has been represented as something abnormal or pathological. Xenophobia is a form of violence and violence is the norm in South Africa. Violence is an integral part of the social fabric, even although the 'New South African' discourse belies this. Indeed by belying and excluding xenophobia, the 'New South Africa' discourse is able to define itself as peaceful and tolerant. It is similarly able to coexist with the 'African Renaissance' discourse and to perpetuate ideals of harmony and diversity. But in order to do this, it is necessary that xenophobia is created and represented as a pathology. Consequently, xenophobia as a pathology is central to national discourse. It must be recognised as part of the new nation, and is not separate from the 'New South Africa', even although it is pathologised within and by the discourse. It is also not a negative consequence of nationalism. Rather, it functions within the culture of violence to give definition to the 'New South Africa' and the forms of identity that accompany this discourse. Xenophobia can thus be understood as a central feature of nationalism. This point is borne out by looking at the experiences that black foreigners have had in South Africa, which suggest that xenophobic violence is an integral feature of their daily lives here.

Migrant Voices

Sinclair's (1998, 1999) work engages with the impact of xenophobia on foreign identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing on interviews with seventy-seven African foreigners, she notes that 'hostility towards foreigners has become one of the most significant features of post-apartheid South African society' (1999: 466). Hostility and abuse are reported throughout her sample, spanning a range of institutions and interactions, from the police and the Department of Home Affairs to employers and neighbours. She comments that 'All migrants interviewed mentioned hostility towards them as their over-riding concern; surpassing even issues of legal status, job security and financial difficulty' (1999: 471).

As a consequence of this hostility, social networks and support structures have developed among non-South Africans during the post-apartheid era. Sinclair (1998, 1999) explains that these communities have been established largely along national lines, and do not span nationality divisions. Rather, they exist as discrete networks, representing particular nationalities, such as 'Nigerians', 'Angolans' and 'Mozambicans'. These local communities have developed as safe havens and comfort zones for migrants.

Company and mutual protection, rather than long-term assimilation, are the central criteria for these local migrant communities. There is no permanence or long-term stability about them. Indeed, the element of transience impacts directly on foreign identities here and this, Sinclair explains, is a direct response to xenophobia. For many migrants 'permanence has become untenable, given the realities of the harsh life in South Africa' (1999: 471).

South African hostility encourages foreigners to leave South Africa, and to feel impermanent while living in the country. Another response to xenophobia is that of resentment and hostility on the part of foreign migrants: 'Many migrants respond with anger and indignation [to the hostility that they face]' (Sinclair, 1999: 469). Morris notes this from Nigerians and Congolese living in South Africa: 'the antagonism and prejudice experienced has resulted in an unfortunate cycle. It has encouraged a strong sense of nationhood among the Congolese and Nigerian immigrants … . The harsh treatment has also encouraged a tendency to view South Africans as the inferior 'Other' (1998: 1126).

He comments further that South Africans are viewed through negative stereotypes.

Besides the feeling that South Africans are prejudiced and parochial, a prominent perception was that South Africans, especially black South African men, are extremely violent: Informants often depicted South African men as lazy, adulterous and not nurturing of their partners … . Often, laziness and crime were interlinked … South Africans were portrayed as unenterprising and wasteful … poorly educated and ignorant (Morris, 1998:1127--8). In contrast, Morris' respondents portrayed themselves as hard-working, enterprising, caring, educated and cultured (1998).

It must be recognised that responses to xenophobia may manifest in hostility, and possibly violence, from foreigners themselves. Indeed, the potential for violence rests within the *actions and interactions* that develop at the point of national identity. Morris comments that identity is caught up in a cyclical and complex relationship at the border of nationality: 'The Nigerians and Congolese interviewed generally exuded self-confidence and were often disparaging about the local Africans. There is little doubt that this combination further alienates the local black population from them' (1998: 1126).

Ironically, the experience of hostility may generate further hostility through the deployment of coping strategies such as isolation, superiority and bitterness. As Kristeva comments, 'just because one is a foreigner does not mean one is without one's own foreigner … . As enclave of the other within the other, otherness becomes crystallized as pure ostracism: the foreigner excludes before being excluded, even more than he is being excluded' (1991: 24).

