

Using Eurocentric and Afro Centric Lenses to Examine, Explain and Understand the South Africans' Attitudes towards "Diversity and Foreignness" of Immigrants Residing in South Africa

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ABSTRACT This research paper is an outcome of the recent episodic waves of ill treatment, discrimination, exclusion and attacks directed to immigrant residing in South Africa. The aim of this paper is to invite attention through debates and discourse, examining the state of diversity and foreignness in South Africa using both Eurocentric and Afrocentric lenses. The paper has used dialogues and debates to understand the contribution of both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism in explaining the current state of diversity and foreignness in contemporary South Africa. Results indicate that Eurocentric philosophies; suffer from serious epistemological and methodological flaws; largely contribute and explain the current state of attitudes towards African immigrants. Besides, they are responsible for imperialism that could be associated with xenophobia and racism; contribute to the homogenization of identity; and perpetuate differentiation and demarcation among the people. In addition, findings indicate that Afrocentrism: accentuates a common identity and humanity; promotes interconnectedness of humankind through the processes of transnationalization and territorialization. Besides, it offers a healing and an emancipatory environment. The researchers propose the world community to consider using both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism in tandem and to advance research and scholarship that seeks endogenous explanations to attitudes against immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

These researchers are prompted to elicit discourse pertaining to the ill treatment of foreigners in South Africa using both Eurocentric and Afrocentric lenses. This is because they feel that the phenomenon of xenophobia has not been adequately addressed (Kang'ethe and Duma 2014). They feel that more explanation has leaned on Eurocentric lenses and neglecting other lenses such as the Afrocentric lens (Hoskins 1992). They also contend that Afrocentric perspectives of examining and interpreting xenophobia have been skewedly obscured by Eurocentric perspectives (Wimmer 1997; Hoskins 1992). It is their contention that Eurocentrism has packaged and defined people along racial/ethnic/geographical/socio-economic lines (Hoskins 1992). This means people are defined according to their races, socioeconomics, geographic regions and particular countries. In Eurocentric philosophical ideology, we have the European, the Indian, the Africans, the Asians, and people from specific individual countries (Pallua 2006). On the premise of this Eurocentric lenses, the world appears to have inherently internalized the above

ideological values to an extent that important services may be accessed on the grounds of these categories. This, in these researchers' contention is what largely explains the global differences. However, we have the North and the South divide, the Black and the White divide, and the citizen and the foreigner divide (Pallua 2006). These are some of the issues that are aggravating inequalities and differences that we observe in the world today (Held and Kaya 2007). Perhaps, addressing United Nations tenets such as the Millenium Development Goals will always face arduous and uphill task as long as these global demarcations persist. This also explains why it is always difficult to achieve the global competitiveness for some countries because markets are always skewed to favour certain geographical regions, and people of different races, people of different socioeconomic classes etc. (Kang'ethe 2014a). It is for these reasons these researchers strongly feel that Afrocentric lenses need to be applied in tandem to explain xenophobia, if not in place of Eurocentrism.

Afrocentrism is a philosophical world-view, an intellectual paradigm that accentuates an examination of phenomena from the point of view

of Africans themselves, and those that embrace the spirit of Africanism (Suttner 2010). These researchers contend that Afrocentrism may play a critical role of minimizing the differences among the people of the world and maximize the common values that bind humanity. The researchers also argue that Afrocentrism should not only be viewed from the political and cultural dimensions, but is also an intellectual project that seeks endogenous explanations to continental Africa's perennial challenges - including that of understanding each other (Suttner 2010). To this end, Afrocentric ideologies include but are not limited to 'Ubuntu' in South Africa, 'botho' in Botswana and 'Utu' in Swahili (Kang'ethe 2006). As to be viewed from the scenarios above, Afrocentrism can be an invaluable, intellectual, ideological and philosophical tool to cultivate and promote social cohesion, reconciliation, common humanity and Pan-Africanism (Kang'ethe and Duma 2014). However, researchers are also of the view that although Afrocentrism goes beyond concepts such as Pan-Africanism, perhaps if Pan-Africanism is applied adequately and carefully as had been propounded by the so called Pan-Africanist founding fathers and other Afrocentric scholars, probably the ugly undesirable incidences in Africa such as wars, ethnic cleansing, genocide and xenophobic violence may have taken another course.

Problem Statement

The persistence state of ill treatment and incarceration of the African immigrants in contemporary South Africa has prompted/motivated the researchers to examine and consider alternative ways of looking at ways to extinguish this pinching and horrendous behavior by South Africans against their African brothers. The researchers are further informed by literature that most of the ill treatment of immigrants whether globally, regionally, and nationally, have been informed by Eurocentric values, philosophies and ideologies. It is therefore their contention that alternative ways of examining the phenomenon is critical, topical and timeous. The researchers hereby argue that Eurocentrism has obscured the concept of Afrocentrism in studies pertaining to Xenophobia to an extent that Afrocentric ideologies, philosophies and values have not had adequate contribution to address the quagmire. It is therefore pertinent that Afrocentric discours-

es are brought to the fore in examining xenophobia with a view to bring in an environment of healing, understanding, and emancipation of both the victims and the perpetrators.

The Paper Rationale

The rationale of this paper is to ignite a debate and discourse aiming to examine and consider the phenomenon of immigrants being treated badly, from both Eurocentric and Afrocentric lenses. This is because of the researchers' contention that explanations around immigrant treatment have largely and skewedly leaned on Eurocentric approaches and thereby obscuring the Afrocentric approaches. The researchers are of the opinion that the phenomenon of ill-treating the foreigners needs to be viewed from other diverse approaches, ideologies and philosophies such as Afrocentrism.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a discourse methodology to advance alternative ways of viewing the way immigrants needs to be treated in foreign countries. It has used dialogues, principles, ideologies from different contenders contributing to understanding xenophobia and racism in contemporary societies. The researchers have pitted the two philosophies of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism, generating debates on the pros and cons of philosophical ideologies each concept embraces.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Niche of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism Ideologies

The Niche of Eurocentrism

Although the role of Eurocentrism cannot be overemphasized in the era of modernization, development, and today, globalization, these researchers are of the view that Eurocentrism perspectives have largely been deployed to examine, explain and inform the phenomenon of xenophobia towards African immigrants (Kang'ethe 2014a; Kang'ethe and Duma 2014). The researchers are informed by the literature than pins Eurocentrism as a strong theoretical

and ideological underpinning that has over the centuries shaped people's mindset, thinking and ideologies of racism and other forms of hatred (Hoskins 1992). Eurocentric philosophical ideologies have dominated and shaped scholarship on race and xenophobia. It is also believed that there is an inextricable relationship between Eurocentrism and the rise of racism and development of capitalism and imperialism on a global scale (Connell 1997). For example, the British Empire is known for having colonized a lot of countries and imposed its hegemonic culture to the people of the colonized countries. This resulted in the creation of enduring systems of racial differentiation and demarcations (Wimmer 1997). Other European countries such as Germany, France, Belgium and Spain followed the same pattern of spreading colonization and equally imposing their hegemonic cultures, and thereby making their subjects as slaves and people of lower cultures through the process of "othering" (Pallua 2006). The imperial projects had the overall impact of embedding enduring and durable forms of social, economic and structural differentiation. This resulted in demarcating Europeans and non-Europeans, the people of the South and the North, etc. (Hoskins 1992). To this end, it is also significant to note that the colonizers extended their imperialistic ideologies through education, socialization and mentorship. The following discussions manifest how the phenomenon of Eurocentrism connects to both racism and xenophobia.

