

“Towards a framework that uses narrative analysis for understanding xenophobic attacks in South Africa”

by Temba Siphon B. Masilela, PhD

30th November 2010

A paper originally presented at the “Coping with Dis-Integration: From the Perspectives of Local to Global” held on 13-14th September 2010, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

Part 1: Locating and positioning oneself in Dis-Integration

Xenophobia: A local example from the South African context

For the purposes of this paper “Dis-Integration” processes and incidents are understood to be features of globalization that exhibit a number of features. These include that they draw on social memory in a quest for wholeness, that they have a present tense action orientation via democratic imaginaries, that they significantly influence the lived experience and prospects of large sections of society, that they call into question individual and collective identities, that they are used as markers in the periodization of the contemporary history and trajectories of societies and nations, and that they are in preceding periods ignored or silenced in dominant public discourses.

They are processes and incidents in which large numbers of the members of a society are somehow personally implicated and confronted with the question— how am I as an individual responsible, through my actions or inactions, for these ruptures and public outbursts and what can I do to further or contain them?

Given this working definition I have selected the xenophobic attacks that occurred in May 2008 in South Africa as a case study for this paper. Xenophobia is defined as “attitudes, prejudices and behaviour (practices) that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on perceptions that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity”.¹ In different contexts and countries it is variously perpetuated through a dynamic public rhetoric; it is associated with acts of violence, aggression and brutality; it is a social and political phenomenon; and in its particularly aggressive forms it is linked to nation-building and nationalism (Crush and Ramachandram, 2009:6).

The focus in this paper is on xenophobia in the post-apartheid period. South African has a long history of migration, dispossession, facilitated immigration, and the use of migrant labour from neighbouring countries which are the backdrop for what opinion polls have consistently established to be generally high levels of hostility towards people from other countries in Africa. An effort by the South African Human Rights Commission to address the issue between 1999 and 2002, in the form of an educational ‘Roll Back Xenophobia’ campaign did not achieve a great deal before it was wound up. “Despite overwhelming research evidence of a powder-keg of xenophobic

¹ ILO, IOM and OHCHR (2001) “International migration, racism, discrimination and xenophobia”

sentiment, the issue was largely ignored in public political discourse until it was too late (Crush and Ramachandram, 2009:14 and 15)."

There is much debate in South Africa about what were the contextual and/or precipitating factors that resulted in the brutal xenophobic attacks of 2008. The character and dispersed nature of these attacks rather than their scale led to public alarm about the trajectory and prospects of the nation building project in south Africa.

A comprehensive 500-page report written by leading social and political scientists as well as by civil society activists in South Africa two years after the events concluded "that a combination of deep structural social, economic and spatial inequalities; an on-going reliance on cheap labour; housing shortages; township retail competition; racism; a history of the use of violence to advance sectional interests; and a traumatically scarred national psyche combined in early 2008 with a desperately low national mood as the economy seemed to be in free-fall and the ruling party was in the midst of factional splitting -- to create ripe conditions for the xenophobic outburst. . . The May 2008 outbreak was a massive eruption which threw into relief many of the fault-lines of South African society (Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010:1 and 4)."

Bond, Ngwane and Amisi (2010:15) point out that "Yet at the same time, South Africa began suffering not only economic problems, but also a dramatic increase in social unrest that presaged a deterioration of the integrity of several liberal political institutions. As one reflection, there were 5813 protests (as defined under the Regulation of Gatherings Act 205 of 1993) recorded by the South African Police Service in 2004 -05, and subsequently, an average of 8000 per annum² with higher amounts for the year 2008-0 anticipated."

As the attacks and the associated emotions – anger, fear, anxiety and disgust – reverberated I felt compelled in the immediate aftermath to make sense of what had happened -- think through my experiences and the part that I had played in the unfolding events -- and make a public statement. My public statement was published as a feature article for IPS News and is reproduced below.

² Charles Nqakula (2007) 'Reply to Question 1834, National Assembly 36/1/4/1/200700232' Cape Town 22 November, cited in Bond, Ngwane and Amisi (2010:15).

"Who and what were the xenophobic attacks in South Africa about?"³

Pretoria, July 30 -- In the aftermath of the xenophobic attacks ambiguity about nationality has acquired dangers that cannot be ignored. However, the transfixing events and horrifying images of murder in the name of being a real and proven South African national are about more than just language and nationality identity. They are also about shortcomings in policy narratives and the ineffectiveness of the links between policy and community action.