Exclusion, alienation and hostility operate in a complex, ongoing spiral across the line of nationality, i.e. between South Africans and foreigners, particularly African foreigners. Studies such as those conducted by Sinclair (1998, 1999) and Morris (1998) reveal that xenophobia impacts directly on foreign identity. It cannot be separated from the normal foreign individual in South Africa. Through xenophobia, foreigners feel foreign. This effect, in turn, alienates and excludes foreigners further from South African society. It also contributes to foreign hostility, and possibly violence, towards South Africans. This understanding of the impact of xenophobia on identity, together with the culture of violence that pervades ordinary South African life, suggests that xenophobia is not the pathology it is represented to be. Rather, it is a key component of the 'New South African' nation. To read

xenophobia as a pathology is to contest traditional, normal understandings of psychopathology. It is not individually located and is not counter normative, but rather operates through the social, for the social, serving to disguise relations of power and discursive contradictions. It is for these very reasons that such a reading is valuable, as its seeming incongruence with psychopatholgy highlights the subtle ways in which certain pathologies are problems of political control, representing the failure of regulatory systems to fully govern particular aspects of the individual.

At the level of the social, instead of accepting xenophobia as something abnormal and separate from the ideals of nationalism, it is vital to interrogate why it has been represented in this light. It is also crucial to uncover what such pathologisation does in order to understand the consequences of seeking a cure. This is particularly important in light of the inherent contradiction between the 'New South Africa' and 'African Renaissance' discourses at the point of nationalism. While contemporary emphasis is on stabilising the continent and bringing peace to the region, Billig reminds us that 'it should be remembered that violence is seldom far from the surface of nationalism's history. The struggle to create the nation-state is a struggle for the monopoly of the means of violence. What is being created -- a nation-state -- is itself a means of violence. The triumph of a particular nationalism is seldom achieved without the defeat of alternative nationalisms and other ways of imagining peoplehood' (1995: 28).

Notes:

[1] The word 'makwerekwere' is derogatory. It purportedly depicts the phonetic sound of foreign African languages.

[2] The psychoanalytic overtones of this interpretation are apparent. And while Hobsbawm's (1996) work attempts to draw on 'social' dynamics, he ultimately cannot escape the level of the 'individual' in his explanations of xenophobia.

[3] The subjects in question were 149 detainees at Lindela.

[4] 'Nationalism' is a hotly debated concept. A vast field is dedicated to defining and critiquing the term (cf. Bjorgo and Witte, 1993; Billig, 1995; Reitzes, 1995). For the purposes of this literature review, 'nationalism is identified as the ideology that creates and maintains nation-states' (Billig, 1995: 19). It is tied directly to the process of nation-building that marks the 'New South African' discourse and is generated through the everyday practices that constitute the nation.

References

American Psychiatric Association (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.

Bjorgo, T. and Witte, R. (1993). Introduction. In T. Bjorgo and R. Witte (Eds), *Racist Violence in Europe*, pp. 1--16. Hampshire: Macmillan.

Boullion, A. (1996). 'New' African immigration to South Africa. Unpublished paper presented at the Conference of the South African Sociological Association, Durban, 7--11 July.

De la Rey, C. (1991). Intergroup relations: theories and positions. In D. Foster and J. Louw-Potgieter (Eds), *Social Psychology in South Africa*, pp. 27--56. Isando: Lexicon.

Durrheim, K. (1997). Peace talk and violence: An analysis of the power of 'peace'. In A. Levett, A. Kottler, E. Buman and I. Parker (Eds), *Culture, Power and Difference: Discourse Analysis in South Africa*, pp. 31--43. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. New York: Edward Arnold.

Hamber, B. (1997). Dr Jekyll and Mr 'Hide': Problems of violence prevention and reconciliation in South Africa's transition to democracy. In E. Bornman, R. van Eeden and M. Wentzel (Eds), *Perspectives on Aggression and Violence in South Africa*, pp. 3--20. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Hamber, B. and Lewis, S. (1997). *An Overview of the Consequences of Violence and Trauma in South Africa*. Johannnesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

Hobsbawn, E.J. (1996). Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe today. In G. Balakrishnan (Ed), *Mapping the Nation*, pp.255-266. London: Verso

Hook, D. and Harris, B. (2000). Discourses of order and their disruption: The texts of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 30 (1), 14--22.

Human Rights Commission (1999). *Report on the Arrest and Detention of Persons in Terms of the Aliens Control Act*. Johannesburg: South African Human Rights Commission.

Human Rights Watch (1998). *'Prohibited Persons': Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees in South Africa*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Kollapan, J. (1999). Xenophobia in South Africa: The challenge to forced migration. Unpublished seminar, 7 October. Graduate School: University of the Witwatersrand.

Kristeva, J. (1991). *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Makgoba, M. W. (Ed.) (1999). *African Renaissance: The New Struggle*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

Minaar, A. and Hough, M. (1996). *Causes, Extent and Impact of Clandestine Migration in Selected Southern African Countries with Specific Reference to South Africa*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Morris, A. (1998). 'Our fellow Africans make our lives hell': The lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21 (6), 1116--36.