Relationship between Eurocentrism, Racism and Xenophobia

The researchers contend that much philosophical theorizing on race and xenophobia draws heavily on the imperialist internalist discourses that focus on relations between Europeans and the non Europeans (Hoskins 1992). Internalist discourses refer to one-sided, biased or skewed explanations of the encounters between the colonizers and the colonized which were developed and managed by the Europeans themselves. These internalist discourses were derived from the notion of global differences (Connell 1997). In doing so, they used the process of "othering", exclusion, differentiation, demarcation and the principle of divide and rule (Suttner 2010). In the same vein, contemporary discourses, ideologies and philosophies explain-

ing racism and xenophobia are still largely influenced by these internalist perspectives. Eurocentric ideals on racism and xenophobia find explanations from the following two conceptual frameworks of racial ambivalence and racial hierarchy.

Racial Ambivalence

The concept of racial ambivalence as viewed by Myrdal (in Markus 2008) epitomizes the internalist and inward looking perspective of racism and xenophobia. The crux of the Myrdalian perspective is that White Americans profess to uphold the democratic principles of equality and justice principles, yet their treatment of their fellow Black citizens, shows otherwise. These researchers contend that the Southern African context largely mirrors the concept of ambivalence. This is evidenced by the fact that although South Africa prides itself as being one of the most democratic countries in the world, and this is true, the way some foreign citizens are being treated contradicts the spirit of democracy (Kang'ethe and Duma 2014).

Racial Hierarchy

Racial hierarchies are systems of stratification that are premised on the assumption and belief that some racial groups are either superior or inferior to other racial groups (Suttner 2010). The concept of 'racial hierarchy' can help us to illuminate racial inequalities, differentiation and demarcation of immigrants in culturally and racially diverse societies such as South Africa (Suttner 2010). These researchers argue that the dominant Western-centric models often deployed to account for interpersonal and intergroup relations frequently face epistemological and methodological challenges.

Epistemological Issues in Eurocentric Models of Race and Xenophobia

The first epistemological issue revolves around the concept of 'race'. As the researchers alluded to above, the Eurocentric models of racism and xenophobia accentuate the primacy of 'race' in accounting for both interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Suttner 2010). There is a serious epistemological problem with this theoretical tendency, and this has to do with what

Busakwe (1997) refers to as homogenous ways of thinking about racism and xenophobia. Homogenous explanations lead to 'closed definitions' and understandings, and can have disastrous consequences for those who are defined homogeneously, and those doing the defining. A corollary of the above epistemological issue concerns the notion of identity. Xenophobia is strongly associated with issues of identity. The homogenizing discourses that are distilled from the Eurocentric perspective tend to view African immigrants as one group. Busakwe (1997:8) argues that "... from a Eurocentric perspective, African identity was viewed as one thing, that is, the same for all Africans. The homogenous explanations would therefore tend to essentialize African immigrant identity racially and ethnically (Suttner 2010). In fact, the thinking can promote 'aggregated' definition and meaning of African identity. All the constituent elements that make up the whole are regarded as the same, fixed, and static. When one lumps together a group of people in "one basket", the ever-present danger is that it will be impossible for one to observe the variation and the diversity that exist within that group (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2013). Their social capital gets totally disregarded (Kang'ethe 2014b). Secondly, identifying African immigrant identities utilizing a solitary identity marker leads to 'reductionist thought'. To this end, Busakwe (1997:37) puts it this way: "... reductionist statements assume that all Africans can be grouped together, and will want the same things, and will expect the same things and can be treated in the same way." The third problem, linked to the previous one, concerns the distinction often made between universalizing and particularizing interpretations of African immigrant identity (Suttner 2010). A universalist conceptualization of African immigrant identity would include, amongst other things, what Frank (1972) calls the notions of freedom, democracy, justice, the common good, economic and social liberalism. On the contrary, a particularistic meaning of African immigrant identity would assume a primordial view – viewing identity as a primordial entity. To this end, McCrone (1998) argues that primordial entities are embedded in human nature and history, and can be identified through distinctive cultures expressed by way of language, religion, culture and so on. If and when an African immigrant identity is defined in such essentialist terms, the

consequences thereof would be too aghast to contemplate – for example, the result could be some kind of 'ethnic cleansing'.

