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The languages of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa: Reviewing migrancy, foreignness, and solidarity

Camalita Naicker

abstract

This open forum argues that the language and discourse of xenophobia is a shared experience among people who are seen and constructed as being from 'elsewhere' in four different provinces in South Africa. It suggests that use of xenophobic discourse and language, the precarious nature of living conditions, labour conditions and restricted access to citizenship rights from the State, are experienced by all people who are categorised as 'migrants' internally, and those described as 'foreigners' or 'refugees' by Government officials.

What this open forum will also show is that the Pan-Africanism and collective ideas of freedom, struggle and resistance or 'bonds of solidarity' among migrant labourers, both from other countries as well as the former Bantustans during the struggles against apartheid, should not be confined to a nostalgic past, but seen as very much present in South Africa today. This solidarity is perhaps not so much about a shared history of struggle against colonialism and apartheid, although this too may be extant, but is rather informed by a shared present where some are seen as citizens with freedom of movement and access to services from the State, while others are excluded. The notion of citizenship, then, becomes refracted, not merely through the making of the new categories of 'foreigners' through labour migration, but also through deeply raced and classed discourses which inform who is viewed as a migrant and who is not.

keywords

migrants, land occupations, shack dwellers, xenophobia, Marikana, community organising

In 2015 South Africa (SA) experienced a fresh round of xenophobic attacks in many of its nine provinces, with the largest number of attacks occurring in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in April. In January 2015 a young boy was killed by a shop owner in Soweto. The shop owner was born in a country outside SA, and knowledge of this fact instigated a series of attacks on other shop-keepers also suspected to be foreign-born, and led to widespread xenophobic attacks in Gauteng that quickly

spread to Cape Town (Radio 702, 16 April 2015). In April 2015 similar attacks occurred in Durban when shop owners were attacked in Umlazi, and Durban city centre as well as other surrounding areas. The attacks spread back to Gauteng, when the army was called after hundreds were involved in attacks in Alexandra (Radio 702, 16 April 2015). Soon after, people designated as 'foreigners' by the State were placed in camps for their own safety. In the same month the Government launched Operation

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Anti-xenophobia walk held in Cape Town on Mandela Day, 2010. PHOTO: Creative Commons.

Fiela, initially meant to be a response to xenophobic attacks (Nicolson, 2015). The South African Government (n.d.) website describes it as follows:

Operation Fiela-Reclaim is a multidisciplinary interdepartmental operation aimed at eliminating criminality and general lawlessness from our communities. As the word 'fiela' means to sweep clean, we are ridding communities of crime and criminals so that the people of South Africa can be and feel safe. The ultimate objective of the operation is to create a safe and secure environment for all in South Africa.

Operation Fiela, which intensified over the next few months after April, culminated in a nationally synchronised two-day operation in July 2015. By the end of June 9968 people had been arrested, and by the end of the two days in July, a further 2908. The majority of people charged with criminal offences, which included offences like counterfeit merchandise, were undocumented migrants (Nicolson, 2015). It is interesting to note here the parallels between Operation Fiela – meant to 'sweep clean' – and Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe – which means 'to get rid of rubbish' in Shona. The

latter began in 2005, when thousands of families struggling to survive in the urban centres of Zimbabwe were branded criminals and pushed out of the urban space into the countryside through a series of forced evictions (Slaughter, 2005).

In SA thousands of people were removed from their communities and put into 'camps'. Introduction of these camps was a clear attempt by the State to wrest the power of attacking and removing so-called migrants from popular control. Between April and July 2015, 15 396 people were deported for being in the country illegally and a further 6781 people from countries outside of SA, called 'foreigners' were screened while awaiting deportation (Nicolson, 2015), in the period during which Operation Fiela was carried out. Many left voluntarily.

This open forum engages Michael Neo-cosmos' (2006) book *From foreign natives, to native foreigners: Explaining xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa*. A central argument of the book is that at heart of the constructions of xenophobia in SA lies the criminalisation of the migrant labour system and a State-driven project of exclusive citizenship based on indigeneity. It begins with an acknowledgement of the

usefulness of this argument, particularly where the discourse of the criminal or dangerous 'African other' is created and propagated through the actions and words of government officials. It shows that there remains collusion between local government officials, police, and local elites to firstly create the category of the 'foreigner' and then demonise those designated this way, for political or economic expediency.

Four different places, in four different provinces in SA where people have been subjected to the language, discourse and violent of xenophobia are reviewed: Nkaneng shack settlement in Marikana in North West province, land occupations named after Marikana – Marikana Land Occupation in KwaZulu-Natal, and Marikana 2 in the Western Cape,¹ and Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. The piece argues that the language and discourse of xenophobia is a shared experience among people who move internally within SA, from rural areas to other places for work, as well as those who are seen and constructed as being from 'elsewhere' because of the language they speak, and people who have been born in countries outside of SA. It illustrates that those designated as 'foreigners' and those migrating from home towns or villages to urban centres often experience similar forms of criminalisation. The violence enacted on so-called 'foreigners' through Operation Fiela, for example, that facilitated mass repatriation of people to their 'home countries' is obviously incomparable and unique to people who were born in other countries as are other experiences and the intention of the article is not to imply or suggest otherwise.

However, the article does suggest that use of xenophobic discourse and language; the precarious nature of living conditions; labour conditions and restricted access to citizenship rights from the State, are experienced by all people who are categorised as 'migrants' internally, and those described as 'foreigners' or 'refugees' by government officials. It should be noted that neither of these terms, 'migrant' or 'foreigner' are stable categories in themselves. Who is included and who is excluded and the basis on which these distinctions are made is often changing depending on the political needs of the State. Neocosmos' book is a great illustration of how these categories

are thought differently, in the most part, by the African National Congress (ANC) in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. These experiences reveal that democratisation which was, at the very least, supposed to create a new SA, that acknowledged not only those who were previously excluded from being South Africans in the Bantustans, but also those who migrated back and forth to the mines and farms in SA from other countries, did not occur. Rather as Mamdani (1996:26), notes "the state was de-racialised but not democratised."

What the article will also show, is that the Pan-Africanism and collective ideas of freedom, struggle and resistance or 'bonds of solidarity' as described by Neocosmos (2006:31) amongst migrant labourers both from other countries, as well as the former Bantustans during the struggles against apartheid, should not be confined to a nostalgic past, but seen as very much present in SA today. For Neocosmos (2006), a return to the solidarity and mass-based people's power movements of the 1980s would be a positive reinvigoration of struggle that was and again could be shared across race, class and nation-state border identities, however the paper shows that in fact one does not need to return to a history of this solidarity because it remains present in struggle today, albeit in a different sphere of politics that is less visible. This solidarity is perhaps not so much about a shared history of struggle against colonialism and apartheid, although this too may be extant, but is rather informed by a shared present where some are seen as citizens with freedom of movement and access to services from the State, while others are excluded. The examples of Abahlali base-Mjondolo (AbM) in Cato Crest, Durban and the Unemployed People's Movement (UPM) in Grahamstown illustrate that people still organise together when they share similar experiences of oppression, in this case the poor black landless persons in SA and black people who have come to SA from other countries in Africa.

The notion of citizenship then, becomes refracted, not merely through the making of the new categories of 'foreigners' through labour migration, but also through deeply raced and classed discourses which inform who is viewed as a migrant and who is not. What the case of people living

in Marikana 2 in Philippi will illustrate, is how the category of 'migrant' and 'foreigner' become analogous in a city like Cape Town, where all undesirable people, in the main poor black people without access to land and resources, are made to feel like they do not belong in the province, even if they may have lived there for over 20 years. They are constantly made to feel like outsiders who do not have the right to claim citizenship in the same way as those with money.

In many ways, the post-apartheid South African State has introduced a new racial hierarchy in which the figure of the 'foreigner' now comes to represent those seen to be 'darker skinned' Africans who come from countries that are less 'modern' or economically wealthy than the South African State. While within the South African State itself, there are those who are viewed as outside of the 'modern,' who merely need to shed their rural and backward existences, usually denoted by the language they speak, and to be brought into 'modernity,' because their current way of being in the world does not fit with the picture of the urban monied citizen. While a black majority government is in power now, freedom has largely remained an economic relation to private property rather than an affirmation of a new humanity.

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Between theory and practice: The continuation of the migrant labour system

Neocosmos examines xenophobia as "a political discourse"; for him (2006:122):

Existing explanations of xenophobia in South Africa in terms of economic crisis, political transition, relative deprivation, or remnants of apartheid all contain a grain of truth but none are adequate in themselves; neither is a mere addition of these accounts sufficient.

He argues that the task is to think politically about the relationship between State formation, citizenship, and political subjectivity in post-apartheid SA. In order to undertake this project he outlines the way in which citizenship became inscribed in post-apartheid SA through a largely top-down State project that followed the depoliticisation of the popular and mass-based participatory urban politics of the 1980s. At the centre of redefining the subject of liberal citizenship of a 'new' SA was the migrant labour system. While mostly male migrants from Mozambique and Lesotho, as well as Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Malawi, in the main, were central to building the economy of SA by working on the mines, and participated in the anti-apartheid struggle together with their already independent governments, this had shifted by the end of apartheid. Neocosmos (2006:62) argues:

The state-nation formation perforce had to exclude those not seen as belonging to the nation as defined by the state, in other words, 'foreigners'. This process provided one of the conditions within the configuration of power relations for post-apartheid xenophobia. State legislation and practice, the former criminalising migration, the latter left untransformed from the apartheid period, have operated within a discourse and practice which have not only reduced citizenship to indigeneity and denied a history to migration, but also enabled state arbitrariness towards 'foreigners' through the expressive power provided to state personnel and the reproduction of racism in a modified form.