Peberdy, S. A. (1999). Selecting immigrants: Nationalism and national identity in South Africa's immigration policies, 1910-1998. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Queens University, Canada.

Reitzes, M. (1995). *The Reconstruction of Citizenship in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.

Simpson, G., Mokwena, S. and Segal, L. (1992). Political violence: 1990. In M. Robertson and A. Rycroft (Eds), *Human Rights and Labour Law Handbook 1991*, Vol. 2, pp. 193--219. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Sinclair, M. R. (1998). Community, identity and gender in migrant societies of southern Africa: Emerging epistemological challenges. *International Affairs*, 74 (2), 339--53.

Sinclair, M. R. (1999). 'I know a place that is softer than this …'-- emerging migrant communities in South Africa. *International Migration*, 37 (2), 465--81.

Sontag, S. (1988). *AIDS and its Metaphors*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1994). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Tshitereke, C. (1999). Xenophobia and relative deprivation. Crossings, 3 (2), 4--5.

Wetherell, M. and Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation*. Hemel Hampstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wilbraham, L. A. (1994). Confession, surveillance and subjectivity: A discourse analytic approach to advice columns. Unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Cape Town.

UCT PRESS
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN PRESS

New Book Notification

Title :   Psychopathology & Social
                 Prejudice
Editors :
                 Derek Hook and Gillian Eagle
ISBN :
                 1 919 713 67 0
Size :
                 247 x 171mm
Extent :
                 280 pages
Binding :
                 Soft Cover
Price :
                 R149.00 (incl. VAT)
Availability :
                 January 2002
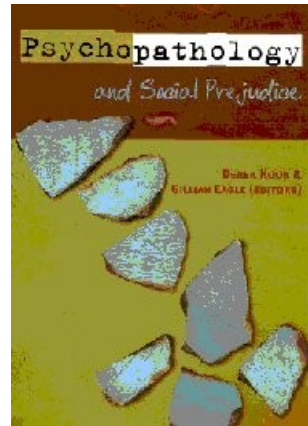
This volume offers an innovative set of critical examinations of the field of
psychopathology. Essentially, it investigates the social formation of psychopathology across
different cultural, discursive and political contexts, and draws on theory from two
traditional domains of psychology - social and abnormal psychology.

Psychopathology and Social Prejudice is unique in many ways:

- It brings together authors from a range of disciplines - psychology, sociology,
  women's studies - and academic and research institutions in South Africa, the United
  Kingdom and Canada. This multi-disciplinary approach facilitates the incorporation
  of new forms of theory and criticism in the field of psychopathology.

- It highlights the socio-political and historical context of current South Africa, which
  produces its own, unique varieties of pathology.

- The critical focus on 'normality' and 'abnormality' illustrates critical social
  psychology at work, in its interrogation of how people are constructed as different
  or 'other', from a range of angles.

- The diverse topics include xenophobia, anorexia nervosa, witch hunting, post-
  traumatic stress, homosexuality, race categorisation and cross-cultural issues.

- Ultimately, the various chapters work in concert to unseat the notion of
  psychopathology as comprised of decontextualised, individualised, essentialist
  categories of organic illness, and accordingly encourage readers to explore critical
  reformulations of clinical and counselling practice.

The Editors:

Derek Hook and **Gillian Eagle** both lecture in the School of Human and
Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand and have

interests broadly in the influence of critical social factors on the psychological study of individuals and groups.

Contents:

1. Introduction: A 'Social Psychology' of Psychopathology

Section one: Clinical Problematics

2. Psychotherapy, Discourse and the Production of Psychopathology

3. Poised on the Brink: The Social Construction of a new Biological Psychiatry

4. The Political Conundrums of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

5. A Critical Re-reading of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from a Cross-cultural Perspective

Section Two: Pathology as Politics

6. Rewriting the Body, Re-authoring the Expert, Reading the Anorexic Body

7. Avoiding the Implicit Re-pathologisation of Male Homosexuality: A Politico-Clinical Direction for Research

8. The Psychopathology of Social Iidentity, Ethnicity and 'Race' Section Three: South African Pathologies

9. Unsettling Meanings of Madness: Competing Constructions of South African Insanity

10. Xenophobia: A New Pathology for a New South Africa

11. Stigmatising Discourses in the Construction of Sexually Transmitted Diseases

12. Witches and Watchers: Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Rural Communities of the Northern Province

Section Four: Philosophies of Pathology

13. Madness, Memory and the Market

14. Normality and Pathology: from Disciplinarity to Postdisciplinarity

15. Norms, Normativity and Normalisation: Between the Vital and the Social

The Market:

Under and postgraduate students of social or abnormal psychology, inquisitive readers and professionals interested in critical applications of psychology will find Psychopathology and Social Prejudice engaging, informative and challenging.