The third epistemological challenge relates to what Connell (1997) calls the twin notions of 'global difference' and 'progress'. Expressed in its most rudimentary and simplistic form, the idea goes like this: *we* are at an advanced stage, and *they* are in the original stage where *we* were before. *We* are the 'metropole' and *they* are the 'Other'. In these essentialist discourses, the 'Other' is often perceived to be 'culturally different' from the '*we*'. According to Wimmer (1997), what we obtain here is the perception of incompatibility and unbridgeable cultural distance. With regard to African immigrants in contemporary South Africa, '*they*' might be viewed as originating from countries that are perceived to be still strongly 'culturally different'. There are two key methodological weaknesses that we can identify with reference to the homogenizing discourses of race and xenophobia originating from the West

Methodological Pitfalls of Eurocentric Models of Xenophobia

The major methodological issue in Eurocentric models of xenophobia lies in the fact that they are largely 'internalist' or 'inward-looking' in their approach (Hoskins 1992). Homogenous discourses are evidently inward-looking in the sense that they adopt a comparative methodological stance in finding the 'truth' about social reality. This comparative methodological stance would proceed along this dimension: the Eurocentric scholar would first look inside his/her own society in order to explain the outside world. The Eurocentric scholars, similar to the European imperialists, "... used themselves as the 'benchmark norm' against which all other societies and cultures could be judged. This is a way of looking at things we term 'Eurocentric', meaning that Europe is seen as being the centre of a world-view that judges all else as different and therefore the 'other' (Busakwe 1997: 33). Obayede (1990) concurs with the above, and states that "In the history of intellectual thought, the Eurocentric paradigm has often assumed a hegemonic universal character, and placed itself at the center of the social structure, becoming the reference point, or the yardstick, by which every other culture is defined." There are two implications of this methodological stance.

The first deals with the hegemonic and totalizing views produced through this Eurocentric methodology. This point has received thorough elaboration from those scholars who subscribe to the school of postmodernism in the social sciences. In criticizing this hegemonic and totalizing methodology of the Eurocentric scholars, postmodern scholars point to the radical forms of research that will have an emancipatory impulse. Boyne and Rattansi, (1990) adds that the emancipatory impulse of postmodern research resides in this underlying feature indicative that there is no one theory capable of generating an overarching answer to societal challenges such as xenophobia. To the contrary, there is a plurality of theories, multiple voices and diverse contexts. These researchers hold their conviction that a Eurocentric methodology produces a narrow and uni-dimensional knowledge about the social phenomena of race and xenophobia. The second implication, directly flowing from the above, is that adopting a uni-dimensional methodological approach limits our understanding of the complexity of the anti-African immigrant sentiments. In fact, it limits the possibilities for researchers to comprehend the full complexity of the human condition (Hoskins 1992). At this juncture, the researchers would like to address the following broad questions: in the light of the epistemological and methodological problems with regard to Eurocentric models on xenophobia, what should we understand about xenophobia directed towards African immigrants? How should the researchers study this phenomenon? Should we study it with a view to understanding the emancipatory possibilities of this notion, or should we study it for social control purposes? A glimpse at some of the ideas of scholars working in the trans-disciplinary field of Africa studies offer some innovative insights that might constitute alternative theorization of the anti-African immigrant phenomenon.

The Niche of Afrocentrism

Afrocentrism or Afrocentricity is a state of mindset rooted in the African ancestral heritage and communal value system. It represents the Africanness of a people, positing the human being as the centrality/totalness of all existence (Hoskins 1992). The concept is an important one as it opens up possibilities of emancipation for both perpetrators and victims of xenophobia in African societies.

Afrocentrism is informed by the two concepts, notion of 'interpellation', and the process of 'transnationalization' and 'reterritorialization' (Mbembe 2001; Suttner 2010). Undergirding all these theoretical strands is the principle of 'oneness' of the African human race sharing a common African origin, but having multiple and dynamic identities. Perhaps sticking and operationalizing these two concepts, in these researchers perspective, can be a panacea. This is because of increased animosity, wars, border related tensions among different countries in Africa.