Rather than creating an environment where oscillating migration would indeed still be possible between surrounding countries and SA, nationalist conceptualisations of apartheid created the view that migrancy was evil, and the hope shared among the ANC leftist intellectuals and the trade unions was that democratisation would lead to a permanently settled urban proletariat who would live in family housing, and single-sex male hostels would be dismantled (Neocosmos, 2006:74). These largely economic arguments obscured the ability of State actors to engage with political and social reasons for migrancy that did not rest on a relative deprivation thesis which created a further divide between rural and urban spaces (Neocosmos, 2006: 47).

Nor did they take into account the effect which the break-up of the compound hostel system would have on the ease with which collective organising took place in the previously ethnically segregated and overcrowded compounds.²

There are various instances and examples of the ways in which migrancy began to form part of and change various cultures and traditions in Southern Africa. For many, it enabled them to economically sustain and grow their rural homesteads.

One of the main functions of migrant cultures on the mines was commitment to the independence and satisfaction of patriarchal proprietorship over a rural homestead. Home networks were sustained so that mineworkers could return to their rural lives one day, which represented *Tiro* (ownership and building of a long-term creative project) with their wives in the *imizi* (homestead) (Moodie and Ndashe, 1994:20–23). In the 1940s about 45% of amaMpondo mineworkers from Lusikisiki were deferring their pay in full, and perhaps 60–70% of their pay was repatriated (Moodie and Ndashe, 1994:33). The tension with the individual unfulfilling life, which is merely represented as *Mmereko* (a means to an end), is representative of a resistance to proletarianisation and a “practical integrity that not only is inconceivable outside of social existence but also lived out courageously within” (Moodie and Ndashe, 1994:23).

Migrant cultures also changed, challenged and transformed social and political relations in the communities from which migrants were drawn. The edited volume *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds 1800–2014* (see Rankin-Smith *et al*, 2014) provides numerous examples of the differentiated ways in which people interpreted migration and how these were downplayed by those who saw rural areas as only beholden to corrupt chiefs and despotism. The book is full of the experiences of young Basotho and Mpondo males, who became men through the tradition of “going wandering”, which in fact was a reference to going to the mines.

For many women who left their homes to work as the first female domestic workers in the cities, or as beer-brewers in the townships, the money and freedom this gave them – although later severely restricted

and policed by the introduction of passes – allowed them to make more autonomous decisions about their lives or support family members at home (Maylam and Edwards, 1996). As Rankin-Smith *et al* (2014) illustrate, the intersection of Christianity, motherhood and domestic labour also produced a potentially narrow conception of ‘respectable womanhood’ in which European patriarchs found complicity with their African counterparts.

By the 1940s South African women were migrating more rapidly than women in India, for example. The latter faced similar conditions in rural areas, yet they did not migrate to towns on the same scale as African women, even though the Indian State did not control women’s migration (Bonner, 2009). Indian women remained in rural areas due to cultural norms such as the authoritative strength of extended family systems, gender norms and the caste system, in which low-caste women had fewer opportunities in the cities and little access to material resources. In SA, however, both single and married women moved into towns in large numbers. These women usually brewed and sold beer or engaged in other ‘illicit’ activities. They often attached themselves to men for protection and subsistence. Nonetheless, these women faced hostility from multiple actors (see Bonner, 2009; Maylam and Edwards, 1996).

Shula Marks notes how a coalition of forces in Natal – white missionaries, Zulu Nationalists, African Christians and the Department of Native Affairs – rallied against the disintegration of ‘tribal discipline’ evident in the increasing ‘immorality’ of single women in urban and rural areas. According to Marks, “It was in the position of African women that the forces of conservatism found a natural focus” (quoted in Hunter, 2010:55). In *Love in the Time of AIDS*, Mark Hunter develops this when he refers to colonialism as “an accommodation of patriarchs”. While he is writing about KwaZulu-Natal, there are certain universalisms which he points to that are instructive here, especially the way in which colonial law ossified African traditions and customs like courting, *ilobolo* (bride wealth) and notions of respect, which were in constant flux before the arrival of the settlers. The way colonialism cast and re-cast gendered identities through imposed taxes, the introduction of marriage laws and

the influence of Christian beliefs on sexuality, had specific effects on African women particularly, who bore the brunt of this kind of social control. For both the men and women at the turn of the 19th century, new experiences with capitalism meant challenges not only to old traditions and customs, but also to attempts by colonialists to crystallise and arrest cultural norms, by politically organising outside of traditional authoritative channels (Rankin-Smith *et al*, 2014).

