Who is a South African? Interrogating Africanness and Afro-phobia

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The need for identity, David Campbell (1992) writes, is an 'inescapable part of being'. The identity need of a State is reflected in its assertion of its nation-ness. The State therefore is always in the quest for a nation. The State in South Africa, in its Apartheid and Post-Apartheid variants, has sought allegiance to different identity markers in its 'quest for nation'. Even though spatially located in Africa, the Apartheid regime had consciously situated itself ideologically, temporally and dispositionally in the western, white world. Against this, post-Apartheid South Africa could only come into being through a negation of what Apartheid South Africa stood for. Its new identity had a clearly defined 'other' in this case.

The presence of a well-defined 'other' however does not guarantee a singular narrative of 'self'. The 'self' if only defined against the 'other' remains only a negative identity category. However, as movements like *Negritude*, African Humanism, Black Consciousness would attest, the 'self' always becomes more than just a reaction to the 'other'. It takes up positive forms. So negritude is just not about a negro, but about a new attitude. The collectivized memories of victimhood do not just become archives of common suffering, but repositories of emancipation. This positive formulation of these inherently negative identity codes means they are much more than just the 'other' to the 'other'. This would also mean that they could be multiply conceived since their relation to the reference point – 'other' – is only weak.

The 'self' in case of the liberation movement was clearly rallied with the idea of 'Africanness'. The collectivized memories of victimhood were indexed in a black, African identity. In post-Apartheid South Africa, we see that two different sets of imaginations, two different discursive markers are used to construct the identity of new South Africa – 'Rainbow nation' and 'African renaissance'. However, as I would argue below, they were primarily attempts to define Africanness itself.

But this conception, or rather conceptions, of 'self' intersect/s with the Westphalian idea of nation state. The nation-building project, that still takes Westphalia as its reference point, is inevitably an exclusionary process. It identifies 'who is in' and 'who is out' by delineating territorial limits. In this western lore mimicked by postcolonial states, insider and outsider are identified on the basis of indegenity/autochtony. This exclusion is replicated internally on class basis by another western lore, capitalism. Xenophobia emerges at the intersection of this double whammy of exclusion. In case of South Africa, this produces a confusing picture in which on the one hand a South African is defined by his/her being an African, while on the other the 'African' becomes target of xenophobic attacks.

The Soccer world cup was feverishly portrayed as an African World Cup. However, even before the World Cup was over and paeans on Ghana's Black Stars were still being written, South African newspapers were rife with reports that attacks on African foreigners would restart just as the world cup got over (Ashton, 2010; Sevenzo, 2010). Ever since the end of Apartheid, xenophobia has been a recurrent reality in South African politics. The worst manifestations of this were the 11 May 2008 attacks in which 62 people were killed. Xenophobia in South Africa has a peculiar, even hypocritical, profile. (Solomon and Haigh, 2009). It is the 'foreigner' with a particular colour – more black than the South African black – that is routinely characterized as the 'despicable other'[1]. Xenophobia in South Africa has emerged potently in form of 'Afro-phobia' (Sevenzo, 2010).

The resentment of the xenophobic masses in South Africa may not be targeted against blackness per se, but the xenophobic discourse holds pretty much the same attendant notions about 'Black Africa' as its predecessor regime under Apartheid propagated. Africa, beyond Limpopo, which in the popular South African lore is often cuckooed by the media and even civil society in South Africa is still the land of mystic, eternally cursed, primitive, traditional, static and rotten. For a country that is said to be earnestly trying to situate itself out of the constraining, and quite discomforting, identity of being seen as the outpost of Europe in Africa into the core of Africa (Sidiropoulos, 2008), these developments raise fundamental fissures about the authenticity and capability of this effort.

These contrasting pictures that egress from South Africa raise profound questions about not only identity of South Africa as a nation, but also of the South African as an individual – *Who is a South African?**[2]*** 'We are all South Africans' is perhaps a very simple answer to a very difficult question – 'Who are we?' This unravels into subsequent queries: 'Where do we come from?', 'What brings us together?', 'Why should we remain together?', 'What is our authentic history?', 'Which is our native land?', 'Who is an insider and who is an outsider? and so on.

This paper looks at the paradoxical picture regarding identity that emerges out of the contrasting vectors that exist in the discourse on New South Africa: one of African identity and other of Afro-phobia. The first section of the paper deals with, what Ran Greestein (1998) calls, a contradiction that lies at the core of 'South Africa' right down to its nomenclature, which is 'Africa' in 'South Africa'. It looks at both historical and contemporary ideas of what it means to be 'African' and how it has been strategically used in the particular context of the nation building project in New South Africa. The second section looks at rise of xenophobic attacks in South Africa against African foreigners and how it intersects with the 'African identity' discourse. In the third section, I briefly analyze the problems that this complex identity *problematique* raises in defining South Africa's international relations.

I am an African

African intellectual Ali Mazrui says, 'One of the great ironies of modern African history is that it took European colonialism to inform Africans that they were Africans' (Mazrui:1986:99). Similarly Kwame Appiah argues: 'a specifically African identity began as a product of European gaze' (Quoted in William, 2009:424). However, despite slavery, colonialism and apartheid, Mazrui says, it was perhaps 'Europe's supreme gift to Africa' (Mazrui, 1986:109, Mbembe, 2002a). The West gave 'Africans' what they never were, and it is debatable if they would have ever become considering their heterogeneity, a homogenous identity: 'Africans'. As late as nineteenth century, Appiah is of the view, '[T]o speak of an African identity…would have been "to give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name"' (Appiah, 2008: 88).

