

African Histories and Modernities

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Hashi Kenneth Tafira

Xenophobia in South Africa

A History

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Hashi Kenneth Tafira
Johannesburg, South Africa

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This book is dedicated to my late mother Jennifer Ndlovu-Gatsheni.

PREFACE

How were the black subject and black subjectivities produced? How did a colonised self-hating being emerge? A being that is not only self-hating, but hates another that looks like them. These foundational questions need profound answers. The overarching concern of this book is a phenomenon termed xenophobia which I prefer to describe as intra-black-racism/black-on-black-racism which has haunted postapartheid black communities. The so-called xenophobia is not a postapartheid aberration. It has its roots deep in the colonial contact. But what does colonial contact entail? To have a deep comprehension of this latter question one needs to take a historical tour. Colonial contact is a process brought about by, and an integral part of, colonial modernity from at least the fifteenth century. When one unpacks the contents of colonial contact then a lifetime story of depredation, dismemberment, dehumanisation and self-abnegation unravels. Now these are the techniques underpinning colonial contact.

VIOLENCE AND BRUTALITY

Colonialism is not possible without employment and deployment of violence, terror and brutality. African people and all non-Western people are welcoming and hospitable people. European strangers unfaithfully misconstrued the hospitality they received as naivety and weakness and sought to eject indigenously people from their lands. That could only happen through the sword, the barrel of the gun and trickery. At the core of this project is rabid racism which sees other people as both sub-human and non-human and only fit for

perpetual enslavement and coerced labour. Once the appellation non-human has been fixed, brutalities like genocides, epistemicides, dispossession, rape and murder and, consequently, colonialism are applied. The violence introduced by colonial conquerors seeps into the being and the psyche of the colonised. That explains the banal black-on-black violence common in black communities. The 2008 anti-immigrant violence is according to Mngxitama not fear and hatred of “foreigners” but fear and hatred of black people which he calls Negrophobia/Afrophobia.¹ This violence is a perpetuation of colonial and apartheid violence against black people which they have systematically internalised.² Mngxitama adds that the security and privilege of South African whites and the new black elite is fed by the everyday structural violence of poor blacks – who are trapped in that reality. In fact, whites are never considered foreigners but tourists, investors and employment creators. Ironically, South African whites who constitute 10 per cent of the population own more than 80 per cent of the country’s wealth. The Johannesburg township of Alexandra which was the theatre of 2008 anti-immigrant violence is only a few kilometres from Sandton, the richest suburb in Africa and the epicentre of South African capital.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL/MENTAL ENTRAPMENT

Given the fact that attempts at dispossession and colonial conquest are met with fierce resistance, techniques aimed at subduing candidates for colonisation are necessary. These comprise the use of religion, book and inferiorisation. The colonial subject is made to feel and believe in their own inferiority; that they are inadequate and that they are not even fully human. This inferiority is interiorised and stays in the psyche of the colonised for generations. Mental colonisation often produces multiple ripple effects. These include colourism, black-on-black violence and other malaise plaguing black communities. Indeed a black subject sees another black as a mortal foe, a rival and a competitor who at certain circumstances must be verbally and physically assailed, expelled and eliminated. Here Mngxitama’s analysis is revealing: colonialism was crucial in creating a black subject preoccupied with labour, jobs and seeking employment at the white man’s employ and content with scrambling for crumbs from the white man’s table.³

DIVISION, DISUNITY AND COLONISATION

One of colonialism's successful techniques has been divide and rule, often based on artificially imposed differences. The ethnic factor, for example, which has come to haunt postcolonial societies, is itself a refraction of colonial creation. In any case it is necessary for colonialism to pit one group of people against another and, in turn, to place the blame on them. This intra-black tension, quarrels and violence is regarded as normal to and constituent of the African nature.

Pioneers of the liberation struggle saw the perils of division and sought to unite the people under the banner of African nationalism. A xenophobe, who also happens to be a thoroughbred tribalist, behaves and acts contrary to the humane precepts which African humanism professes. Azanian Pan-Africanist Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe called for creation of the United States of Africa which symbolises African unity, erases racialism, tribalism, imperialism and colonialism.⁴ The success of a liberated African nation hinges on loyalty to one African nation, from Cape to Cairo, Madagascar to Morocco, where ethnic and national groups are subsumed.⁵ Africanists, according to Sobukwe, do not subscribe to the idea of South African exceptionalism because South Africa is part of the indivisible whole of Africa. Arguing against multiracialism, Sobukwe insisted that it fostered and maintained group exclusiveness.⁶ As a negation to democracy, multi-racialism "implies that there are such basic insuperable differences between various national groups here that the best course is to keep them permanently distinctive in a kind of democratic apartheid. That to us is racialism multiplied, which probably is what the term connotes."⁷

Despite these noble efforts the spectre of ethnicism and differences haunted the liberation movement. In South Africa, the African National Congress of 1912, the Unity Movement, the Congress Youth led by Anton Lembede, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and the Black Consciousness Movement sought to foster a Black Solidarity as an antidote to colonial artificial differences. The idea, of course, was to infuse nationalism to override tribal traditions and inculcate pride in the black subject and instil humanity in them which colonialism usurped. The effects of colonial devastations are enduring. Colonial rulers' ideas once etched in the psyche of the colonised are difficult to efface.

The unfortunate tale of intra-black racism haunting postapartheid black communities prods us to revisit the question of colonialism and, of course, the need for decolonisation. Xenophobia is a colonial construct and a

derivative of white supremacy. It can only be effectively dealt with by deconstructing structures and machinations underpinning continued colonialism which manifests in another guise and disguise.

Johannesburg, South Africa

Hashi Kenneth Tafira

NOTES

1. Andile Mngxitama, "Blacks are Kwerekwere Whites are Tourists," *New Frank Talk* 7, November 2010.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. R.M. Sobukwe, "One Central Government in Africa," *Drum*, November 1959.
5. Manifesto of the Africanist Movement, n.d.
6. Opening Address by R.M. Sobukwe, Inaugural Convention of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, 4–6 April 1959.
7. Ibid.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADAPT	Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training
ANC	African National Congress
BPC-SASO	Black Peoples Convention-South African Students Organisation
COSATU	Confederation of South African Trade Unions
CST	Colonisation of a Special Kind
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ID	Identity Book
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
NRC	Native Representative Council
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
SANAC	South African Native Affairs Commission
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UBC	Urban Bantu Council
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association