

## Introduction

Our book explores xenophobia empirically, comparatively, and theoretically. We portray xenophobia in postapartheid South Africa, postfascist Germany, and multicultural Canada. Have these societies learned humanistic lessons from their racist past? With the main research in South Africa and focus on the current situation, we probe what went right and wrong with the vision of liberation.

*Imagined Liberation* traces how the dream of an inclusive nonracial democracy faded in South Africa. For many former anti-apartheid activists the vision has turned into a delusion, while others are still imagining liberation through outdated policies. To support our analysis we use xenophobia as a prism for South African society at large. Our empirical evidence probes perceptions about foreigners in selected all-black township schools, because xenophobic violence signifies how the imagined postapartheid solidarity is being jettisoned. A marginalized underclass displays extreme hostility toward fellow Africans. Through the lens of xenophobia, we aim at capturing revealing aspects of the current collective mindset, twenty years after legalized apartheid has been abolished.

What puzzled us is a society that freed itself at the very least from institutionalized racism but that nevertheless practices new forms of black-on-black racialization. Strangely, whites are not considered *amakwerekwere*, hated foreigners. Whites, whether locals or visitors, are welcome tourists, investors, and job creators. Hardly any white ever enters the sprawling slums. On the whole, racial groups still live apart and hardly socialize but interact respectfully, even amiably, at work and in the marketplace.

Our ethnographic research in townships in the Western Cape aimed at discovering empirically what motivates a strongly anti-apartheid township

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population to turn violently against fellow Africans. We explore the reasoning and rationalizations behind the hostility. For successful intervention, it is not sufficient to merely register and document xenophobia through preformulated statements found in attitude surveys. Instead we let the respondents themselves give the reasons for their hostility in open-ended replies. Furthermore, how political figures, police personnel, teachers, and community leaders react to xenophobia—whether they tolerate, deny, condemn, or even incite it—seems an important factor. We portray this reality as we experienced it through focus groups, surveys, and interviews in impoverished township schools and through participant observation in the racialized affluence of Cape Town and Stellenbosch during our annual research visits.

The research literature on xenophobia highlights foremost competition for scarce employment, demands for entitlement, scapegoating for poor living conditions, and entrenched habits carried over from the apartheid era. Yet how do they relate to one another, and what about the new human rights culture of a progressive constitution? A society that liberated itself in the name of universal human rights nevertheless demonstrates extreme hostility toward persons who moved to South Africa because they lacked human rights at home. This includes restricted life-chances with no jobs, civil wars, or environmental disasters. The liberal democracy that the end of apartheid had ushered in guaranteed rights for all South African residents, regardless of citizenship. Yet these inclusive human rights jar with the exclusive entitlements of citizens that underlie the legitimacy of a liberal democracy. Of all countries in the world, South Africa has admitted the most refugees. Is there a limit, dictated by a state's resources and the hospitality of citizens? This so-called liberal paradox characterizes all Western democracies that have enshrined rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Modern xenophobia harks at entitlements for citizens from which foreigners are excluded. How can universal human rights be reconciled with closed rights of citizens? Can hostility toward strangers be considered a universal phenomenon, perhaps an evolutionary conditioning for maximizing survival, as sociobiologists assert? Is the antagonism toward perceived foreigners an issue of an insecure identity? Can xenophobia be unlearned and be corrected through appropriate political education? How can empathy with refugees be nurtured? The strangers in this case are not visibly different but share the same phenotype, sisters and brothers who assisted South African liberation, as the story goes. Therefore, are the “dangerous strangers” invented or constructed, just as European anti-Semitism once attributed all kinds of imaginary features to Jews? In a similar vein, Islamophobia now ostracizes Muslims and predicts an Islamic “tide swamping” of a childless Europe, turning it into “Eurabia” after emptying its welfare budgets.

Is xenophobia a collective paranoid delusion? Mental health textbooks define delusions as “beliefs held with great convictions in spite of having little empirical evidence.” Foreigners’ swamping, flooding, drowning, polluting a nation, introducing diseases, peddling drugs, defrauding the locals, and seduc-

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ing women conjure up threats. The stranger lurking to invade and undermine a virtuous people is an age-old tactic to construct an enemy. Anti-Semitism under Nazi rule had perfected the mobilization against a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Xenophobia resembles this fictitious logic but differs from the paranoid delusions of anti-Semitism.

In economic terms, newcomers compete with locals for scarce resources, especially jobs. Migrants are a real threat under conditions of scarcity. This gives xenophobia a rationality that anti-Semitism lacks. Therefore xenophobia should not be pathologized. A similar caution applies to the conflation of xenophobia with racism. The “figment of the pigment” lacks a scientific basis. It was invented to rationalize colonial domination with the “civilizing mission” of the “white man’s burden.” In contrast, the “othering” of strangers rests on the nepotism of the locals. Citizenship legitimizes excluding noncitizens from the rights of natives.

Xenophobia cannot be reduced to problems of a labor market alone. We soon had to question whether an impoverished township life suffices to explain scapegoating. The neglect of the shantytowns was embedded in the overall political development of the country, where an urban elite pays only lip service to the fate of the poor. This led us to revisit a once-glorified liberation movement that is still politically strong but morally weak. Chapter 4, “Falling from Grace,” sketches in broad strokes the collective state of mind of the “rainbow nation.” We identify various moral turning points: the HIV/AIDS denial, the continuing high crime rate, the crisis of corruption with the waste of public funds in the arms deal, the reracialization through black economic empowerment, and passivity by the African National Congress (ANC) toward the Mugabe regime. We argue that South Africa is not threatened by an unlikely descent into a Zimbabwe-type dictatorship, but by the opposite: a disintegration into anarchy once liberation ideals lose their appeal. The disillusionment with an imagined liberation can trigger all kinds of irrational reactions, given the widening inequality that no longer is based mainly on race but now is based also on class.

As is well known, South African decolonization was achieved not by military means and departure of the colonizers, as happened in other African settler societies (Algeria, Rhodesia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Angola), but with the cooperation of power holders who could have delayed their ultimate demise for some time. This unprecedented “negotiated revolution” has forced compromises on both antagonists that constrained implementing the initial visions of the new regime. Transforming a colonial economy, capturing its “commanding heights,” redistributing wealth and land or nationalizing the mines, proved impossible when the compromise essentially rested on the replacement of the political class in return for maintenance of the old property relations and neoliberal market order.

What needs clarification is how much of the current malaise should be attributed to the apartheid past and how much should be ascribed to the short-sightedness of the new leadership. The legacy of racial oppression obviously is

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not wiped out by new nonracial legislation. Internalized habits of domination and submission last, often even unrecognized by well-intentioned progressive forces. However, blaming the apartheid legacy for most of the current political deficiencies too easily exempts inept, self-indulgent new rulers. Failing to deliver textbooks in Limpopo or paralyzing Eastern Cape education by a “selfish teachers’ union” cannot be explained by referring simply to Verwoerd’s Bantu education six decades earlier.

In Chapter 6 on Germany, we portray the dilemmas of a modern welfare state that needs to attract migrants with the right skills but ends up with non-integrating asylum seekers—criminalized Roma and Sinti—who are seen as defrauding the system. We discuss the European Islamophobia and the myth that an incompatible religion prevents integration. We also seek answers to why xenophobia is much higher in former East Germany (GDR) than in the Western part, although few foreigners lived in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In Chapter 7, we portray an official immigration society as an alternative to the South African model: an immigrant integrating, multicultural Canada. Why did South Africa not follow the Canadian or Australian example of a vision that not only regulates immigration through a sophisticated point system but also celebrates cultural diversity as well as cherished multiculturalism? Why do South Africans reject the benefits of regulated immigration of scarce skills? While in some ways South Africans are ahead of Canada by intuitively living comfortably with diversity in daily reality, Canada leads in the teaching of mutual respect and integrating difference consciously, by encouraging tolerance of dissent and equality through citizenship.