In fact, this kind of distinction endures today, where the politics of the party, trade union or non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the urban space often ignore or attempt to de-legitimate other forms of politics, either because these are viewed as backwards and outside the modern, or because they appear incomprehensible to the logic of liberal institutions. The Marikana strikes of 2012 and the subsequent massacre were indeed an example of forms of politics appearing on the mountain that was outside of politics as understood and authorised by the party, the trade union, and the NGO. There was a pronounced inability on the part of the State, media, and civil society actors to comprehend the organisational and political capacities of striking mineworkers (see Naicker, 2015; Bruchhausen, 2015).

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There is, however, another crucially important aspect that is missing in the story of migrancy and xenophobia in SA today: that the migrant labour system did not undergo democratisation under the new government. Although the aspirational desires of the urban intelligentsia of different orders was for the formation of an urban proletariat, the migrant labour system endures, even if it is drawn in the most part from within SA. Many mineworkers, for example, chose to maintain rural homesteads and have plans of returning to their piece of land when their time on the mines comes to an end; this has been confounded by the fact that mining companies have failed to provide adequate housing and services to their workers (Breckenridge, 2012). Far from dismantling the oppressive

single-sex hostel system, the detested slabs of concrete where six to ten men slept in a small, cold room, and building housing with running water and electricity, the mining companies began to offer workers a Living Out Allowance (LOA) (Hartford, 2012).

This LOA, offered to those who choose to leave the single-sex hostels, is not enough money to rent a home, and often mineworkers who take the money use some of it to rent a shack or build their own shack and send a portion back home. This has resulted in the proliferation of shacks around the platinum belt, with no access to running water or proper sanitation. These shanty towns, with their thousands of tin shacks, are also a solution for male workers who have families on the mines. These spaces illustrate that far from being the male-dominated space that we have come to associate with the mines in SA, the major presence of women and children due to the change of laws of movement after apartheid means that these families often want to live together and make their homes in the new place in which they find themselves.

In the cities, the figure of the migrant labourer is also no longer that of the male worker who has left his home to come to seek work; this has been rapidly changing, and many young women have begun to do the same, especially those who do domestic and childcare work, and there is a desire for them to build a home in these new spaces. Yet without land and without services this has often been an impossible feat, maintaining the poor conditions of poor black people in SA and reinforcing the category of 'migrant' as outside of the civil society space.

Marikana, North West province; Marikana Western Cape: The making of internal migrants through the language and discourses of xenophobia

Nkaneng Shack Settlement is a large piece of land that is occupied by mostly mineworkers (largely men, and a few women), as well as people who work in Marikana at the London Mining Platinum Mine (Lonmin). Its residents are predominantly isiXhosa-speaking people who come from the Eastern Cape, as well as some SeSotho-speaking people.

The land is owned by the Traditional Authority of the Bapo ba Mogale, under SA's Traditional Authority Bill, which means that it is controlled through a trust and a narrow definition of who is allowed to use the land. Historic 'labour-sending areas' like the former Transkei and Ciskei, now in the province of the Eastern Cape, continue to send a largely rural-based male population to work on mines, like that in Marikana. It is a well-known fact that the majority of mineworkers involved in the Marikana strikes of 2012 came from the former Transkei.

People living in the shack settlement of Nkaneng say they are there as the name suggests: 'by force', because the local councillor and the Traditional Authority of the Royal Bapo Ba Mogale family tells them this land is not for them. The Mogale Traditional Authority tells people from Nkaneng that the land is not for them because they are amaXhosa, and that land is Tswana traditional farming land. In fact, they are routinely told to go back to the Eastern Cape, where they come from. Their requests for a memorial site to be erected in honour of those who were killed before and during the Marikana massacre of 2012 are currently being ignored, because of

their ethnicity. They are frequently told to go and build a memorial in the Eastern Cape.

The people of Nkaneng want government to buy the land for them, but the land tenure is under the Traditional Authority and government continues to use narrowly conceptualised ideas of ethnicity to deny resources to people who it views as undesirable, in the same way in which Lonmin uses it to ignore requests for resources and services from its workers. It is often the women who are most directly affected by the lack of services. As has been made clear from the statements of groups like Sikhala Sonke, a women's movement that emerged during the strikes of 2012, and the Marikana Widows, it is they who bear the burden of care work in an environment seriously limited by services. During the massacre the lack of roads, running water and electricity made care for the injured mineworkers nearly impossible, and the lack of roads meant, in most instances, critically injured people could not be taken to hospital in time (see Naicker, 2016).

