Becoming an African Diaspora in Australia

Also by Finex Ndhlovu

NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL PROJECTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA:
New Critical Reflections (*co-editor*)

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND NATION BUILDING IN ZIMBABWE

Becoming an African Diaspora in Australia

Language, Culture, Identity

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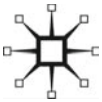

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To the memory of my father and hero, James Mabhuku Ndhlovu-Mhaso. Although you missed out on the opportunity to receive a modern education, you nevertheless understood the transformative power of education and the promises it holds for a better society

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Preface

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed the resurgence of nationalist discourses on topics such as national sovereignty and national interest across the globe. This trend seems to be intensifying, albeit in the midst of an unprecedented increase in a complex and intricately connected linguistic, cultural, religious and transnational diversity that defies traditional identity imaginings of the nation-state. The Australian Liberal Government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott that was elected on 7 September 2013 launched its business with a military-style border protection policy dubbed Operation Sovereign Borders. This policy, essentially aimed at 'protecting Australia' against perceived 'invasion' by asylum seekers arriving by boat on the country's shores, takes its cue from former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, who once declared: 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' (Liberal Party of Australia, 2013: 4). Back in 2011 the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, defended his country's decision not to join the European Union single currency zone, arguing that such a move would hurt Britain's economic and 'national interests'. He declared that he wanted 'to make sure we get a good deal for Britain [and that] Britain would never join the euro' unless there were 'proper protections for key British interests' (David Cameron, 2011). At the level of the United Nations (UN), the long-standing debates and differences over climate change policy have consistently been stalled by self (national) interests that have tipped the balance against collective global action on this topical issue. Arguments in defence of national (economic and political) interests, as opposed to the interests of the totality of humanity and the environment, have often prevailed in guiding member states on whether to ratify major UN statutes such as the Kyoto Protocol.

All the above are clear examples of how narrow state-centric and inward-looking nationalism seems to be influencing current identitarian discourses in a manner that is anachronistic to the realities of transnational diversity that are visible at both local and translocal scales. Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders policy is a clear statement of national sovereignty emphasizing the need for the country to control its borders, which are imagined in spatial terms – as constituting a

completed and closed horizontality. Such a view of Australia and the underlying meaning of being and becoming an Australian contradict the dynamic and open-ended nature of current global cultural and political identities. It misses the real substance of the matter; that is, the crucial point about present conditions of unprecedented voluntary and forced transnational movements of human populations, goods and services, which are aided by the incipient rise in information communication technologies. These have meant that national borders are now social and transient virtual spaces that are constantly under construction. Unlike what they used to look like when they were invented in the late 18th century, national boundaries and their associated cultural and political identities are costantly in the process of being (re)made and (re)negotiated; they are never finished and are never closed. However, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of cultural, linguistic, religious and political pluralities across the globe, nation-state-centric forms of cultural and political insularity are still being pursued and vigorously defended by the governing authorities of individual countries – all in the name of safeguarding national interest. Australia in particular is still trying to wiggle out of the trappings of its racist past that produced a racialised and stereotyped national identity construct, which privileged Anglo-Celtic cultural and linguistic norms over those of indigenous Australians and non-European groups of immigrants. While this observation abounds in previous studies on Australian history, migration and politics, the conversations have unfortunately remained locked in tired and reductionist understandings of race, racism and the associated cultural and linguistic discourses about what it means to be an Australian. Much of the previous body of literature is replete with discourses of denial and mythologies of political correctness that do not capture those everyday experiential dimensions of belonging that play out in micro-social settings way out of the gaze of official master-narratives on Australian identity.

Becoming an African Diaspora in Australia contributes some groundbreaking conceptual and empirical ideas to extend in new directions the debate on identity, culture and notions of race and racism in Australia and internationally. It highlights discourses on indigeneity, nativism, migrant assimilation and integration, and discursive/symbolic forms of exclusion, as key identity categories that require a fresh look from a nuanced and progressive conceptual perspective. The book presents recent empirical evidence to develop the new language nesting model of diaspora identity and calls attention to the limitations of current cultural frames of identity representation, which have so far failed to

capture the complexities of contemporary transnational identities. It also attempts to de-naturalize the often taken-for-granted everyday assumptions and imaginings about the cultures and identities of African diaspora communities. To this end, the book invites us to revisit and rethink the vocabulary that we use to look at popular conceptual categories of identity – race, culture, language, ethnicity, nationality and citizenship, among others – in the context of a critical transnationality that recognizes the need to contain the hegemonic and universalising cultural theories of the past millennium.

Acknowledgements

While my doctoral and previous academic work already had a strong focus on several aspects of African studies, including language policy and politics, language and nation building and language and everyday forms of exclusion, the aspect on African diasporas was peripheral and less prominent. My interest in the broad field of African diaspora cultures and identities grew out of my postdoctoral work, started in 2008. My first postdoctoral research fellowship project, which investigated the role of English language proficiency skills in determining the outcomes of the Australian values test for citizenship applicants from African refugee backgrounds, was to be the genesis of my now well-established interest in African-Australian diaspora studies. For this reason, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Victoria University postdoctoral research fellowship scheme that enabled me to develop and consolidate my experience and expertise in the field of African diaspora studies. Three of the chapters in this book are greatly revised versions of my journal articles that were published out of the data collected as part of my postdoctoral research fellowship work. I am, therefore, thankful to Taylor and Francis for permission to use the following chapters: Chapter 3 'Language and Nationality: Prime Markers of Diaspora Identities?' (a revised version of Ndhlovu, 2009); Chapter 4 'Belonging and Attitudes Towards Migrant Heritage Languages' (a revised version of Ndhlovu, 2010); and Chapter 6 'Being and Becoming Australian' (a revised version of Ndhlovu, 2011). Chapter 7 'Language Practices in Regional Settings – The Language Nesting Model' is a reproduced version of Ndhlovu (2013), also with permission from Taylor and Francis.

I am also greatly indebted to the University of New England (UNE) for the Research Seed Grants funding scheme (Round 1, 2012), which enabled me to collect and analyse the data that culminated in some of the chapters in this book. In particular, the language nesting model presented in Chapter 7 was developed from the analyses of oral interview data on the language practices of emerging African communities in regional New South Wales. The model, which is among the most significant contributions of this book, is a product of collective effort between myself and my daughter, Thandi Thandaza Ndhlovu. I say thank you to Thandi for her valuable contribution. I would also like to thank all

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To all my colleagues in the School of Behavioural Cognitive and Social Sciences at UNE I say thank you so much for providing the much needed collegial environment and academic support. Finally, to my academic mentor, Professor Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, thank you for your continued guidance and critique of my work, which has seen me grow and develop into the senior academic I am today. Finally, to Libby Forrest and the editorial and production teams at Palgrave Macmillan I say thank you for a job well done.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCESS	Australian Assessment of English Communicative Skills
ACALAN	African Academy of Languages
AU	African Union
ACPEA	Australian Council on Ethnic and Population Affairs
AMES	Adult Migrant English Services
Cth	Commonwealth
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIEA	Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ESB	English Speaking Background
ESL	English as a Second Language
IRA	Immigration Restriction Act
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NSW	New South Wales
ORE	Occupation Requiring English
PRC	People's Republic of China
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
STEP	Special Test for English Proficiency
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees