

Is xenophobia racism?¹

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The outbreak of anti-immigrant violence in May 2008 in South Africa has prompted a set of theoretical questions and a reappraisal of theoretical suppositions. While the attacks have in the main pervasively been presented as xenophobia, I argue in this paper that what is termed xenophobia is in fact racism – New Racism – practised by people of the same population group, which has characterised post-apartheid South African black social relations. These are implications of decolonisation and difficulties of assimilating and integrating black African immigrants into the new South Africa. On the other hand there is increased culture contact and intermixing as a result of the accelerated presence of people of other identities. There are of course conceptual and definitional limitations of the term xenophobia in describing the complex social realities occurring in South African black communities. I therefore call for the deconstruction of the term xenophobia and propose that we begin to see it as culturally-based racism. The article explains that this kind of racism is heavily entrenched in cultural differences enunciated by dissimilarities in nationality, ethnicity, language, dress, customs, social and territorial origins, speech patterns and accents. These differences are deepened by social and economic inequalities, and frustrations among local people are expressed thorough economic grievances, which however mask the preceding cultural contempt and disdain. In addition, some current black on black practices are reminiscent of apartheid white anti-black racism. Drawing on my fieldwork in Alexandra, I then discuss a wide range of labels which are used to refer to African immigrants.

Keywords: Xenophobia, New racism, anti-immigrant violence, labelling, South Africa, Alexandra

On 11 May 2008, violence against black African immigrants erupted in South Africa, starting in the Johannesburg township of Alexandra and spreading to other areas of Gauteng. When the violence subsided, sixty-two people were dead, hundreds injured and maimed and thousands displaced. The attacks were in scope and nature characteristic of pogroms.² The thrust of my argument is that what has been termed *xenophobia* in many circles, including the media and academia, is actually racism, that is, to be more succinct, the *New Racism*³. The *New Racism* is racism practised by black people on other blacks, who belong to the community but are seen as socially and culturally inferior. I further argue that racism is not necessarily based on skin colour (ie. that it is possible for people of the same skin colour to practise racism against each other⁴), but on differences in culture, nationality, language, dress, habits and ethnicity. This kind of racism is more of a cultural nature; culture takes precedence over anything else. I am cognisant of the complexities that arise from this problematique, particularly the question: what activity constitutes racism, and/or what is *xenophobic*?

As I will show later, I have equated *xenophobia* with racism and have maintained that what is seen as xenophobia is actually racism. I have attempted to achieve that by taking a semantic route and putting both *xenophobia* and racism into a conceptual and theoretical framework. Indeed I am sceptical

of the definitive and theoretical limitation of the term *xenophobia* where practices, nuances and logics in Alexandra are concerned, which I find more racist than *xenophobic*. However all this begs the question: what is xenophobia and what is racism? The definition of the former is more straightforward, while the concept of racism poses dilemmas because of its fluidity and the lack of general agreement of what constitutes racism. The paper begins with some theoretical expositions; I present some arguments to show why I am inclined to use the term racism instead of xenophobia. The following section of the paper bolsters this argument with ethnographic evidence from my fieldwork in Alexandra in 2009, which I have extrapolated for the purpose of this paper. I end with some suggestions as to why it is important to treat *xenophobia* analytically as racism.

In my understanding the use of the term *xenophobia* is inadequate to comprehend the violent attacks against black African immigrants in South Africa. I call for the deconstruction of the term xenophobia and suggest that, rather, we need to consider post-apartheid South African black and black relations as the *New Racism*. Xenophobia as a universal phenomenon has been broadly defined as an intense dislike, hatred or fear of those perceived to be strangers (Crush 1996; Frederickson 2002; De Master and Leroy 2000). The term denotes behaviour specifically based on the perception

1. This paper is based on my Masters research conducted in the Johannesburg's Alexandra Township in 2009, culminating in a dissertation entitled *Black Racism in Alexandra: Cross border Love Relationships and Negotiation of Difference in a post-Apartheid South African Community*, Department of Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand.
2. The Coalition Against Xenophobia, formed in the wake of the violence, has, in its Declaration, termed the violence pogroms similar to those in nineteenth century Europe.
3. I have departed from my earlier work where I termed this 'black racism' (Tafira 2010). I have realised the complications that arise from using this term. It is possible that black racism might be confusing to some, implying that it may be seen as racism by black people on whites. In this sense I mean racism by black people on other black people
4. One might think of the German/Jewish; British/Irish relations. Members of these groups are of the same skin colour but their relations are marked by virulent racism.