Far from the imagined resettling of these communities in their places of work, people still travel back and forth, as they have for



Washing day in the Marikana Settlement, Phillipi, Western Cape. PHOTO: GroundUp. See <http://www.groundup.org.za/article/marikana-residents-struggle-water/>

over a hundred years, and maintain homes in the rural Eastern Cape. This is, in part, also due to Lonmin's failure to fulfil most of its labour and social legal obligations. Lonmin, the platinum mine that employs most people who live in Nkaneng, built just three of the 5500 houses they were supposed to have built by 2008 (Marinovich, 2015: 50), and a few years before began to offer their workers an LOA. Here too Lonmin remains mute, deferring all responsibility to the Traditional Authority, which controls the trust land it mines. Traditional Authorities have remained largely unchanged since the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. This Act gave authority to traditional leaders within their traditional 'tribal' homelands and laid the legal foundations for the self-determination of the Bantustans and the establishment of territorial authorities.

It is clear that government, the mine management, as well as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) believe that mineworkers are still the subjects of kings and traditional leaders. They frequently fly to the Eastern Cape to consult with traditional leaders and ask for their 'help' to stop strikes on the mines in the North West province (Feni, 2014). The ANC government has continued to give more power to the Council of Traditional Leaders and has attempted to pass a Traditional Courts Bill which continues to oversee areas of the former Bantustans, further bifurcating South African society into those who are citizens and part of a 'rights-based' civil society in the urban space, and those who are subjects under traditional leaders and who are seen as belonging in the rural space under different sets of 'traditional and customary' laws. Mamdani's (1996) formulation of the bifurcated State in *Citizen and Subject* remains a useful resource when thinking through the despotism that has come with the traditional authorities and their long afterlife in South African rural society.³

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We should also not see this form of xenophobia as an anachronism of traditional authority, but rather as a powerful colonial tool that has been taken up with enthusiasm in the post-apartheid era. Neocosmos (2006) is right to assert that notions of citizenship

began to take a very statist form after the end of apartheid, and as James C. Scott (1998) shows in his book *Seeing like a State*, the State has always made settling people and being able to account for them central to its project of control. However, as Mamdani (2013) argues in *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*, this takes a particular form when it comes to colonialism, where people are not merely prevented from being nomadic but there is a directed attempt to geographically fix black African people and to crystallise them within a particular historical moment.

For Mamdani (2013) the distinction made in Africa and elsewhere too between races and tribes is an important one, because races were said to be able to evolve and to be part of civil society, but tribes were not. This idea can be extended to the tricameral system under apartheid, where so-called Indian and Coloured people were allowed representation in Parliament. Although this was rejected by a large number of people who refused to be part of a system designed to prolong apartheid, black African people in general, but particularly the African family, were categorically meant to be kept out of the cities and in Bantustans under despotic African 'chiefs.'

In the post-apartheid era this has largely become directed at poor and working class black people who cannot afford to buy themselves into the property market and elite civil society. While Neocosmos (2006) is right to point out that the State has inscribed citizenship through its rejection and criminalisation of 'migrancy,' it is not merely a return to the mass-based urban movements of the 1980s that will allow us to work through this problem. At the centre of these debates must be the question of land and governance and understanding how the discourse of migrancy not only creates migrants – which we will see shortly do not view themselves as migrants – but also how people are forced into this category through the use of xenophobic language. It is clear that those who occupy land on urban peripheries are seen as outsiders.

The Marikana 2 settlement in Phillipi East in the Western Cape is another example of how the category of 'migrant' is constructed and used to make poor people who occupy land feel excluded from surrounding society. They live in a huge shack settlement with

over 20 000 shacks and little to no access to services like water, electricity and sanitation. They are always seen as coming from elsewhere, in this case from the Eastern Cape, and destined to return to a rural space without ever being able to achieve the status of urban citizen.⁴

In 2012 Western Cape Premier Helen Zille's comment that children from the Eastern Cape who were escaping their failing education systems and coming to the Western Cape to seek greener pastures to go school, were 'education refugees' was, predictably, taken badly by many (Molefe, 2012). What followed was even more interesting. Thinking that she was defending herself, Zille rather ironically wrote that "'refugee' was not a pejorative and concluded that the responses to her use of the word, showed that South Africans, conflating refugee with foreigner, were deeply xenophobic" (Molefe, 2012). Yet people in Marikana 2 settlement just outside of Cape Town say this is the kind of rhetoric they frequently hear from city officials, and Zille was not the first or the last. At a committee meeting held in 2016 they said if there is one thing that really annoys them, it is people who think they came to Marikana from the Eastern Cape to occupy the land. One member of the committee said:

I arrived in Cape Town in 1989, I've been a back-yarder in Crossroads. We've been trying to occupy this land for years, that day [in August 2014] we succeeded. We, all here in Marikana, we were in Cape Town already. We lived in Delft, Khayelitsha, Crossroads, Nyanga, Langa. We were always passing this land and we always wanted to occupy it.