In the Conclusion, we scan the social science literature for theoretical conceptualizations of xenophobia, ranging from the notion of “moral panic” to Fanon’s postcolonial condition and Freud’s “narcissism of small difference,” to psychosocial concepts of “identity assertion” and “reversal of honor.” Merely invoking and preaching noble constitutional principles overlooks that the progressive ideals, enshrined by an urban elite, barely resonate with substantial sections of a depoliticized population. Therefore, we argue, only increased political literacy can create a cosmopolitan identity that immunizes against a violent citizenship of exclusion. However, has a complacent ruling group a real interest in such nuanced, critical political education when it is better served by uncritical conformity?

Given the vast literature on the “Mandelaland,” “What is new and different about your book?” friends frequently asked. Our answer is fivefold. First, we unashamedly try to explore neglected dimensions of the landscape—what orthodox Marxists dismiss as mere “superstructure” or “false consciousness”—such as identity, perceptions, and attitudes as well as moral commitments. Second, we write from a comparative perspective as inside-outsiders, who have lived and taught intermittently in Germany, South Africa, Egypt, and the United States and for the longest time in Canada. We bring these experiences to bear on the interpretation of South Africa. Third, we minimize the popular

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journalistic focus on political leaders and emphasize more the sociological conditions in which they succeed or fail and what makes a following susceptible to the calls of government. Fourth, our own modest empirical research tends to be more ethnographic than representative. Therefore we complement it extensively with representative countrywide opinion surveys and reflect on immigration policies worldwide. Fifth, we focus on perpetrators rather than the experience of victims or the vast refugee assistance programs in civil society organizations. We believe that foremost a deeper understanding of collective hate is a precondition for minimizing it beyond the well-intended charity. Finally, we apply social-psychological and psychoanalytical concepts in theorizing South African ethnic relations, superimposing these over common economic explanations. We are interested in the fantasies that sustain xenophobia and other collective outbursts of hate. We also try to write for a politically interested general audience, South Africans and non-South Africans, seeking to communicate in a more journalistic style. We did not confine ourselves to academic treatise but deliberately utilized media pundits extensively in order to enliven the portrait of South African society with everyday descriptions.

Regrettably, we continue to use apartheid racial labels, because South Africa is not yet a race-free, color-blind society and probably will not be one for a long while to come. Even in the postapartheid state, the old race categorizations are officially retained, but now to measure progress toward transformation (greater representivity) through affirmative action policies. In addition, the legacies of varied identities, associated with the phony ethnoracial categories, persist. The common label of African for the black majority does not preclude that the members of the other groups are also African in the political sense of citizens belonging to the African continent as their only home and origin. This is clarified in Chapter 5, "Settler Colonialism," which also compares SA liberation with Israel/Palestine. In contrast to the Middle East, all parties in South Africa, including the Pan-African Congress (PAC), have accepted this status of original "settlers." Therefore, not all Africans are black, and not all blacks are Africans. It should also be noted that since the rise of Stephen Biko's Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the late 1960s, "black" had become a proud political term, comprising politically conscious members of all three disenfranchised groups, including "Indians" and "Coloureds," the 10 percent 'mixed-race' people in the apartheid hierarchy.

So that there may be greater author transparency, two mini-autobiographies have been added in the appendixes. As the viewpoints we adopt and the research topics we chose emanate from personal histories, autoethnographies allow the reader to judge biases and vantage points of the authors. Kogila, as a Durban-born South African, sketches how her family managed to overcome systemic discrimination in a period when Indians were considered unassimilable aliens. Heribert, of German background, outlines other obstacles he had to overcome to liberate himself as well as many academic controversies in which he has been involved since graduating and working as an assistant at the Frankfurt

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Institute of Social Research under Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the 1960s. This book synthesizes our fifty years of academic involvement with South Africa. It can also be read as a series of essays on the rich South Africa trajectory, a country that embodies the problems of both the first and third worlds in a microcosm.