that the Other is foreign, or originates from outside the community or nation (International Labour Organisation *et al.* 2001:2). In the wake of the 2008 violence, some authors have proposed the analysis of the events as *Negrophobia* or *Afrophobia* (Gqola 2009; Mngxitama 2009). *Negrophobia* is seen as the fear and dislike of black people and their culture (Fanon 1967; Chinweizu 1994; Gqola 2009); *Afrophobia* then would denote the fear and/or dislike of Africans and their culture. Phobia as defined by Hesnard (cited in Fanon 1967) is a neurosis characterised by an anxious fear of an object or anything outside the individual; it must arouse both fear and revulsion. These definitions I think are incompatible with the salient, implicit, explicit or hidden racist practices that black people exercise towards each other. Although both Gqola (2009) and Mngxitama (2009) have noted that the attacks were racialised and characteristic of *Negrophobia*, I argue that what happens in South Africa is neither xenophobia, *Negrophobia* nor any other kind of phobia, but must be understood in the context of racism, practised by black people against other black people. My supposition is that this *New Racism*, which is cultural, may indeed take on an economic outlet. However, it is not economic in origin but the economic logic serves to deepen the differences, which are mobilised to effect prejudices, discriminations, notions of inferiority and superiority and, subsequently, violent attacks and pogroms.

My renunciation of the term *xenophobia* and subsequent adoption of the term *New Racism* is inspired mainly by the following propositions: *xenophobia* has been the term the media has used, juggled around and fed to their audiences; it is possible that the media themselves do not understand the racial nature of anti-immigrant attacks; commentators who have used the term may have done so unconsciously and inadvertently or for lack of a better term to describe anti-immigrant practices in post-apartheid South Africa. I assume that it may be incomprehensible to many people that racism can be a practice between people of the same skin colour. Furthermore, I suspect commentators, the media included, may fail to see the *New Racism*, as it has unfolded, as an unfortunate misconception. They may fall into the common trap of understanding the conundrum of racism as mostly biology-based. They have not come to see how people of the same skin colour, in this case black African immigrants and black South Africans, are and have over the years been transformed into racialised subjects and how they have come to perceive each other in the light of their racial subjectivities.

At this juncture, my question is: are *xenophobia* and racism, as universal concepts, different, or are they distinct and overlapping? To some extent, they are different, yes. *Xenophobia* is understood to be the dislike and fear of strangers, and racism, to use Goldberg's (1993) definition, is discrimination against others based on their putatively different social membership. Commentators assume that when discrimination and prejudice happen among people of the same skin colour (where immigrants are concerned) it is *xenophobia*, not racism. The meaning of racism is contingent on the prevailing social and epistemological conditions. It follows to say that racism is a fluid, chameleonic and delicate term, and its conceptualisation assumes a different meaning at different times (Goldberg 1993). I insist then that racism, from apart-

heid racism to what is called *xenophobia*, and to what I call the *New Racism*, are all forms of racism, which are transformed over time, subjected to contingencies of history and the ever changing socio-cultural and material landscapes. How and when does one kind of racism change into another, which may be different in form, content and manifestation, yet still remains racism? According to Goldberg (1993: 92), this is subject to existing social conditions:

The methodological predisposition one brings to the analysis of racism will influence, if not fully determine, its definition. The conception of the phenomena analysts take themselves to be addressing is circumscribed by the constraints of method. Studies of racism have tended to divide methodologically between those assuming an individually oriented and those accepting a structural approach.

Goldberg further states that:

Nevertheless, the meaning of racism is significantly narrowed to omit a range of expressions – namely, practices, effects and implications – that I want to insist are properly constitutive of racialised discourse, in general, and (subject to proper definitional constraints) to racism in particular (Goldberg 1993: 93).

Following from these observations, I have come to the conclusion that in South Africa the discourse of *xenophobia* should come to an end. We need now to analyse, treat and see what is called *xenophobia* as a form of racism, which is practised among population groups of the same skin colour. This may become the new paradigm.