For them, constant references to their Eastern Cape roots because they are isiXhosa-speaking and have family in the Eastern Cape is insulting. Particularly because, as another member mentioned:

We are not allowed to be South Africans like everyone else. We've been contributing to the economy. Before we came here, there were murderers and rapists using this land and dumping bodies here. We are making it into a community. Any land in South Africa should belong to the people of South Africa.

Another member added:

If we start to bring the issue of race, we are seen as negative ... this province was the beginning of apartheid. Twenty years in democracy, we are still treated like foreigners by the government of the Democratic Alliance. If we speak about it, we are seen as rebels or radicals, so we don't talk about race when we talk about the land and services, we don't want to mix politics and human rights issues.

This separation between what is understood as politics, as something very definitely tied to the way people experience life, personhood and identity in relation to the State, and on the other hand the things they feel the State should be providing to them as human beings, is a distinction that is also present in KwaZulu-Natal and the North West province. People feel that their access to citizenship, and by extension the nation, which very much means access to land and services, is circumscribed by their race and ethnicity, where they are made to feel like 'foreigners' outside of the Eastern Cape.

Thus far, it is clear that Neocosmos' assessment of the State-driven and propagated xenophobia is correct, but it is also clear that it is now being used to create the category of 'migrant' as the poor black person who cannot claim rights in a space that s/he is seen as not belonging in, regardless of the time s/he has spent there. There is another important point however. Although many South African citizens, sometimes across race and class, may themselves be xenophobic, there does exist in certain spaces a solidarity and understanding among people who see themselves as targets of the same kind of language and categorisation as 'migrants' or 'foreigners'. In other times and in other spaces there is an acknowledgement of similar experiences of being ignored or treated as a non-citizen; it is from these quarters that a subaltern sphere of politics and solidarity emerges.

Migrancy and solidarity: Lessons from KwaZulu-Natal and Grahamstown

In 2015 in KwaZulu-Natal many blamed the comments of Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini for the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in the province. When he addressed a crowd

of people during a public event in the town of Pongola, he accused the South African Government of not protecting local people from the influx of 'foreigners,' and making them compete for the few economic opportunities present. He added that foreigners should go back home (Ndou, 2015). However, what happened during an anti-xenophobia march held in April as well as in some shack settlements in Durban was a very different kind of picture.

On 7 April 2015 AbM, a social movement in Durban, organised a peaceful march in collaboration with a Congolese people's movement and others, against xenophobia, following the xenophobic attacks. The march turned violent when police fired rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd of peaceful and unarmed marchers. One woman, who lives in Marikana Land Occupation in Cato Crest in Durban, a settlement affiliated to AbM, broke her leg while trying to run away. Others ran into a Mr Price shop to buy new t-shirts and took off their AbM t-shirts so that they wouldn't be shot.

There was another presence at the march. A group of men carrying weapons, dressed in Zulu traditional clothing and singing struggle songs, was approaching the marchers. Their songs implied that they were getting ready for war. Police, who should have been protecting the peaceful marchers, decided to use tear gas and water cannons containing a strange blue substance that made protestors itch, against them.

When asked why the people in Cato Crest took part in the protest with Congolese people, many gave a simple answer: we know how it feels to be treated this way. Marikana Land Occupation is constituted of people who come from the Eastern Cape together with Zimbabweans, Malawians, some Congolese people, and folk from other countries. People whose family homes are in the Eastern Cape make up the majority of the residents of this settlement. They were forced to occupy this piece of land after they were evicted from land across the road which was earmarked for Reconstruction and Development Programme houses. When they enquired as to whether they would get the houses, since they are the people who used to occupy the land, they were told by local ANC

councillors that the houses are not for them and they should go back to the Eastern Cape.

When the AbM Marikana branch held a meeting with eThekweni Mayor James Nxumalo to ask why they as South African citizens should not get the houses in Cato Crest, to their horror he repeated the same sentiments as his subordinate government officials: "These developments are not for people from the Eastern Cape, this is KZN." The people of Cato Crest say they had to go on the march because they knew that this is the same language that the Government uses against them all the time. They too are treated as 'foreigners' in KwaZulu-Natal.

A Malawian resident of Marikana Land Occupation said that if he had any opportunities in Malawi he would leave SA and never come back, because it was clear that the Government did not believe in Pan-Africanism and had not worked out the internal divisions between their own people. The only reason that people who had come from other countries remained in their homes, even though horrified by xenophobic violence in other parts of Durban, is because they say AbM protects them and has a firm anti-xenophobic stance that all their members subscribe to. People in these settlements who come from various places, have different backgrounds and often speak different languages, feel safe because they know their neighbours; they meet them every Sunday in the community meeting; they meet them during various community activities and they meet them at social occasions, like poetry, dance and arts events hosted by AbM in Marikana, which is a celebration of the diversity of the settlement. People are clear that xenophobia, far from being spontaneous or sudden violence, is something that your councillor, mayor and local government official remind you about on a regular basis. They remind you who is an insider and who is an outsider, whether you are Mpondo or Zimbabwean – the language is the same.