One automatically asserts the negative visage and effect of this kind of colonial identity. A condemnation to wretchedness, almost to the limit of its being an orgiastic celebration of the bestiality of Africans, was bestowed upon the people of the black race by cloaking this discourse in religious and political garbs. A number of western scholars, like Hegel, Hume, Mills, even Karl Marx, constantly portrayed Africans as people without history and by that definition no people at all.

Such portrayal of Africans continued with pessimistic assessments of newly independent African states in the 1960s. Much before, Thabo Mbeki gave the clarion call for an African Renaissance; the term was used by a westerner, Leonard Barnes, in his 1969 book by the same name, but hardly in a sense visualized by the current African intelligentsia. The very first paragraph of Barnes' book revealed his intentions:

Africans are aware that their newly independent countries are not greatly esteemed outside Africa, or even inside it. They do not like this. But they do not react by resolving to deserve praise through improved performance. They blame the world for not having a higher opinion of them, and believe that, but for colonialism and racial prejudice, it would. They ask how they can improve, not their soul, but their image (p.1).

He continues, somewhat later:

It is hardly surprising that casual observers often conclude that the grand experiment of African independence has

failed and ought never to have been tried; that white supremacy, with or without apartheid, stands on an altogether higher plane of political wisdom; and that, while the independence constitutions cannot now be revoked, it is mere prudence and honesty to admit that basically the running of African affairs must remain in non-African hands for many years still (p.3).

Against this meta-narrative of 'African' as a 'despicable other', construction of a positive African self by African scholars, according to Achille Mbembe, took two paths – nativism and Afro-radicalism (Mbembe, 2002a, 2006). The accent on nativism was one of constructing a romanticised past of African virginity and thus rehabilitating the African self to its original state. In its contestation of the western narrative on African identity, nativism begins first with an affirmation of its difference. Exemplified in ideologies like Negritude, it places emphasis on an authentic African sense of being which is different from, in fact ontologically opposite to, the western other. Perhaps the best manifestation of this comes in Leopold Senghor's retort to the Cartesian dictum: 'I think, therefore I am'. Senghor affirmed and attested to the European idea of an African who preferred emotion to reason. He said that the African, the Negro, believed not in the 'reasoning-eye of Europe' but in the 'reason of touch', and proclaimed 'I feel, therefore I am' (Senghor, 1964:73-75).

Afro-radicalism meanwhile approaches past with Marxist and nationalistic lenses. It deconstructs western discourses on Africa and exposes any claims of difference and superiority of the west. Afro-radicalism is characterized by 'developing an idea of culture and politics that is constantly permeated by the tension between voluntarism and victimization' (Mbembe, 2002a, 2006). Voluntarism gives rise to a politics of self-determination that is constitutive of alternative narratives and scripts of statehood. Victimization, meanwhile, locates the continuities of colonialism in the minds of the people. It argues that even though notional independence has been achieved, a psychological subjugation internalized by the colonized through several years of colonization and construction and propagation of false fables and myths about Africa and Africans condemns Africa to perpetual bondage. The invisible hand of the history of subjugation thus becomes the prime agent that deprives Africans of their own agency in the current temporal space. Any claim to rehabilitation of Africa therefore must come through deconstructing, not essentialising, the idea of difference (Mbembe, 2002a).

Mbembe, in his subsequently well-debated article in academia[3], harps on two points on which African writing of self has consciously chosen to elide. First, colonialism was a co-invention. African auxiliaries who sought to profit from slavery, colonialism and apartheid were conspicuous participants in the colonial project (Mbembe, 2002). Second, just as African racial homogeneity is a myth, similarly a claim to singular, continuous pre-colonial and colonial history is false. There are multiple African narratives, rather than one collective narrative, that emerge, quite expectantly, from the vast imaginative terrain of Africa. Further, by making the African responses wholly contingent to the acts of the western other, the African intellectuals have crassly undermined the agency of African responses and their 'heretical spirit' (Mbembe, 2002b).

In response to these identities that are situated in, rather obsessed with, the past; a number of scholars most notably Mbembe and Appiah have called for a more positive articulation of 'Africanness' which is more future-oriented. 'Africanness,' according to this view, should first recognize its own heterogeneity and thus debunk the theories of race and cultural homogeneity that are invoked to construct an 'Africanness' bought from 'invented histories, invented cultural affinities' and invented narratives. Recognizing that some form of invention of myths is necessary to generate a feeling of cohesiveness, they argue that Africanness should be based on shared experiences gathered in a way that they deal with the tyranny of the past as well as of borrowed concepts of political imagination (Appiah 2008, Mbembe, 2006).

Although, these scholars do not deal in great lengths about their proposed alternative, I argue that political elites in South Africa did explore, to some extent, this alternate idea of Africanness. I would term it as 'Afro-universalism'. It bases itself on the belief that an oppressive past gives the oppressed a rational outlook as well as a moral mandate to actively pursue liberation for all: the ultimate universalism. In other words, a history of racial oppression makes Africans natural adherents and proponents of an idea of a truly non-racial post-colonial society. In the aftermath of colonialism, when the erstwhile racially oppressed – the Africans – are a majority, it is not only the former colonizer, or the white ruler, who is made to lose his privileges bestowed to him under a regime committed to maintaining a false

sense of colour superiority; in fact, a greater sacrifice has to be made by the 'Africans'.[4] For a non-racial society, the Africans have to first renounce their own claims of a new racial order. Renunciation of 'self' becomes the first condition of erasure of 'other'.