I always knew that the survival habits of a prolonged period of living in exile would one day come back to haunt me but I never thought they would do so in such a brutal manner. Anonymity and ambiguity had in the past proven their usefulness in so many different situations. Despite being born in South Africa I had lived as a refugee for 32 years and retain vivid memories of the 20 formative years I lived in East Africa. I recently celebrated 15 years of successfully living in, working in, and starting a family in South Africa - when I was suddenly confronted by horrifying media reports that 62 people, a third of them 'born and bred South Africans', had died in various townships across South Africa as a result of what came to be commonly referred to as xenophobic attacks. Hundreds of people had been injured and tens of thousands had been forcibly removed from their homes and not allowed to take their possessions with them. During and after these attacks the police arrested approximately 1400 people for crimes alleged committed as part of the xenophobic attacks – murder, attempted murder, aggravated robbery and theft. Extensive media coverage ensured that these attacks came crashing through the front door of every home in South Africa.

In public commentary in the weeks following the attacks it was disconcerting to hear the long list of public policies, practices and circumstances that were said to have contributed to and exacerbated matters – past migrant labour policies, current immigration and refugee policies, weak border controls, the hiring of seasonal farm workers, unemployment, quiet diplomacy in Zimbabwe, inequitable housing policies, the issuance of identification documents, the provision of social security, corrupt policing, the proliferating informal urban settlements, competition for scarce resources, crime, and a disconnected government that no longer listened to the anguish or comprehended the anger of millions of people living in poverty.

³ http://ipsnews.net/new_focus/changelives/opinion3.asp

As someone who had spent 13 years in the South African public bureaucracy crafting particular policy positions and had occupied a front row seat during the period of a massive post-apartheid overhaul of public policy -- this long list of alleged policy failures was unsettling. The more I thought about matters the more this began to overshadow strategies of anonymity and ambiguity. I soon concluded that I was implicated in the frightening "not-in-my-name" events that were taking place in far away townships in the home country of my return. I had started my professional life as a journalist and worked in the areas of public management reform and social policy when I returned to South Africa. Later as a special adviser I earned my keep by writing numerous carefully researched, considered and crafted policy speeches so escaping my share of responsibility for deficiencies in policies and how they are communicated would be difficult.

There were other reasons that made this difficult. Although I had always accepted Easton's 1953 definition of the public policy process as a "narrative about the authoritative allocation of values and resources", it was slowly dawning on me and my colleagues that we had not thought through the full implications of the definition. The 'authoritative allocation of values and resources' part of the definition had just become clear. The deep, without-hope-anger that had erupted into inhumane xenophobic attacks clearly had a lot to do with human values and competition for scarce resources. The only remaining question was whether in performing our roles as policy interpreters, message designers, information brokers, and branding specialists we had given sufficient thought to the first part of the definition -- the part about the public policy process being first and foremost a narrative.

As the events and images of May 2008 unfolded I couldn't help asking what had been the relationships, plots and perspectives in the policy stories we had told? At the time everyone who mattered said that our policy narratives resonated with our audiences. But if each policy document was in itself a narrative, were the everyday stories handed down from generation to generation not also full of questions -- who, why, where, how, what consequences and costs, and who benefits? Wasn't the joy of listening to a story in the waiting for the endlessly intriguing answers to these questions? Upon reflection it was clear that our policy documents were not constructed as stories. The series of questions that should have held our stories together and given them coherence were often at best ambiguous. It was more often the case that they were totally absent.

Our policy narratives thus read as long lists of answers. To compound matters they often avoided being explicit about who would bear the consequences and costs of the policy. It was therefore not surprising that long after we had forgotten them, they resurfaced.

For the purposes of addressing the issue of xenophobia in South Africa, the Immigration Act of 2002 and the Immigration Amendment Act of 2004 illustrate the 'stand alone' deficiencies of legislation as a policy narrative. Context is taken as a given or presumed to be too controversial and thus not specified in the legislation. Yet instances of xenophobia can only be correctly understood if they take into account the lived experience and memories of the actors involved – experiences and memories inextricably tied to the long history of migration within the Southern Africa region to work in the mines of South Africa. The presence in South Africa of Africans from surrounding countries is not a new phenomenon. If the Immigration Act specified this context it would make the xenophobic attacks of 2008 more comprehensible in terms of a story line that highlighted the massively increased scale and uncontrolled nature of post-1994 migration into South Africa.