AbM in many ways attempts to build a politics based on residence as opposed to origin; in this they welcome people from different places and cultures in order to build a new culture of resistance that is forged through their struggles for housing, land and political freedom in Durban. Their UnFreedom Day celebrations, which they



View of Grahamstown from Fort Selwyn – clearly showing a town divided. PHOTO: Public domain.

hold every year on Freedom Day (27 April in SA) in order to show that they are indeed not yet free, is usually also a celebration of difference and an acknowledgement that this is a strength of their movement. In 2016 leader of the AbM S'bu Zikode, even though he himself is from Durban, opened his speech with the words "Viva Eastern Cape". Another woman, who read some of her poetry, was dressed as a domestic worker as homage to all the women in the movement who do this kind of work. In fact, women are often a central part of these cultural and political interventions, and it is something that is specifically encouraged within AbM.

In Grahamstown in late October 2015 another nasty but familiar scene was being played out. In a series of articles in the *Daily Maverick*, an online newspaper, Paddy O'Halloran, a student at Rhodes University, recounted and explained the xenophobic attacks and the collusion of local government officials, local taxi businessmen, and the police. Over 500 people were affected, displaced, and left without a home and over 300 shops were looted, while

police did little to stop the violence. The shops were owned by Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Ethiopian, Somali, Nigerian, Malawian, Zimbabwean, Egyptian, Senegalese, Palestinian, Sudanese and Chinese residents. However, the main targets were mostly Muslims, after rumours that "An Arab man with a beard" was linked to mutilations and murders in Grahamstown in the previous months (O Halloran, 2015a).

The UPM in Grahamstown tried to warn police and the Mayor about the possibility of xenophobic attacks, and they were ignored. The unsubstantiated rumours quickly led to growing Islamophobic sentiments among local community members. The UPM then initiated a community meeting where they invited police to talk to residents and quell rumours. The police arrived late and then failed to take any decisive action. It was the UPM whose "members stood between flying bricks and the shop-fronts, pleading with the attackers to stop or helping the people inside to escape" (O'Halloran, 2015b). Despite this, police allowed looting to continue, and no arrests were made. It later emerged that

local taxi bosses encouraged rumours and looting (O'Halloran, 2015c), while local politicians, ANC and Democratic Alliance councillors alike, made xenophobic comments to crowds of community members on several occasions (see O'Halloran, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d).

In a town of acute poverty and unemployment, it was the UPM, the Rural People's Movement (RPM), and local NGO Masifunde that organised community meetings, worked to dispel rumours through pamphlets as well as talks at local schools, and provided food and other basic necessities to the many families who were impoverished or whose male members had to be taken out of town and kept at a secret location (O'Halloran, 2015a). Their wives were the ones who bravely faced police, looters, and local government officials; they held a protest at the Grahamstown City Hall on 30 October. The women, many of whom were South African citizens married to men born in other countries, were ignored, and instead of receiving protection, temporary housing, or food packages, were told by the Mayor that "she had 'only a shoulder to cry on' and nothing else, to offer them" (O'Halloran, 2015c).

It would be completely accurate to say that in Grahamstown local businessmen that had the direct support of Government officials and police, who encouraged or tacitly gave their support through inaction, instigated xenophobic attacks. It would also be completely accurate to say that socially, politically, and economically, the solidarity and support that people who were born in different countries received was from the poorest sections of the community. The UPM and RPM are organisations used to protesting against and seeking solutions from the largely inactive Grahamstown Municipality, notorious for ignoring its constituents. They are familiar with the kinds of struggles that the most oppressed and marginalised in a highly polarised town like Grahamstown experience.

On the other, more affluent, side of town where students of Rhodes University were protesting, police were present to monitor the situation while social media was abuzz with the ongoing student protests that also shook the country in 2015. Some would argue that the university and students had more important things to deal with at that

time, but it was clear that there were two parts of town. One side was experiencing looting, violence, and families whose members had to leave town to stay safe. It was on this side of town that poor people organised, educated against, and resisted xenophobia.

This reality does not fit the descriptions one would easily find in mainstream media of poor people in townships ready to attack 'foreigners'.

Some conclusions

The loud voices of those who have access to the bourgeois public sphere obfuscate the nuanced reality of xenophobia for the sake of political expediency. President Zuma appears in national mainstream media saying that National Government has failed to "explain to people how their democracy was won," or opposition leader Julius Malema explains xenophobic violence as the "spontaneous action of unthinking individuals." Both leaders are willing to frame the majority of citizens as the *lumpen* who need to be educated, when it suits their political ends, rather than account for the State's role in creating and propagating xenophobic discourse.