According to this view, liberation, inevitably, is a 'moment of sacrifice' (Mbembe, 2005). Jean Paul Sartre, in*Black Orpheus*, claimed that the telos of *Negritude* was in its negation for the cause of global universalism. According to him, only the Black man could be asked to renounce the pride of his colour for future common good; for it is only the Black man who, having suffered oppression at both personal and structural levels at all times, knows the value of freedom and thus wants it for all. His fight for liberation ends only with the liberation of everyone else (Diawara, 1996). It recognizes that under a colonial system, the oppressor and the oppressed are in an institutional relationship of exploitation. But in this, there are no clear fault lines about who is a victim. The oppressor himself, as an individual, is a victim. It is he in fact who loses his humanity first in order to be able to unleash oppression. An act of oppression demands the oppressor's disconnect from his own humanness, the ablation of the very values that he claims to protect, from his own body politic.

This shared feeling of sufferance, of victimhood, thus becomes the conceptual register of a new universalized thinking. 'African' as an identity is defined by its newness. Sacrifice of a vindictive racial self, creating a common archive of selectivized memories of victimhood, and harping on an inclusivist identity become main features of this discourse. However, it is faced with a paradox at the very moment of its foundation i.e. at the point of liberation. The post-colonial state, by the very fact of its being a post-colonial *state* and thus having to mimic its Westphalian type, circumscribes the limits of identity to territorial bounds. Exclusion is at the heart of any state identity discourse, and inclusivity of this new 'African' identity meets its nemesis at the very moment of its birth.

Nevertheless, this thinking was the philosophical foundation of Mandela's 'Rainbow nation'. Rainbow nation as argued above was underlined by the twin principles of sacrifice and universalism. Although Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu were the most avowed proponents of this thinking, its best exposition, perhaps, comes out in a speech by one of the most unlikely of all people, Thabo Mbeki. Interestingly, it is also a speech that many view as having initiated a counter-ideology to Rainbow nation – African renaissance.

The '*I am an African speech'* delivered by then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki underlines at the very beginning that 'the migrants who left Europe', 'the Boers who suffered' death, destruction and concentration camps, 'Malay slaves from the East, 'Indians and Chinese transported into native land for physical labour', 'native warrior men and women' were all Africans (Mbeki, 1998). 'Africanness', here, is inscribed not through claims to autochthony, but with a sense of shared history of existence in the 'native land'.

Assertively he says:

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes and unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins. It is firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white (Mbeki, 1998).

Interestingly, throughout the speech, references to Africa/African are abundant, almost one and a half dozen times. The term is used liberally to convey a psychological, cultural and historical identity. On the contrary, 'South Africa' is mentioned only 'twice'; once in a territorial sense and the other time to convey the South African basis of the ANC. Mbeki is making a conscious effort to situate a new South African identity on its Africanness. South Africa remains a territorial inhabitation, while Africanness becomes the identity of those who reside in it. Claims to 'Africanness' are neither defined through autochthony nor against a colonial other.

Steve Biko, the leader of the South African Black Consciousness movement, had argued that though Africanness belonged to Blacks alone, being Black was not a matter of pigmentation. Black was an identity of those who had 'started on a road towards emancipation' and were committed to fight against all forces that used blackness as a mark of a subservient being (Biko, 2004:52). According to this definition, the Indians, the coloureds and other supposed non-whites who fought against white rule were 'Blacks'. On the contrary, the black people who worked for

apartheid were merely non-whites, not Blacks. This definition of Blackness, thus Africanness, was far more inclusive, even though the whites were still out of it.

Thabo Mbeki, as his biographer Mark Gevissor (2007) notes, in the speech freed 'Africanness' from its colour jackets and noted that 'Africanness' could also no longer be defined through categories of colour formulated through the colonizer's gaze. The masses should themselves now acquire and exercise 'their right to formulate their own definition of what it meant to be African' (Mbeki, 1998). This is clearly an articulation for creating a new 'inclusive, hybrid and syncretic' identity (Gevissor, 2007: 326). Gevissor writes:

While classic Africanism, from Garvey to Biko, fashions a Black African identity outside of, and in opposition to, white European hegemony, Mbeki achieves the supreme act of self-definition: he appropriates and assimilates the identity of his oppressor and uses it to define himself (p.326)

A second, very important, process of articulation of this 'Africanness' was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC, Valji (2003) points out, was clearly mandated to sift archives from memories of apartheid. These archives, which according to Derrida, are 'the official repository of memory, but…simultaneously a crucial site in the process of forgetting' (Quoted in Valji, 2003), were selectively chosen to construct the story of a new nation. Through a deliberate selection, both of 'victims' and their 'stories', a common archive of victimhood was created through TRC. The perpetrators, the villains, were identified only in a few elites and the institution of apartheid. A vast majority of beneficiaries of apartheid were encouraged to express their own shock and outrage and thus be able to cast themselves as 'victims' of the system (Valji, 2003).

At crucial moments, people like Mandela and Tutu highlighted the commonality of victimhood and suffering. At the inauguration of TRC Meiring in 2000, Mandela said:

Looking at the guilt and suffering of the past, one cannot but conclude: In a certain sense all of us were victims of apartheid, all of us were victims of our past (Quoted in Valji, 2003).

Archbishop Tutu, Chairperson of the TRC, similarly, stated in 1996:

We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past, to lay the ghosts of that past so that they may not return to haunt us. That it may thereby contribute to the healing of a traumatized and wounded nation, for all of us in South Africa are wounded people (Quoted in Valji, 2003).

The accent here was in selective forgetting. The construction of commonality of grief, suffering and victimhood was the narrative around which new South African nationhood was sought to be constructed with future-oriented lenses, much against the Afro-radicalist position of placing victimhood solely on the shoulders of formerly oppressed.