Interpellation of Subjects

The concept of 'interpellation' is borrowed from the works of a French philosopher, Louis Althusser. For Althusser, the ideology works by interpellating. This is 'hailing' or recognizing individuals, providing them with a social and juridical identity that constitutes them as subjects (Althusser, in Bassel 2008). Extending the application of this concept to the South African apartheid state, Suttner (2010) argued that interpellation occurred by packaging different people of South Africa into either 'Whites', 'Indians', 'Coloureds', and Africans. Africans, furthermore, were not only interpellated as Bantu, but also as categorized into tribal subjects such as Xhosa, Tswana and so on. A further interpellation, for example, broke the *Xhosa* into '*Gcaleka*', '*Abathembu*', '*AmaBomvana*', and so on. It is these researchers' contention that this interpellation has been operationalized even today and continues to perform significant political and ideological functions. It is however important to assess how this interpellation informs the state of understanding the xenophobic rejection of immigrants of African origin in contemporary South African society? To say the least, interpellation is also responsible for the construction of 'immigrant hierarchies' that result in differential and preferential treatment of different individuals who come to South Africa. Consequently, each and every immigrant-receiving country gets specific preferences regarding who to allow in, and under what conditions.

The Transnationalization and Reterritorialization of African Societies

Transnationalization and reterritorialization are concepts of globalization and regionaliza-

tion that brings countries and regions together irrespective of their geographical space. Mbembe (2001) is of the view that the continent of Africa is undergoing transformation in many ways. His contention revolves around the notion of how geographical spaces, economic and political life, and African identities are all transformed in continental Africa. In these researchers' contention, these ideas are a panacea in that they provoke the emergence of new extractive structures and mechanisms, the aim of which is to convert territories into resources and power leading to radical transformation of existing geographical spaces and national territorial boundaries. These processes, in these researchers' perspective could have far reaching effects in the way people make a living and also in the way they define themselves. They have led to an unprecedented revival of the imaginaries of long distance. This is because of improvement in transport and proliferation of information Technological infrastructure in the continent. This translates to increased migration, increased contact between people with different cultural orientations. This, in these researchers' opinion could trigger periodic outbursts of conflict and rising tensions of xenophobia. These processes create what Portes (1999) defines as transnational communities whose members participate on a routine basis in a field of relationships, practices, and norms that include both places of origin and destination (Roberts et al. 1999). Pivotal, new forms of economic livelihoods, identifications have emerged which are both fragmented and dynamic (Appadurai in Pessar 1999). In this vein, these researchers contend that any examination of the phenomenon of xenophobia against African immigrants in South Africa should be understood within the above context - a context of transnationalization and reterritorialization in which the old economic and political relations are constantly being reconfigured, recomposed, and institutionalized into new forms. This would also lead to the imperative of understanding the inter-connectedness of human beings in this world.

CONCLUSION

The researchers regret the fact that eurocentrism largely continue to inform the debates and discourses pertaining to xenophobia and racism. These researchers advocate for other ap-

proaches and perspectives such as Afrocentrism to be applied to explain the phenomenon of racism and xenophobia. The researchers advocate that there is need to transcend the orthodox and Western-centric explanations of race and xenophobia that centre on homogenizing discourses, and instead, situate the debates on Afrocentric discourses that accentuate heterogeneity, diversity, interconnectedness of the global community, and shared humanity.

WAY FORWARD/RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ The researchers are of the opinion that the global community should recognize other plausible strategies and methodologies of examining the way immigrants should be handled besides skewedly using Eurocentric lenses.
- ♦ The researchers need to explore various epistemologies and methodologies of understanding the phenomenon of xenophobia that promise to offer an emancipatory impulse to xenophobia
- ♦ People should be conscientized about aspects embedded in modernization, westernization, and globalization, that may promote xenophobia and racism
- ♦ The government, NGOs and civil societies should unequivocally defend and lobby for the rights and human dignity of the victims and those targeted by xenophobes.
- ♦ The governments of the world should initiate massive public campaigns and education pertaining to xenophobia and racism.

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