The moral outrage of the middle classes often pastes over real attempts to understand and engage with relationship building that occurs within communities of so-called 'foreigners' and South Africans, who frequently live together in shack settlements across the country. It is here that stories of solidarity, hope, despair, and most certainly humanism, as well as, at times, sustained progressive organisation, can be found.

It is clear that there are resonances between the experiences of those who are put into the categories of 'internal migrant' and 'foreigner', although there are some important differences. The similar experiences have pointed to the narrow conception of who belongs to the post-apartheid nation, and who can claim citizenship rights. It has also illustrated that it is often the damned of the Earth who provide the most solidarity to each other.

Perhaps, however, it is necessary to rethink the use of the words 'foreigner' and 'migrant' altogether, and the ways in which we refer to people who have arrived here

from other countries. If we are to politically engage with the social and economic conditions of migrants, Alain Badiou (1998:117) suggests it should take place through a series of three questions:

We should first tackle the question of how, concretely, we treat the people who are here; then, how we deal with those who would like to be here; and finally, what it is about the situation of their original countries, that makes them want to leave.

A useful formulation and one that was central to Badiou and his militant group *L'Organisation Politique* and the struggle of the Sans-Papiers movement in France in the early 1990s was: "*quiconque vit ici est d'ici*" (whoever lives here, is from here). For Badiou (quoted in Nail, 2015:111) neither the category of 'citizen' nor the category of 'foreigner' are useful:

The figure of the citizen is no longer adequate because it has become a 'separating word' or 'partition' between 'the French' and 'foreigners', and is used to justify laws that apply only to part of the people living in the country

What could a politics of inclusivity not based on, in Mamdani's (2013) formulation, 'a point of origin' but rather a universal claim to 'residence' look like? This idea like the Sans-Papiers movement started by African migrants in France is something which Julius Nyerere managed to cultivate in Tanzania in the 1960s through projects of nation-building and legal reforms. Despite criticisms of programmes like Ujamaa, central to the construction of citizenship in Tanzania was a decided focus on residence and not on race or origin (see Mamdani, 2013; Mulenga, 2001).

This politics of residing has clear resonances with movements like AbM and UPM, and it is from these already existing practices within a subaltern sphere of politics that new notions of inclusive residence can be fashioned.

Notes

1. All quotes from people in Nkaneng Settlement in Marikana, Marikana Land Occupation in Cato Crest and Marikana 2 Settlement in Philippi East were conducted by the author between 2015 and

2016 as part of an ongoing research project. In most cases interviewees chose not to be named unless necessary.

2. Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout (2012:245) speak about the various regimes of control, which acted on the bodies of mineworkers as they left one node of spatial control in the reserves and moved into the compounds on the mines. Yet the way in which these spaces of control were used to organise and to meet was something that the NUM capitalised on when they eventually came to the mines in the 1980s and tackled the indignity of the small, squashed and overcrowded compounds (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2010:248). In some ways the policy of ethnically segregated compound systems as well as the home-friend networks also laid the foundations for the bitter faction-fighting that would rock the mines during the 1970s and 1980s (Moodie, 1994:82). This would eventually force mining companies to desegregate the compounds and allow the NUM to unionise workers and restructure the 'tribal' system on the mines. Although this system was extremely flawed in many ways, it was also what facilitated the retention of migrant cultures and political tradition for that period of time, making it easier for AmaMpondo to respond to issues of living conditions in a collective way.
3. While Mamdani (1996) is correct that there is despotism inherent in this corrupt system of governance, at the same time he ignores the ways in which people in and from rural spaces use cultural political tools of organising to resist this kind of despotism. The Mpondo Revolts were a brilliant example of people resisting corrupt chieftaincies while at the same time remaking old traditions and forging new ones, as were the traces of this rebellion in the Marikana strikes of 2012 (see Naicker and Bruchhausen, 2016).
4. It is interesting that the term migrant was first introduced into legislation during colonialism in SA as a term to describe 'temporary residents', in other words, black foreigners who were wanted as labour but not as immigrants. By the 1970s the term was expanded to include black people from the Bantustans (Neocosmos, 2006:30). It is uncanny how this distinction still functions today, where xenophobic attacks only affect those who remain within the category of 'migrant' and not those who fall under the category of 'immigrant' and are afforded access to civil society and governmental services.

It is easy to see the practice of this in a city like Cape Town, which will happily invite into its bosom European travellers of various kinds, middle-class 'job seekers' from cities and countries well beyond its borders, and market itself in all other kinds of ways as a 'world-class city' for visitors, 'voluntourists', backpackers, artisans and immigrants. Migrants, however, remain the corollaries of the urban monied citizen. Pushed behind the mountain in mushrooming shack settlements, they are seen as outside of the domain of citizenship: rural, backwards, criminal, dangerous and 'foreign', as a designation of being 'outside'.

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