Since the decline of the biological conceptions of superior and inferior races, which were so prevalent in the nineteenth century, and their disappearance from public and academic discourse (Modood 2001), what has emerged is the *cultural assemblage* of racism. What is generally regarded as *xenophobia* in post-apartheid South Africa should be viewed through this lens. This *New Racism* is part of the era of decolonisation, marked by the difficulties of assimilating and integrating black African immigrants into the more modern, industrial and economically advanced society of South Africa. I find many striking similarities between the European experience of two decades ago and the contemporary South African one. In the 1980s, writers in Britain and France detected a 'new, cultural' racism; 'a name given to the enunciation of difference on cultural grounds', they argued that the racist discourse was now being culturalised (Grillo 2003: 7). In other words: cultural racism is seen as 'racism in disguise' (Stolcke 1995: 4), which is articulated through a language of essentialised cultural difference (Taguieff 1990). For Taguieff (1990: 117), when talking of cultural racism, racism can be articulated in terms of either race or culture. He further argues that racism does not only biologise the cultural; it also acculturates the biological. While biological racism is based on unequal treatment and exclusion of others due to phenotypical and other physical differences, cultural racism builds on these to vilify and marginalise certain groups; this is expressed in racial terms (Balibar 1991).

Although many a scholar has decried the biological bases of racism, these traces are not entirely eliminated. Biological

racism does not necessarily become redundant; in some cases it works with, and in conjunction with culturally determined prejudices. In Alexandria while immigrants are defined by their phenotypical appearances (they are seen as those of a darker hue), they are also a racialised group with distinct cultural identities which primarily motivate certain prejudices and discriminations. Michel Wievorka (1997) notes two kinds of racism: classical/inegalitarian and differential. The former considers the Other as inferior, and as those occupying the lowest rungs of society; it legitimises domination and discrimination as a result of overt racial doctrines, which support biological racism. My analysis of the situation in Alexandria, however, led me to make use of Wievorka's concept of differential racism which in many ways is cultural racism. Defined culturally, the Other is seen as a new danger to society, a threat, an invader intent on usurping the hard won materialities which the locals earned with sweat and blood. The ultimate answer is that the 'foreigner' be kept at a distance, expelled and if all else fails, destroyed. In the South African context, the emphasis on cultural differences in manners, speech and pronunciation, and the detection of accents with a special attention to the 'purity' of local languages has become synonymous with cultural racism. All these phenomena serve to portray the problems of ethnic and cultural intermixing, intermarriage, cross-cultural love relationships and 'interbreeding' in societies like Alexandria. However, it should be noted that although cultural racism implicitly avoids a hierarchisation as it was espoused by the apartheid doctrines, which dissipated with the abolition of apartheid in 1994, it is nonetheless presupposed on social and economic inequalities between members of the 'local' population and the supposed 'foreigners'.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the Enlightenment notion of racism was being widely and prominently discredited. Scientific racism as both a historical construction and a product of Enlightenment era originated in the myths developed by philosophers of the eighteenth century, which attempted to explain man's nature and place in society (Marx 1992; Frederickson 2002; Magubane 2007). Although the European supremacist discourses were not inherently racist *per se*, they were employed to justify racist acts and practices (West 1993). Thus the eighteenth century science, philosophy, religion and rationality merged to circumscribe European representation of Others (Du Bois 1965; Magubane 2007). Race has come to be understood as a social construction (Miles 1993). Beliefs such as race were used to construct the Other and therefore the self (Miles 1993). For Goldberg (1993, 2002), race and racism are neither static nor monolithic with a single given meaning. Rather, racial discourses are developed specifically in the paradigmatic views of the day. The concept of race has the ability and adaptivity to define particular population groups at a given socio-historical conjuncture. As races are formed, there is transformation over time in the understandings of what counts as 'race' and what kinds of exclusion and discrimination it entails. Goldberg argues that although the scientific notions of racial hierarchisation and gradation are now obsolete, the concepts of inferiority and superiority implicit in racial hierarchy are still finding expressions in contemporary society. Racism therefore cannot simply be defined in biological terms. Nor can we understand it