Ironically, even though Mbeki was the author of the *I am an African* speech, his own position could only be characterized as Afro-radicalist. The speech alludes to an inclusive African identity but it was more in consonance with Mandela's (as also the ANC) line of thinking. Mbeki's worldview, and his assertion of Africanness, that comes up in most of the policies during his Presidency and innumerous other speeches he gave, was informed by a different lens through which he interpreted the question of race.

Non-racialism as an ideal based on universalism and sacrifice, according to this interpretation, was based on a misplaced assumption of colonialism and apartheid being modes of only political dominance. Non-racial ideology believed that with the upturning of the political regime of subjugation liberation was achieved. The Afro-radicalist position goes further and takes psychological colonialism as the more insidious form of domination. Both Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko had constantly emphasized the 'psycho-affective realm of revolutionary activism and emancipation' (Bhabha, 2004: xxiv). According to Biko, 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Biko, 2004: 74). To deprive Africans of their political liberties, the colonial encounter had rationalized it by depriving Africans of their human self, in fact conferring bestiary on them. This had been achieved by a systematic process of falsely essentialising, decontexualizing and bastardizing African traditions to portray them

as degenerate; and inflicting 'epistemic violence' by erasure of history of Africans. To put it in Fanon's words: 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content; by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it' (Fanon, 2004: 70).

The Afro-radicalist discourse in post-apartheid South Africa thus asserted that any argument for 'renunciation of self', the core of Afro-Universalism, was vacuous since Africans had already 'lost self'. The internalization of the colonial mindset, according to Mbeki, was complete since South Africans had inculcated this 'slave mentality' (Gevissor, 2007). True liberation thus would come from 'reclaiming', not renouncing, self which would require nothing short of a 'Renaissance'. Much as African Renaissance was a call for continental renewal, it was also domestically targeted. It was a call for South Africans to take pride in their being 'African', claimed retrospectively.

Damn it! I am a South African

The counter-discourse that emerges simultaneous to assertion of 'Africanness' in South Africa is a nationalist-chauvinistic narrative that places 'South Africanness' against 'Africanness'. A South African, under this narrative, is one who is not an African, or as I argue below, an un-African. To be true, any nation building effort in the Westphalian schema must begin with an assertion of its difference from the other. Thus, despite the accent on 'Africanness' by the elites, it is somewhat understandable that 'South Africa' as a nation predisposes itself on its difference from other nations. However, what is baffling is that this effort at nation building does not pre-suppose a homogenous other. The process of 'othering' in South Africa takes exclusive, in fact excessive, dimensions with regard to 'Africa' as a contemporary space.

Admittedly, Xenophobia would not be a right term for characterizing the structured and manifest violence targeted against foreigners in South Africa, since White foreigners are usually not at the receiving end of this hatred. On the contrary, they are considered as being good for the economy and culture of the country (Nyamnjoh, 2006:28). At the receiving end of the discourse and practice of xenophobic violence is a specific foreigner (with a particular shade of Black): African. Paradoxically, it is the same country whose mining sector, the backbone of its economy during and post-apartheid, is largely sustained by the foreign Africans (Sharp, 2008).

The xenophobic discourse, that partakes from the notion of modern statehood, harps on indigenity/nativity/autochthony as being the basis of citizenship and a qualifier for one's identity of being a South African (Neocosmos, 2006). To Vale, it is unconvincing that the native question in South Africa has still not been resolved (Vale, 2002).

It is particularly striking to note that most of the black South Africans who resist the 'foreigners' were themselves not too long ago characterized as 'foreigners' alongside their other African counterparts in South Africa. They were, as Desmond Tutu would often quote, 'native foreigners' (Quoted in Neocosmos, 2006:5). Much of the liberation struggle in South Africa was fought from the neighbouring South Africans states as the leading political parties including the ANC and PAC were working from exile. The Blacks struggling against each other also looks awkward in the face of the fact that in many of the independence struggles across Africa, including South Africa, foreigner blacks fought against the colonial regimes alongside native blacks. None of whom perhaps better suited than Frantz Fanon. The fact of migration, Mahmood Mamdani argues, is not only central to African economic and social life but, he goes further in declaring, the nationalist uprisings in much of Africa were spearheaded by the moving populations of migrants.

[I]f the economy led to trading places, quintessentially through migrant labor, the polity tended to keep each in their own place, their own homeland governed by their own Native Authority. It is the population that crossed the boundaries between different Native Authorities that provided the energies and the vision for the nationalist revolt. These were the intellectuals and the migrant workers, Nkrumah's *verandah* boys and Cabral's boatmen (Mamdani, 2007:24).

The tendency of closure towards other Africans, regularly touted as 'foreigners', 'aliens' – depriving them of even

their human status, much in the spirit of the colonial discourse relegating them to the realm of the unfamiliar, harmful exotic – is also pretty much at abeyance with the social characterization of these categories of*autochtons* and *allochtons* in African cultural space. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh argue that prior to liberalization, rulers in African political formations were often from *allochton* clans who particularly emphasized on their non-indegenity (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000:423).

Much of the ever fattening literature on xenophobia in South Africa has sought to situate the emergence of democratic post-Apartheid South African state within the expanding contours of globalization. Globalization, as innumerable academic pieces have argued, generates multi-vector flows affecting the political, economic, social and cultural spaces that invariably cross each other stimulating both the tendencies of expansion as well as closure. Not only did the South African nation-building project had to negotiate with the changes in international system characterized by the end of cold war; the 'end of history thesis' acting as an alibi to force down the throat the neo-liberal 'consensus' to the developing world, in conjunction with globalization was given as the reason by the formerly leftist ANC to step up on the neo-liberal bandwagon. The nature of the transition in South Africa was also responsible for such state of affairs. While the political negotiations took part in full public glare and scrutiny, the economic transition was managed by a few select individuals, which some analysts have termed as 'elitepacting'. (Valji 2003) The growing wedge between the rich and the poor as a result of such policies also reproduced the racial divide as class distinction in South Africa. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the neo-liberal pill to set right racial differentiation in access to resources, only produced a small black elite and a black middle class, which was just as content to amplify class divide.

While the rhetoric of 'African identity' and 'African Renaissance' was actively used to generate a unity among Black elites, it could not find much resonance amongst the masses. It is only unfortunate that while the liberation struggle had invested so much in cultivating an inclusive African identity with the ultimate aim to win political as well economic resources for its people, it is only by going against this identity that the masses in South Africa could now think of laying hand at these resources. Widespread poverty, economic marginalization due to lack of progressive economic transformation, poor service delivery by the state and the proclivity of African immigrants to work for far less wages and other benefits than the South African poor have combined to spawn frustration among the masses, and African immigrants become their natural targets (Ashton, 2010). It also doesn't help that these migrants are seen as being relatively well off by having devoured on South African resources. The government and the media also raise alarm by often exaggerating, way too far, the number of such migrants[5] (Danso and McDonald, 2001). Sociologist John Sharp finds that much as it is argued in literature that xenophobia is the result of constrain on resources, one cannot punctuate it from the larger context of the faulty economic policies under the rubric of neo-liberalism that serve to entrench the monopoly of a few elites on national resources (Sharp, 2008).

Second set of causation can be located at the level of development of political consciousness. In an excellent study, Michael Neocosmos (2006) deals at length with how the hegemonising discourse of liberal political values, uncritically accepted by the political elites in South Africa, is often deprived of a well suited context. Mahmood Mamdani (1995) argues that the notion of citizenship based on concept of indegenity emerged in a particular context of Europe, i.e. France of 1789, where constraining geographical boundaries ensured that place of birth and place of work coincided. This, however, could not be transposed into Africa where migration is at the core of economic activity. In another article, Mamdani states:

Contrary to the notion of 'homeland' and 'tradition' evoked by colonial customary law, African populations have not been historically rooted to the soil. Given that migration – both local and regional – has been an integral part of African life, how does one define who is indigenous and who is not, at both the central and the local levels? (Mamdani, 2007: 14).

Peter Vale puts the same point very strongly with regard to South Africa. He says:

The place we continue to call South Africa is the product of a continuous product of migration. Viewed reciprocally, the simple truth is this: without the movement of people to the space we call South Africa, there would quite simply, be no state, no South Africa and, to raise a paradox…no place to which migrants migrated (Vale, 2002:9).

Alternatively, Neocosmos (2006) argues that the refusal to ground liberal values, which is fought for in the spatial domain of the west but applied universally, in appropriate context, has led to the emergence of a politically passive concept of citizenship. Rights have been taken out of popular control and given to the state by making it guarantor and deliverer of these rights. Their technical and scientific nature is given as the reason for placing them in the juridical realm of the state, rather than allowing them to be scrutinized and claimed through public debate. He says: 'The people are forced, if they wish to have their rights addressed and defended, to do so primarily within the confines of, or in relation to, the state institutions of the juridical' (p. 116). He claims that this socio-passivity of empty choices under neo-liberalism becomes the ultimate source of 'child-like powerlessness' (p. 118).

This powerlessness is reflected in the failure of emergence, or sustenance, of any alternate popular-democratic politics. In the case of South Africa, the liberation movement of the 1980s was one such movement that could not be sustained under the hegemonising state discourse of neo-liberalism in the post-Apartheid polity. The liberation movement, owing to its popular character, was inclusivist and clearly had not much fetish for indegenity as an authentic portrayal of a South African. In the post-apartheid politics, the popular movement led by ANC was co-opted in the state and any alternate imagination beyond it was discouraged (Neocosmos, 2006). The neo-liberal state discourse that privileges territoriality and indegenity soon overtook political agency. Political belonging under this discourse, as Comaroffs (2003:147) so very aptly suggests though in a different context, becomes 'a site of ID-ology'[6]. Xenophobia thus becomes a natural corollary to state, since in the western imagination of a Westphalian state, a nation-state is constituted as much against the 'foreign' as it is constituted with the 'indigene'.

This, however, still does not explain the racial character of South African xenophobia. To understand this feature, Neocosmos refers to Frantz Fanon's reading of the xenophobic tendencies emergent in post-colonial African states in the 1960s (Neocosmos, 2006).

Frantz Fanon (2004) identifies xenophobia as a particular rendition of a 'crude, empty, fragile' sense of national consciousness by the national bourgeoisie in order to mimic its western counterpart (p.97). The national bourgeoisie, Fanon claims, serves not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism' and 'revels in the role of agent in its dealings with the Western bourgeoisie' (pp. 100-101). Domestically, he continues, the colonized bourgeoisie utilizes its new found power-status to compete with the Europeans, often through mimicry, while in enactment of their our nationhood 'the artisans and the small traders [the urban proletariat] pick fights with Africans of other nationalities', modeling their behavior on that of their bourgeoisie (p.103).

In noting the coexistence of Africanism and chauvinism, he states:

Whereas the demand for Africanization and Arabization of management by the bourgeoisie is not rooted in a genuine endeavour at nationalization, but merely corresponds to a transfer of power previously held by the foreigners, the masses make the very same demand at their own level but limit the notion of African or Arab to territorial limits. Between the vibrant calls for African unity and this mass behavior inspired by the managerial class, a number of attitudes emerge. There is a constant pendulum motion between African unity, which sinks deeper and deeper into oblivion, and a depressing return to the most heinous and virulent type of chauvinism (pp.104-105).

Here, Fanon, almost prophetically, captures the dilemma which is at the heart of the nation-building project in South Africa. The 'Africa', ingrained not only in the name but also in the identity of South Africa, has a paradoxical relationship with the country. The New South Africa cannot define itself without it, yet 'nationhood' demands its purging.

Neocosmos (2006) interprets Fanon by arguing that the neo-liberal liberal order by distributing resources and power unequally creates degrees of citizenship. The rich and powerful exhibit their power through control of state apparatus and resources on the poor by depriving them of it, the poor citizens direct their ire at the more weak – the African migrants and refugees (p.118). Though often seen as fight for resources, under the conditions of the extreme powerlessness (made worse when seen in conjunction with the pain of apartheid and the evaporating promise of liberation) the claim to authenticity, indegenity remains the only privilege the poor could have. Claim to citizenship, apart from the material benefits, is also a matter of political satiation and empowerment.

The process of 'othering', as seen above, does not homogenize the 'foreigner'. The White foreigner is clearly the 'desired other' while the African foreigner is the 'despicable other'. The White foreigner is seen as good for the economy and culture, also not forgetting the common-sensical notion that 'he is powerful'. The African foreigner on the contrary is drain on the economy, eats up jobs, engages in crimes like drugs, murders, thefts, prostitution, trafficking, etc., and comes from 'the heart of darkness' (Nyamnjoh, 2006). These stereotypes are (re)created and (re)produced by the media, the politicians, the elites and even civil society. Empirical data reveals that the relationship between immigration and rising unemployment, as often claimed by media and politicians, is not necessarily causal. In fact, a major study by SAMP in Johannesburg revealed that migrants create more jobs than they take (Carter and Haffaje, 1998). Similarly, stereotypical claims linking crime and migrants are often vacuous. Often claims like 'almost 80 per cent of perpetrators in South Africa are illegal migrants' are made without any empirical backing. It turns out, as Harris documented for the year 1998, 98 per cent of all arrests made by the police were South African citizens and arrest rates for foreigners were less than 1 per cent in most crime categories (Harris, 2001b).

Another set of explanations that are adduced to explicate xenophobia in South Africa are psychological ones. Identifying an 'isolation hypothesis' in the works of scholars like Morris (1998), Harris argues that the insulation of South African citizens from nationalities beyond South Africa during the apartheid era has inculcated a 'fear of the unknown foreigner' amongst South African masses. The end of apartheid led to integration of South Africa into international community and international economic networks bringing South Africans into direct interface with foreigners. The history of isolation leads South Africans to look at these foreigners with suspicion and hostility: 'When a group has no history of incorporating strangers it may find it difficult to be welcoming' (Morris, 1998:1125 quoted in Harris, 2002).

According to this hypothesis, xenophobia exists because of 'foreignness of the foreigners' (Harris, 2002). A particular problem with this hypothesis is its accent on 'foreignness'. One may argue that considering the apartheid regime had 'foreign-ised the natives' by deliberately pursuing a policy of segregation and primitivizing by creating separate *Bantustans*, South African blacks ought to have more familiarity and sympathy with 'foreignness'.

However, any absence of such sympathy and familiarity can be attributed to the stereotypes about 'African foreigners' in the South African public space. The media under the garb of neutral reporting caricatures Africans and reproduces the Western negative imagery of Africa. Africa, in South African media, is portrayed as 'poverty-stricken', 'war-torn', 'barbaric', 'diseased' and 'rotten' (Danso and McDonald, 2001, Neocosmos, 2006, Valji 2003, Harris 2002, Pillay 2008). The migrants, who seem to be fleeing in 'hordes', like animals, into 'Fortress South Africa' bring the African curse onto a 'relatively developed', 'progressive', democratic', in short un-African, South Africa. A specific stress on the word 'un-African' since it is different from 'non-African'. Non-African shows not belonging, while un-African shows a belonging but having moved ahead. It shows a particular accent on having internalized the modernity debate by exhibiting South Africa's advancement from tradition to modernity, barbarism to civilization, bestiality to humanity, and poverty to affluence. Africa, in words of Neocosmos, becomes as much of an embarrassment as it is an identity New South Africa wishes to forget as one does not want to remain connected to poorer relatives (Neocosmos, 2008). This 'chauvinism of affluence' (Quoted in Crocher, 1998:657), as Habermas put it, is a relationship of belonging yet a privileged existence. Africa, in the un-African imagining, is not the insulated other but an 'other' that is a part of the Hegelian historical self for South Africa. This is not an exhibition of difference, but of distance. To clarify, distance reflects a reality of having grown apart even though historically jointed, while difference is an assertion of ontological separateness.

To return to Fanon, one can extrapolate from his arguments a thesis of cultural power of the neo-liberal hegemony. The emerging Black middle class, invariably both the conveyor belt as well as the intellectual genesis of ideas and civic culture for any nation, becomes increasingly enamoured by western lifestyles and western values. This results in the middle classes mimicking the west not only in its appreciation of universalized western values but also in internalizing a particularized western imagery of 'Africa'. In South Africa, this tendency, which has percolated down to the poor, has resulted in an assertion of distance from African identities and espousal of the hackneyed apartheid idea of South African exceptionalism, in its being a progressive, developed, liberal country of Africa, rather of its being 'un-African'.