Similarly, the Immigration Act would have greater utility as a policy narrative and have specific utility in helping to understand the xenophobic attacks of 2008 if it referenced the 1995 “amnesty offer” of permanent residence made by the government of South African to all foreign mineworkers who had provided at least 10 years of service in South African mines. Many foreign mineworkers did not take up the offer of permanent residence because they had no intention of uprooting themselves permanently from their home countries. By not referencing this fact and these preferences the Immigration Act as a policy narrative did not contribute to managing public expectations or fears. Because we encounter them as 'stand alone' pieces of public policy, policies like the Immigration Act are deficient because they lose sight of the fact that public policies are stories, stories about the allocation of resources and values. A story has context, actors, relationships, a plot, different points of views, and an ending – not always a happy one.

In addition, a good story is a call to action and policy should be that too. It should not just speak to me as a potential employer of an illegal foreigner. It should also refer to my responsibilities as citizen vis-à-vis the rights of a foreigner.

Because of countless nights spent around a fireplace no one should have needed to tell us that our policy narratives or stories would need to be re-told many times over. But in our professional lives we had somehow forgotten this and our policy documents were not crafted to be lovingly retold. Our policy narratives did not contain recognizable and archetypal characters that had or could be given names. Our stories were impersonal and told in a consistently flat tone. They weren't just abrupt and to the point, they started with a conclusion and never elaborated upon this conclusion. They were linear in intent and construction and designed to indicate that all discussion was now closed. By design, the space in these narratives for communicating was severely restricted. We did not realize that our policy narratives had been clothed in straitjackets.

The absence of intrigue in our policy narratives was the most difficult part to explain. We had all had front row seats and were often party to the almost endless political and bureaucratic intrigue that accompanied policy development. Not to mention the special interests carrying carefully counted brown envelopes and the corresponding shifting alliances that seemed to almost define policy development processes. Yet our end products, the resultant policy documents and narratives, were stripped of all intrigue. No wonder frontline bureaucrats found them useless as guides to action and in many cases didn't even bother to try to implement them.

Another area where we have forgotten that our policy processes and documents are narratives is the requirement for a suspension of disbelief in order to enjoy and learn from a story. In drafting policies and in resolving disputes about interpretation we always insisted upon literal translations – done in the here and now, in the disorienting glare of the mid-day sun. Alternatively, we have operated on the basis of a false hope that the suspension of disbelief in our policies would last for decades -- hopefully long enough to undo centuries of oppression, discrimination and state orchestrated attempts at systematic de-humanization. No wonder the episodes of 2008 seem to have come upon us so quickly. (ends)"

This introspective narrative, its 'I am implicated' stance and the anguished voice in which it is told is an example of a reflexive practice occasioned by an incident of dis-integration. This conference is taking place at a critical distance from the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 and is being used as an opportunity for a more considered reflection on the approaches and tools that can be used to make sense of

processes of Dis-Integration as they are enacted in collective actions and in public spaces.

Reflexive practices in understanding and coping with Xenophobia

In considering approaches and tools that can be used to understand the xenophobic attacks that occurred in South Africa in 2008 this paper adopts the reflexive practice of using multiple perspectives, stories, frames and metaphors (Alvesson et. al., 2008:486). "This (kind of) reflexive researcher is a traveller . . . she is also a builder or 'bricoleur', piecing together a richer, more varied picture by viewing research – their own or others' – from different angles. These practices guard against theorizing that presents an unambiguous view of reality represented in the form of a single 'grand narrative', not by dismissing the foundational claims of any single perspective that it offers a better understanding of reality, but by showing how other perspectives provide different understandings and, by combining them, greater insight might be achieved." This article focuses on the differences between the perspectives/narratives/frames/metaphors that can be used to understand the xenophobic attacks and accepts their incommensurability. The interest in this paper is in highlighting the different ways in which the phenomenon was understood. The perspectives of the main actors, key researchers/scholars, and public commentators are selected and juxtaposed. Alvesson et. al. (2008) argue that reflexivity as a multi-perspective practice is a useful supplement to 'incomplete' research.

The rationale for the selections and juxtapositions in this paper is informed by Castells and Damasio's respective work on violence and discourse in the networked society (Castells, 2009); and on the role of emotions and feelings in decision making (Damasio, 2003). An interesting question that is not addressed in this paper is the usage and uses of mobile phones in processes of Dis-integration. In Africa the exponential growth in mobile phone users is taking place in a context of relatively low rates of penetration by landlines thus the correlations between mobile phone activism and processes of social change (Ekine, 2010). With respect to the events of May 2008 in South Africa it would be enlightening to study the mobile phone activism of both the perpetrators and the victims. The mobile phone activism of the Somali Association of South Africa in response to the

xenophobic attacks would be a particularly interesting case study in itself and for comparative purposes⁴.