simply in economic terms. Historical analyses must not only extend beyond economic relations, but they must include systems of values and appropriations. These values converge and merge at certain socio-historical conjunctures to formulate terms that are political, legal and moral and that espouse racist expressions. In racial subjectification or identification, Goldberg observes that by using racial terms with a racial significance, social subjects racialise people and population groups. What would constitute racism are entities and expressions which include beliefs, verbal outbursts, slurs, acts and consequences which sometimes are violent in nature. In racial subjectification, social actors subject themselves and are subjected to modes of expression which in most cases is done by means of language; Benveniste (1971) calls this interpellation. This refers to the use of language in ways that are debasing, demeaning and derogatory. It is from these, according to Goldberg (1993; 2002), that a thorough understanding of racism can be obtained. Once a racial label has been affixed to people, ideas about what they refer to come to have social and psychological effects (Appiah 2000). By constructing ways in which people see others and themselves, these labels help shape identification, which Ian Hacking (1992) calls 'making up people'. This is synonymous with the South African use of terms like *makwerekwere* and *amagrigamba* which I discuss below. Such terms are not only derogatory but carry racial connotations as well and with reference to civilisation, *makwerekwere* would qualify as a label for a subhuman race (Nyamnjoh 2006).

Racism has a historical specificity (Hall 1980, 1996). However, since racism is not monolithic with a single given meaning (Goldberg 1993), it augurs well to talk of racism(s) in the plural, in order to point out that different racism(s) are not only historically specific but are also articulated in different ways in the societies in which they appear. Though they may draw on historical, cultural and ideological traces of the previous historical phases, they always assume specific forms which arise out of the present – not the past – social and material conditions and organisation of society. Emphasising the historical specificity of racism, Hall posits that the general features of racism are significant: they are modified and transformed by the contexts in social environments and societies in which they appear. Thus, historically, there is not only racism, understood as a monolithic concept, but there are multiple racisms. Hall also warns us against assumptions that hold that since racism(s) are anti-social and anti-human, they are the same – or homogeneous – everywhere. Instead they are contingent to the time, place and social contexts in which they appear. Therefore the characteristics in and within a nation have a level of determination in which racism is active. In societies like South Africa, which were previously structured and articulated through racial domination, racism tends to persist and endure throughout history even if it changes its *colours* in a new socio-economic context. For the purpose of this paper I will not delve into the intricacies of apartheid racism; rather I would like to point out that a deployed racism seems to appear in societies like Alexandria, which continues to exhibit traits of the anti-black racism characteristic of apartheid. I am of the opinion that psychoanalysts would agree that population groups that were previously racially subjugated express the same attitudes towards their own.

However, we need far more research on this subject.

'Alexandra is Africa.' This I was told by one of my research participants. I suppose he said that because of the multi-ethnic character of the township where members of almost all South African ethnic groups and immigrants from across Africa reside. For a long time, ever since its foundation in 1912, Alexandra has been a primary destination for both internal and external migrants. Internal migrants came from areas like Natal and Transkei, while external, transnational migrants arrived from neighbouring countries such as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Mozambique, Nyasaland (Malawi), Lesotho and Swaziland. On the Witwatersrand they worked in the gold mines and the subsequent secondary industries. In the post-apartheid era, more migrants have come to Alexandra from different parts of Africa. Many settled, made the township their permanent habitat, married local women⁵, set up homes and changed their names and surnames to local ones. Already before 1994 there were contestations of who were *bona fide* Alexandra residents, and who were not (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008). Migrant labourers from rural South Africa were called *amagoduka*, meaning those who would return [to their presumed homes]. It tallied with the apartheid migrant labour system that prohibited permanent urban residency. It implied that the *amagoduka* were temporary residents who after a certain period of time would return to their rural 'hinterland'. Naturally this kind of arrangement suited the interests of the apartheid regime, which was loath to accept the city slicker type and street-wise township resident.

The advent of democracy in 1994 saw the country opening up to the whole world in a globalised process of accelerated flows of goods, labour, and an increased migration of black African immigrants (Nyamnjoh 2006). Many non-nationals found their way to Alexandra Township, first, because of long-existing kinship networks of immigrants who had migrated over the past hundred years. Second, the township is a favoured destination because of the industrial areas surrounding it – Kew, Marlboro and Wynberg – which offer prospects of employment. Third, it makes economic sense because of the cheap shack accommodation, which has been proliferating in the area since the late 1980s. The increased migration and settlement of black African immigrants has exacerbated anxieties, insecurities and anti-immigrant attitudes (Nyamnjoh 2006). As a result there has been a cementation of boundaries and sequestration of ethnic groups.