This lack of sympathy was also ingrained in the TRC. I argued above that the purpose of the TRC was to create a common archive of suffering. However, the commonality of that archive was territory-bound and the commission chose not to record the voices of people from other countries who perhaps suffered just as much under the ravaging apartheid regime (Valji, 2003). So even though, as I have argued above, 'African' was made the common tag of victims, ironically it excluded Africans outside of the territorial space of South Africa.

Having explained the *why* of xenophobia, it becomes easier to identify the *whom*. Harris (2002) introduces a bio-cultural hypothesis aiming to explain the asymmetrical targeting of African foreigners. Africans, he says, are identified at the level of visible difference. Certain identificatory stereotypes, such as physical features, clothing style, language accent and pronunciation, vaccination marks, etc., are indexical signifiers of their foreignness. These markers point out *whom* to target.

A quote from a study by Minnar and Hough (1996:166-167) follows here:

In trying to establish whether a suspect is an illegal or not, members of the internal tracing units [of the South African Police Service] focus on a number of aspects. One of these is language: accent, the pronouncement of certain words (such as Zulu for 'elbow', or 'buttonhole' or the name of a meerkat). Some are asked what nationality they are and if they reply 'Sud' African this is a dead give-away for a Mozambican, while the Malawians tend to pronounce the letter 'r' as 'errow'… . Appearance is another factor in trying to establish whether a suspect is illegal – hairstyle, type of clothing worn as well as actual physical appearance. In the case of Mozambicans a dead give-away is the vaccination mark on the lower left forearm… [while] those from Lesotho tend to wear gumboots, carry walking sticks or wear blankets (in the traditional manner), and also speak slightly different Sesotho (Quoted in Harris, 2002).

Emergence of xenophobia has caused perhaps most discomfort to the Africanists. Thabo Mbeki has been at pains to describe this phenomenon and point blank refused to call it xenophobia. In his words:

The word xenophobia means a deep antipathy towards or hatred of foreigners. When I heard some accuse my people of xenophobia, of hatred of foreigners, I wondered what the accusers knew about my people, which I did not know. …[E]everything I know about my people tells me that these heirs to the teachings of Tiyo Soga, J.G. Xaba and Pixley Seme, the masses who have consistently responded positively to the Pan-African message of the oldest liberation movement, the African National Congress, are not Xenophobic. These masses are neither antipathetic towards, nor do they hate foreigners. …none in our society has any right to encourage or incite xenophobia by trying to explain *naked criminal activity* by cloaking it in the garb of xenophobia (Mbeki, 2008, emphasis mine).

Needless to say, his 'denialism' fuelled more controversies than it was meant to solve.

South Africa's Inter(?)-National(?) Relations

Identity for while was a peripheral concern for theorists and practitioners of international politics. This status has, however, altered in the past two decades and identity has gained certain currency in the discipline. Nevertheless, efforts at understanding the identity *problematique* have been inadequate, even though a vast literature populates the discipline now. While positivists have been either disregarding or have tried to establish laws of causality with identity, post-positivists have often felt liberated at situating themselves outside rather than inside the discipline. Both approaches, to some extent, have been unworthy participants in keeping the discipline identity agnostic.

Of late, a particular strand of theory has emerged which locates 'identity' as the core security need of states. The ontological security thesis (Steele, 2008; Mitzen, 2006) argues states are more concerned about protecting their basic identity needs. However, this strand itself is reflective of what is wrong with the identity literature. The Ontological security thesis portends that states have consistent, or largely consistent, identity needs. This, as the discussion above brings out, is not true. Identity is forever in the making. In fact, contrasting identity discourses can emerge within a state simultaneously, or at different times. This leads to a schizophrenic nature of foreign policy in such states, as evidenced in case of South African foreign policy.

Perhaps an illustration of this would be to look at the specific narratives of foreign policy during reigns of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. As we have argued above, the basic thrust of Mandela's project of nation-building was a 'rainbow nation' national identity underpinned by notions of sacrifice, universalism and creating common archives of suffering. The world view that shaped foreign policy during Mandela's administration was thus one of this universalism. Championing of global values such as human rights and democracy sometimes even at the expense of fellow African states,[7] a reconciliatory tone towards the west, renunciation of nuclear weapons programme,[8] willingness to lend a moral voice to the world, all could be easily understood with the lenses of what I earlier called Afro-Universalism.

On the contrary, Mbeki's administration sought to construct a different state identity. Premised on Afro-Radical principles, Mbeki's foreign policy reflected a deep sense of injury caused by the colonializer as well as by their neo-colonial midwives. He located everything – from the lack of FDI into Africa to the debates on Aids, Zimbabwe and other African conflicts – as a racial discourse emanating from the White world. The solutions for which he believed could only come from inside: African solutions for African problems. His foreign policy from HIV/AIDS, Zimbabwe, and approach to international institutions came from his this world view. Even in his calls for adopting neo-liberal agenda in form of GEAR, a manifest anti-Westernism is clear in his speeches. His referent for adopting liberal economic policies, however, is not the West but the Asian economies like Japan and the East Asian Tigers.