Part 2: Pathways in a narrative analysis of Dis-Integration

The centrality of power and emotions in Dis-Integration

Castells' (2009:10) thesis on communication power and emotions in a networked society, presented in a much telescoped fashion, is that "power is the most fundamental process in society, since society is defined around values and institutions, and what is valued and institutionalized is defined by power relationships. Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interest, and values."

Further, "There is complementarily and reciprocal support between the two main mechanisms of power formation identified by theories of power: violence and discourse. . . Communication power is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society. . . Power is more than communication, and communication is more than power. But power relies on the control of communication, as counter power depends on breaking through such control. And mass communication, the communication that potentially reaches society at large, is shaped and managed by power relationships, rooted in the business of media and the politics of the state (Castells, 2009:11 and 3)."

His book is thus focused on: "Why, how, and by whom power relationships are constructed and exercised through the management of communication processes; and how these power relationships can be altered by social actors aiming for social change by influencing the public mind. My working hypothesis is that the most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind (Castells, 2009:3)."

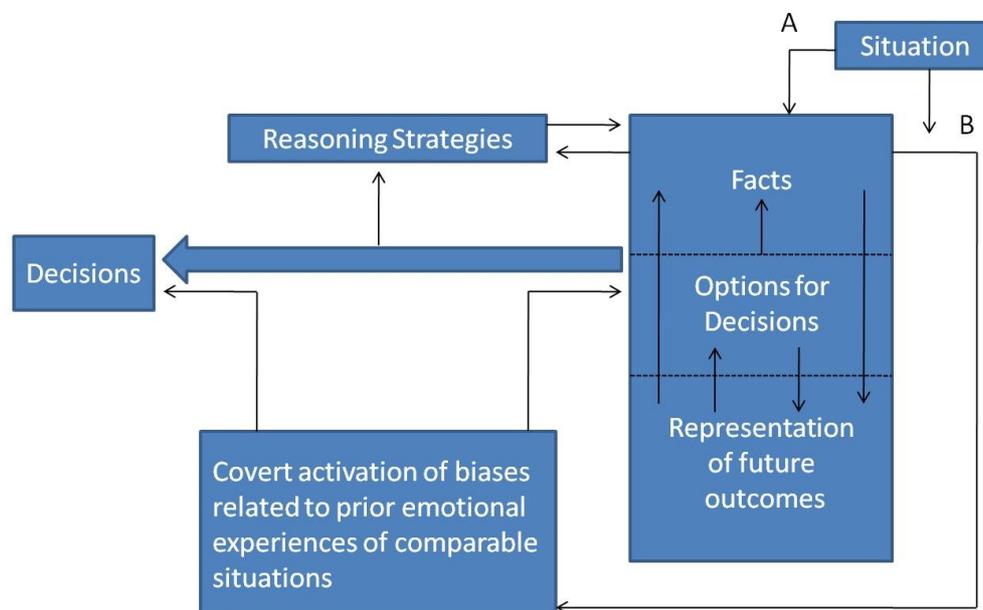
Castells develops this hypothesis by referencing the research on emotions and cognition developed by Professors Antonio and Hanna Damasio and by focusing on six basic emotions generally recognized -- fear, disgust, surprise, sadness, happiness and anger. Interestingly all six of these basic emotions were expressed in the public outcry when

⁴ The Somali Association of South Africa is a registered Not-for-Profit Organization with branches in all of South Africa's provinces. The association's membership includes the majority of Somali nationals living in South Africa. Somalis were the community most affected by the 2008 xenophobic violence (Amisi, 2010:16).

the powder-keg of xenophobic sentiment exploded in May 2008. Castells notes that Antonio Damasio's research has shown that "emotions are deeply wired in our brain (and in most species' brains) because they have been induced by the drive to survive throughout the process of evolution (Castells, 2009:140)." And argues that "metaphors are critical to connect language (thus human communication) and brain circuitry. It is through metaphors that narratives are constructed. Narratives are composed of frames, which are the structures of the narrative that correspond to the structures of the brain that resulted from the brain's activity over time. Frames are neural networks of association that can be accessed from the language through metaphorical connections. Framing means activating specific neural networks. . . . Most communication is built around metaphors because this is the way to access the brain. (Castells, 2009:142-143)."