Construction of racial categories

In Alexandra, non-South Africans are known by and given a wide array of names. These are labels which carry racial connotations. Some of these are outright degrading; others are jocular but offensive nonetheless. These labels emanate from culture contact, a result of the presence of other people of other identities and ethnic groups. Each of the labels is value laden; all carry a particular meaning denoting the social and cultural origin of the carrier. In Alexandra particularly the labels change over time, during which process they undergo a mutation. While originally they are often used to refer to a

particular ethnic or social group, they may sometimes become a blanket label for anyone who is not a South African. The process of Othering ostensibly uses national or ethnic identity as a cover, under which there is a psychological, racialised impulse to mobilise these identities and other forms of differences to degrade, deprecate and inflict physical harm. I believe the use of labels to effect Otherness has more far reaching effects than might seem to be the case on the surface. My research in Alexandra in 2009 revealed other practices occurring in the township, although for the purpose of this paper I have focused on how the construction of Otherness leads to racialised identities and pervasive cultural racism. Such interpellating practices are indicative of other modalities of cultural racism in Alexandra, such as the fight over women, the myth concerning the male immigrant genitalia, and other cultural myths about immigrants⁶. Certainly there are many complexities and contradictions in the township; that connect in an intricate manner and throw one into a theoretical conundrum. If one looks at the labels, which I discuss below, it is obvious that they transcend ethnicity, nationality, social and geographical origin, culture, language, perceptions, opinions, innuendos and modalities of migration. All these connect in one way or another into a maze, yet at the same time are mobilised to effect difference and degradation.

As I went around Alexandra asking people about their perceptions of the social relationships between locals and African immigrants, I also enquired about the names they are given and their etymological roots. Those below are some I managed to collate. It must be stated that while these labels are the ones commonly used in Alexandra, there are different names applied in other parts of the country.

Makwerekwere

This is probably the most common, popular and 'older' label used to refer to black African immigrants. Its roots lie in language differences. The speakers of a 'strange' language with unusual phonetic sounds were seen as bearers of an alien speech, which is presumably totally incomprehensible for South Africans. I was told when African immigrants speak, the phonetic sound goes like "*kwerekwerekwerekwere*", hence the name *makwerekwere*. Following the May 2008 violence, The Black Lawyers Association proposed that the painfully offensive term *makwerekwere* be declared part of the lexicon of hate speech in the statute books (*The Star* July 9, 2008).

Magrigamba

This is another term that has been in existence for quite some time. It originally referred to West African men. I was told by participants that *grigamba* were those who came to South Africa with nothing but clothes on their body. After a while they returned home wealthy, propertied and monied, all drawn from the materialities of the host country. The term might have originated in economic relations but has become collapsed with racial identification.

5. Migration was, in the early days, a male phenomenon.

6. I discuss these in depth in my Masters thesis (Tafira 2010).

Maforeigner

This recent label came about as a result of the May 2008 violent attacks on immigrants. The period and aftermath of the violence were captured extensively in the media, which referred to people caught up in the inferno as 'foreigners'. As a result township residents blended the term into their daily linguistic repertoire. The term resonates with nation, nationality and citizenship.

AmaKalanga

I first heard this label from a group of Zulu men, while I was watching a soccer tournament taking place on the grounds behind Madala Hostel⁷. Members of the Kalanga ethnic subgroup of Zimbabwe were among the first Zimbabweans who migrated to South Africa a long time ago to work in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. They were recruited under the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). In Zimbabwe, Kalanga are not regarded as 'real' Ndebele, who are said to be those who came with Mzilikazi from Nguniland in South Africa in the 19th century. Most of the Kalangas, however, are fluent in Ndebele, and have settled in Alexandra, where they have lived for many decades. The term *AmaKalanga* came into use before and during the May/ June 2008 violence. It referred to Ndebele speaking people of Zimbabwe and those from Swaziland. The idea was that they are not *bona fide* Nguni; therefore they are *amaKalanga*. Lately this label has come to refer to anyone who is not a South African. Implicitly there is an association with ethnicity, ethnic origin and ethnic identity.