Two points must be noted here. First, foreign policy here is not just a manifestation of the worldview in a way that it reproduces the internal identity of the state in its foreign relations. What is crucial to note here is the role foreign policy itself plays a role in construction of nationhood. Foreign policy should be understood as a meta-narrative of a state, which not only conducts the state's behavior in the external realm but also legitimizes it. We must remember that foreign policy as the apogee of modern statehood is the most authoritative and most consciously constructed official narrative of a state. It not only projects a nation's values to the outside world, but also targets, just as much, the domestic constituency. A people know what they stand for through what their foreign policy tells them they stand for. Thus, foreign policy as a narrative is as much directed internally, as it is externally. In the above discussion of Mandela's and Mbeki's foreign policy, one can sense that foreign policy was not just about telling the world 'Who is a South African? And what s/he stands for?' It was as much about telling South Africans who they were. Foreign policy and state identity are, thus, mutually framed. Foreign policy narrates state identity and also constructs it.

Second, one can argue that no state can exist without some form of foreign policy. Foreign policy can exist without state, for e.g. foreign policy of ANC during apartheid, but no state can potentially exist without some form of foreign policy. After all, recognition by other states, at least a few, is a necessary condition for granting of modern statehood. A recognized as well as recognizing the 'foreign,' therefore, is a pre-condition for existence of a state. Not only does the 'foreign' have to exist, it has to exist at least in some form of alterity from self.

Not surprisingly, the theories of international relations however have necessarily constructed this image of foreign as a 'dangerous entity', considering it is the primary marker that separates self from other, domestic from foreign. Need for security from 'foreign' is what approves the existence of state in the first place. However, the historical falsity of this construction and the damage it inflicts is visible in the South African political space.

Historically, the 'I' in South Africa, constituting the individual who stands for a collective soul of the nation, has been, as Thabo Mbeki says in his *I am an African* speech, the one who has learnt to be both 'at home and be foreign'. Migration has been central to not only economic foundations of the whole of Southern Africa, but also to the ideas of both self and community. Pointing out towards the vacuous claims to authenticity of territorially-confined identity against human flows, David Ludden says, 'Modernity consigned human mobility to the dusky dark archives that document the hegemonic space of national territorrialism. As a result, we imagine that mobility is border crossing, as though borders came first and mobility second.' (Ludden, 2003:1062)

Thus, there is clear disjuncture between the narratives of 'I' when it placed at the intersection of historical claims and the modern nation-building project. In fact, a refusal to deal with this crisis in the domain of legality and conferring illegal (rather alien)[9] status on migrants complicates rather than solves the problem, more so in the era of globalization. As a remedy, Peter Vale visualizes a Southern Africa of peoples in place of Southern Africa of states.

The idealistic thrust of the suggestion notwithstanding, there is a need to develop alternative conceptions of citizenship. With regard to Southern Africa, scholars have proposed that citizenship ought to be based on place of work, not place of birth (Neocosmos, 2006). This affirms what the South African constitution says: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it.'

For the discipline of international relations, this reconceptualization of 'I', where self appropriates the supposed other, has important consequences. First, the bounded and exclusive spaces of 'foreign' and 'domestic/native' become problematic. Second, it causes a seismic shift in a statist understanding of international relations. A peoples' centric approach looks at people (migrants) not as 'dangerous foreign entities', but as positive contributors to the development of the state. Migration becomes not an issue of insecurity but security, or emancipation, as Ken Booth would have it (Ken Booth, 1991). Specifically, for South Africa as a nation that has been historically constituted through migration, Vale suggests that migration was always seen as a source of security, not insecurity (Vale, 2002).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the identity question in South Africa is far more complex than what it looks like. On the one hand, there is an assertion of Africanness in order to differentiate the new identity from the erstwhile white South African identity. Africanness, itself, is multiply defined. On the other hand, the imperatives of nation-building, intertwined with the pressures of neo-liberal globalization and a sense of South African exceptionalism, have promoted nationalist chauvinistic tendencies, ostensibly targeting foreigner Africans. This paradox is central in defining *who is a South African?* Admittedly, this paradox does not solely exhaust the identity *problematique*. Contestations between whites and blacks, blacks and other non-whites, urban and rural masses, ethnic communities and so on only complicate it further.

Further, this paper has looked at the linkages between this identity *problematique* and defining South Africa's foreign relations and has argued that the schizophrenia associated with the South African foreign policy could have its groundings in this debate. Moreover, the international relations literature has defined 'foreign' in historically weak terms, contributing to the propagation of false myths about security in South Africa.

Although one can hardly say anything conclusive about questions of identity, South Africanness is still far from gaining any widely accepted self-definition. To be sure, very seldom can entities like nation-states, huge as they are, claim to have a coherent identity or an overarching identity that belittles all others. South Africa presents an even more complex picture owing to tenuous social relations, a legacy of apartheid, lack of historical narratives of a coherent national identity contrastingly pitted against a belief in national exceptionlism, paling significance of the liberation ideals in the face of inability of the post-apartheid state to deliver rewards, and inability to define 'Africa' and 'South Africa' in symbiotic terms.

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End Notes

1. In the 11 May attacks, out of the total casualties, 21 people, one-third of the people killed, were South African citizens. Most of them were killed because they were thought to be 'foreigners' since their features matched with that of a stereotype 'African foreigner'.
2. Ivor Chipkin (2007) asks the question 'Do South Africans exist?' his recent book.
3. For the responses to Mbembe's article and his subsequent response to it, see *Public Culture*, vol 14, no 3, Fall 2002.
4. The idea of sacrifice in this sense in dealt in greater detail by Mbembe (2005)
5. Claims vary from 2.5 million to 12 million.
6. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff state this in relation to the internal ethno-identity struggles in a multicultural South African postcolony.
7. Such as Mandela's stand against Nigeria.
8. Although, the nuclear weapons programme had technically been stopped by the apartheid regime, nevertheless the ANC led government completely supported the move.
9. The immigration act is curiously names South Africa's Alien Control Act.

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