Antonio Damasio (2003:149) proposes a model of the process of human decision making that involves emotions, feelings and reasoning components. This model provides a useful tool for understanding the decision-making processes that created pathways for the aggregation of xenophobic sentiment.

Figure 1. The process of decision-making according to Antonio Damasio (2003:149).



"The critical point in this process is that emotions play a double role influencing decision-making. On the one hand, they covertly activate

the emotional experience related to the issue that is the object of decision making. On the other hand, emotions can act directly on the process of decision-making, by prompting the subject to decide the way she feels. . . . Thus, decision making has two paths, one based on frame reasoning [A] and the other directly emotional [B] (Castells, 2009:143-144).” These paths alter us to the importance of maintaining a dual perspective at the level of the individual when studying processes of Dis-Integration as they are enacted in collective actions and in public spaces.

As noted earlier in this paper part of the backdrop for the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 in South Africa was both a longstanding history of the use of violence to advance sectional interests and so called ‘service delivery’ protests in the post-apartheid era. The range of actions and public drama entailed in this scripted violence (Wood, 2005) is in the South African context well described by Minnaar (2001:3) in his study of vigilantism. This vigilantism takes a variety of forms that include spontaneous mob-style emotive reactions and well planned and organized vigilante activity through specific organizations.

The political economy of xenophobia: Structure, social activism and micro-politics

A number of studies of the xenophobic attacks of 2008 adopt a political economy approach (Berry, 2008) in their analysis of events in South Africa – particularly the study by Patrick Bond, Trevor Ngwane and Baruti Amisi (2010:6). In examining the question of structure and agency they identify a number of structural factors that need to be taken into account:

- Extremely high unemployment which exacerbates traditional and new patterns of migration;
- A tight housing market with residential stratification;
- Extreme retail business competition in townships;
- Exceptionally high crime rates;
- Corruption in the Home Affairs Department and other state agencies in a manner detrimental to perceptions regarding immigrants;
- Cultural conflicts; and
- Severe regional geopolitical stresses, particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

They assert that “these structural forces do not excuse or can cancel agency. It is crucial to point out that xenophobic rhetoric and attacks

are grounded in a politics that can be traced to leadership decisions (or vacuums), and to explicit discourses in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras (Bond, Ngwane and Amisi, 2010:8)".

They also note that the xenophobic rhetoric and attacks can also be traced to a consciousness that arose from particular existent social relations and manifested itself in organized social activism.

"The combination of immigrant *rightlessness* (emphasis in the original) and structural exclusion, amidst a perceived invasion of 'foreigners', resulted in *organized social activism* against individuals perceived as dangerous to the socio-cultural and moral fabric, and as threatening the economic opportunities of poor South Africans, within a system set up by wealthy South Africans to *super* exploit migrant labour from both South Africa and the wider region. Hence we require a framework to incorporate not only the flows of labour, the reproduction of labour in housing (especially during an unprecedented real estate bubble), the nature of extremely competitive retail trade in community reproduction, gender power delineations, and regional geopolitics, but also the *consciousness* that arises from these socioeconomic relations, and the ways civil society organizations both contest the xenophobic reactions and in many cases fail to locate or address the root causes of xenophobia in structural oppressions (Bond, Ngwane and Amisi, 2010:8)".

Misago et. al. (2009:1-2) locate a precipitating factor in the attacks in the micro-politics of townships and the authority and power of local leaders. "In almost all cases where violence occurred, it was organized and led by local groups and individuals in an effort to claim or consolidate the authority and power needed to further their political and economic interests. It (their study) therefore finds that most violence against non-nationals and other 'outsiders' which occurred in May 2008 is rooted in the micro-politics of the country's townships and informal settlements".

This micro-politics played itself out in the broader context of particular kinds of predominant media coverage about migrants and public communications campaigns by the South African Human Rights Commission to 'Roll Back Xenophobia'.

Media coverage of migrants and 'weak signals' of xenophobia

Based upon a review of a number of studies of post-1994 media coverage which used discourse analysis⁵, Smith (2010:1) notes that the key points that the studies are in agreement about are that the majority of print media articles:

- Are anti-immigration, or at least make negative references to migrants and immigrants;
- Adopt an un-analytical / simplistic approach, with little in –depth analysis;
- Persist in using certain labels when referring to migrants such as ‘illegal immigrants’ ; and
- Perpetuate negative stereotypes about migrants using such terms as ‘criminals’, ‘illegal’s’, and ‘job stealers’.