MaNyasa

This term refers to Malawians. The first Malawians to migrate to South Africa did so before Malawi's independence, while it was still called Nyasaland. However, the label is understood to be derogatory and causes offense. The term connotes national and social origin, and like other labels, is a marker of difference, if not inferiority.

MaNigeria and Broder

'*MaNigeria*' denotes the social-geographical origin of the Nigerians – Nigeria. 'Broder' is an imitation of Nigerian speech: "*my broder from anoder moder.*" On the surface these labels seem 'innocent'; it is only in the way they are used, ie. who uses them and for what intentions and purposes, and with which results, that they assume social significance in the process of social and human interaction. Again, these terms connote nationality and metaphysical boundaries constructed around different social groups.

Ngwangwa

This is another label referring to Nigerians. It is not clear how it came into being in Alexandra. During my fieldwork I could not establish its origins. However, my participants told me it had something to do with the kind of food that Nigerians eat, or with the fact that locals hear the word *ngwangwa* whenever Nigerians are in conversation. It seems to me that there is a linguistic connotation to this. Interestingly, many South

Africans watch the popular Nigerian video movies, known as 'Nollywood' movies, and appropriate registers to construct identities of the 'Other'.

Padrao

This term refers to Mozambicans. It originated from the usage among Mozambicans themselves and indicates the way they addressed each other. Initially it was a respectable term, referring to Mozambican business people involved in hawking and trading. When addressing one another, one party would shout:

"*Eh, Padrao!*"

The other would reply:

"*Padrao!*"

However, the term has been appropriated by South Africans, and the way they use it has become offensive, carrying negative connotations and intending to cause injury to Mozambicans. Though I observed numerous Mozambican women traders, they are not called *padrao*. Seemingly *padrao* is a gender-specific term and I could not establish why this is so. Among Mozambicans, women are called *señora*. Apparently this female address has not been incorporated into the South African lexicon.

Omotswagai

In seSotho/seTswana, this term means 'where do you come from?' Originally it was used by urbanised township city slicker people to refer to South Africans coming from rural areas, who were not well versed in city ways, and were seen as 'traditional, conservative and backward.' However it is now used for African immigrants. By addressing them as such, it questions their motive for being 'here'; where they are coming from (an unknown, alien and strange place with strange people). In the psyche of Alexandra residents, *omotswagai* is another kind of species; one that is different from South Africans linguistically, physically and culturally. It implies inferiority associated with 'foreign' places of social origin and ancestry. It also reinforces the locals' claims to autochthony. The term encompasses a host of relations, including geography, territorial monopoly, and citizenship.

Mkwevho

This term refers to Tsonga and Venda people from Limpopo as well as Mozambicans. The label originated from a popular Venda soap opera, *Muvhango* which is broadcast on SABC 2. The drama series features a prominent Venda family and the company they own, called *Mkwevho*.

MaShangani

This is another label commonly used for Tsonga and Venda people. During the anti-immigrant violence it was used to refer to Mozambicans, who are also commonly known as the Shangaans. I suspect 'Shangaan', an Afrikaans derivation, gained prominence during the times of apartheid, when Mozambican migrant labourers found employment in local mines. Historically more distant still, it might have originated from Soshangane, Shaka's general, who like Mzilikazi, fled

7. The violence in Alexandra emanated from the hostel and spread throughout the township.

during the *mfecane* with his followers and settled in some parts of Mozambique. The logic for the label *maShangani* is that Mozambicans share the same blood, ancestry or origin with South African Tsonga and Venda who are also called *maShangani*. It also means that Tsonga and Venda are constructed as being beyond the pale of the South African polity and citizenship.

Abantu BakaMugabe (Mugabe's People)

This label is used to refer to Zimbabweans. They are considered to be just as bad as their president Robert Mugabe. Nothing positive is constructed locally regarding Mugabe, largely because of media coverage that reveals him as a dictator and responsible for his country's economic and social problems.

AmaXenophobia

This is a recent label, which came about in the May/ June 2008 racial violence. When the term *xenophobia* was widely mentioned in the media, Alexandra residents began to refer to displaced immigrants as *amaxenophobia*. *The Star* (a Johannesburg daily newspaper) of May 30, 2008 explains, "the most used term in the past weeks has been xenophobia, generally understood to mean fear or hatred of foreigners and their culture."

The term *amaxenophobia*, like *amaforeigner*, has been incorporated into the daily linguistic repertoire of Alexandra residents and has become a racial label. However, like other labels, it is also used interchangeably to refer to all non-South Africans.

MaZimbabwe

The label not only refers to Zimbabwean immigrants but to other non-nationals as well. It first appeared in the post-2000 era, when the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe led to a mass migration by Zimbabweans to South Africa, especially to Alexandra.

Myfriend – Oooo!

This phrase was derived from immigrant patterns of speech and address. Immigrants are known to often say, when speaking to South Africans: "my friend ..." The "Oooo" part is adopted from West African speech patterns, which my participants told me they hear in Nigerian movies.

The labelling of Others is, however, not a unilineal process. Immigrants also have names for South Africans:

MaSasko

This is mainly used by Zimbabweans to refer to South Africans. There are two explanations as regards this term. Some say that it might be a linguistic derivation of 'South African'. Others claim that it comes from the South African Sasko bakery, whose Sasko bread is well-known in Zimbabwe. During the recent severe economic crises and food shortages in that country, cross border traders were buying foodstuffs from South Africa. This included bread, which came to be called 'Sasko'. The label *sasko* may have originated in Zimbabwe and may have been brought into South Africa by recently

arrived Zimbabwean immigrants.

MaZulu

Immigrants have a perception that all attacks perpetrated against them are initiated by the Zulus, a South African ethnic group. Common responses from immigrants were that South African perpetrators of violence would ask those they suspected to be non-South African, Zulu names for certain body parts, and failure to do so would elicit a beating and other physical harassment. It has thus become common among immigrants that people who molest and attack them are Zulus. The *maZulu* label encompasses every South African – even if they are Sotho, Tswana or Xhosa or belong to any other ethnic group, they are still called *maZulu*.

Racism in a shared social space

Given its long history of migration, Alexandra is a place where different ethnic groups reside. The various social actors live side by side, in close proximity. It must be noted that Alexandra is a small area, overpopulated and overcrowded; at first sight a visitor will be struck by the maze of closely intertwined concentrations of shacks. It may appear that, given this closeness of human interaction, where one cannot go out of one's abode without bumping into 'someone', social relationships are well defined and close. This may mislead us into thinking that this society is a multicultural melting pot where all that live in it do so in harmony. It is through this presupposition that many were caught by surprise by the May 2008 violence, which pushed them to seek answers for possible causes. Most perplexing was that neighbour had turned against neighbour, even though they had been living together for so long. Indeed male immigrants have lived in the area for over a century, married local women and set up permanent family structures. Many had lost contact with their homeland, and the families and kin they had left behind. This character in Zimbabwean parlance is known as *mujubheki* (the Johannesburger) or *muchoni*, the one who got swallowed up by the delights of Johannesburg, with the city's abundant entertainment and pretty women. The new families they established in Alexandra had become *de facto* their only kin. It is this question that leads us to find theoretical answers to these problems. What we do not fathom, often times is reality: does the absence of violence mean that people are living in harmony? Do we have to wait for racial disturbance to acknowledge the existence of racism? Does racism manifest and express itself only through violent ways? What about nuances, innuendos and logic steeped in stereotypes, culture, habits, racial labelling and verbal outbursts? Indeed salient forms of racism have been an integral part of the community for a while. A fact is that certain prejudicial attitudes exist in people's daily social interactions and it is through an analysis of these, in addition to 'real' cultural differences, that a thorough understanding of racist tendencies can be obtained.

I would like to call Alexandra a common world, where people from different areas, regions and nationalities co-habit in a joint territory and social space. In one homestead one might find Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos, Tswanas, Vendas, Zimbabweans, Malawians and Mozambicans. This typical microcosmic world has its own specificities; on the surface the social relationships are not strained, the inhabitants show each

other muted respect, a silent acknowledgement of each other's presence. However, I should emphasise the social distance that this also implies: while the social actors are near each other physically, they are distant and far from each other – socially, psychologically, and in spirit. Yet they have no choice but to live and tolerate each other's presence because there is no other way. Alexandra is a common world, where their fates have brought them together.

The primary social relationships characterised by family, friends and kin where racism is nurtured, are directly linked with a whole societal network of relations, where manifestations of racisms are revealed in the public sphere. While the private domain plays an important role in socialising individuals for participation in the public sphere, the public domain is shaped by a morality which is inculcated in the family (Rex 1997). In the aftermath of the racial attacks on immigrants in Alexandra, *The Star* newspaper ran an article with a picture of a group of schoolchildren jeering at displaced immigrants:

Their faces contorted with hatred and contempt, the schoolchildren shout and jeer and torment and laugh at a woman refugee in Alexandra yesterday. This perhaps, of all pictures that have come out of Alexandra, is the most disturbing. This is the lesson children have learnt from their elders ... xenophobia, even if they never heard the word. (*The Star* May 15, 2008).

While children live with immigrants and interact with them on a daily basis, the private sphere of this common world is one of greater social distance. Proximity can also include social distance. The specifics of the Alexandra situation leave people with no option but to live side by side. Living side by side can nonetheless give an illusion that all social actors participate in a harmonious world devoid of racial or ethnic tensions. This situation I call *coerced co-habitation*. Social actors live together, not because they desire to do so, but because they have nowhere else to stay. Circumstances and the situation *coerce* people to live side by side. As a result they grant each other certain 'concessions', which allow them to live together. These tolerances are presupposed by both situation specifics and *coerced co-habitation*. This explains the 'surprise' many (especially politicians) felt about the 2008 violence; it is also indicative of the specific conditions that generate cultural racism in Alexandra. A couple of reasons may explain this: the proximity of Alexandra to industrial areas like Kew, Wynberg and Marlboro; the availability of cheap shack accommodation; and since Alexandra has a long history of both internal and external migration, the presence of existing kinship networks, which is exploited by new arrivals who come and stay in the area. Finally, there are the Alexandra *mastands* (landlords), who prefer immigrant tenants because they do not 'give headaches' when it comes to paying rent at the end of the month.

Conclusion

Alexandra's characteristics as a multi-ethnic society mean that social relationships are marked by conflict and tension and are not as harmonious as they might appear on the surface. Alexandra is unlike other communities where incidents of *xenophobia* have occurred; its specifics set it apart. It can therefore not be generalised that what happens in one com-

munity would take the same form and meaning in another. Each community has its own particular and peculiar beliefs, community dynamics, cultural myths and attitudes towards foreigners. These characteristics exhibit a persistent endurance through time. Each area has its own specificities and internal dynamics. The *New Racism* in South Africa has found expression in different areas of the country. It implies that our analyses of these different racisms cannot be generalised but each situation must be treated as unique. We cannot apply a one-size-fits-all approach. I argue that in South Africa there has been an inclination to make universalised claims about the nature and causes of *xenophobia*. I however, maintain that research on the phenomenon needs more specific contextualisation. I am aware that there may be similarities and links between the phenomena in different areas, yet the causes and effects are certainly different. I would like to conclude with Goldberg's (1993) assertion that different racisms may exist in the same place at different times or different racisms in different places at the same time. Racist expressions differ; they are different in the conditions of their expression, forms of expressions, objects of expressions and effects, among different people at the same time; that is what one may wish to call 'space conjuncture'. By delving deeper into the limitations of the term *xenophobia* and its usefulness to understand the actual prejudicial practices found in daily social and cultural interactions allows one to argue that the term *xenophobia* has outlived its meaning, purpose and usefulness.

The dichotomy between *xenophobia* and racism remains confusing, inattentive to human relationships, and ineffectual. That is why during the 2010 soccer world cup in South Africa, FIFA ran a campaign with anti-racism banners before some matches. Apparently many could not distinguish the difference between racism and *xenophobia*. For some, *xenophobia* remains far removed from racism, different in form and expression. Thus, while it may be morally good to campaign against the latter (as FIFA saw fit, despite an orgy of anti-immigrant violence in South Africa hardly two years earlier), the former remains inconsequential. Recognising *xenophobia* as a form of racism means that a fight against *xenophobia* is *de facto* a fight against racism.

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