It is through these and other metaphors that the covert activation of biases (as postulated by Antonio Damasio) among interpreter readers occurred.

In this context how is it that despite evidence of strong and persistent xenophobic sentiments the issue was largely ignored in public political discourse until it was too late? Mendonça, Cardoso and Caraça () draw an analogy between the subtle and continuous early warnings of a rise in temperature that are ignored by a frog and the kinds of weak signal analysis that often accompany Dis-Integration processes. Responses are tempered by gaps in surveillance filters, by the operation of mental filters because the signal does not conform to a shared frame of reference or culture, and by the functioning of power filters because the signals are not constructed as being in the interest of powerful constituencies. They argue that “conceived as a component of strategic foresight, weak signal analysis (is) a systematic process of detection of alarming messages suggestive of up-and-coming tendencies and path-shattering incidents that may alter the rationale of the policies that were designed in past circumstances and are being implemented today (Mendonça, Cardoso and Caraça, :11).”

Drawing upon work on early warnings and weak signals in management studies, one can approach the issue of coping with Dis-

⁵ Danso, R. and D. Macdonald (2001) “Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Print Media in Post Apartheid South Africa” *Africa Today* 48[3]: 114 – 37. Fine J & Bird W. 2002 “Shades of Prejudice: an investigation into South African media’s coverage of racial violence and xenophobia”, research conducted by the Media Monitoring Project. McDonald DA & Jacobs S (2005), “[Re] writing Xenophobia: Understanding Press Coverage of Cross-Border Migration in South Africa”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23 [3], 295 – 325. Bekker, S, I. Eigelaar-Meets, G. Eva & C. Poole (2008) “Xenophobia and Violence in South Africa: a desktop study of the trends and a scan of explanations offered” unpublished paper.

Integration in terms of responses to 'surprises' which arise because of either a lack of attention or a lack of knowledge or failures of interpretation. Along these lines Cunha, Clegg and Kamoche (2006:319) argue that "considering that organizational knowledge is always incomplete, and that uncertainty and ambiguity are inherent in complex organizational settings, surprises should be a well established field of organizational research. However this is not the case." Based upon their review of the field they propose a typology of surprises (creeping developments, losses of meaning, sudden events, and routines) that can be used as a typology of Dis-Integration.

Each of these metaphors of Dis-Integration (creeping developments, losses of meaning, sudden events, and routines) were evident in government narratives about the events of May 2008.

Government discourses on xenophobia: Humanism, pan-Africanism, criminality and anarchy

Although government officials and policy makers at different times constructed varying narratives about the events of May 2008 the government's fall-back perspective on the xenophobic attacks was articulated by President Thabo Mbeki in a statement to the nation made on 19th May 2008. The statement was based on framed reasoning in which the frames of humanity, pan-Africanism, criminality and anarchy were emphasized. In the state the president said:

"Citizens from other countries on the African continent and beyond are as human as we are and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Our humanism as a people enjoins all of us to respect, care, co-operate and act in solidarity with others regardless of their nationality.

We dehumanize ourselves the moment we start thinking of another person as less human than we are simply because they come from another country. Humanity is indivisible. As we have seen, what breaks the fabric of respect for others and for the law *opens* the way for further forms of criminality.

As South Africans, we must recognize and fully appreciate that we are bound together with other Africans by history, culture, and economics and above all, by destiny. South Africa is not and will never be an island separate from the rest of the continent.

We dare not lose sight of the fundamental reality of our interdependence as the people of Africa.

I call upon those behind these shameful and criminal acts to stop! Nothing can justify it. The law-enforcement agencies must and will respond with the requisite measures against anyone found to be involved in these attacks.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all members of the public, as well as political and community leaders who have joined calls for the immediate ending of these attacks. In particular, I would like to thank those who have lent a helping hand to the victims by, amongst others, offering shelter, clothes and food. They have demonstrated a true South African spirit. Let us all work together to make it impossible for the few criminals in our midst to realize their inhuman objectives.

Everything possible will be done to bring the perpetrators to book. Already, more than 200 alleged perpetrators have been arrested. Both the Minister of Safety and Security and the Acting National Police Commissioner are keeping me informed of developments and I am confident that the police will soon make significant breakthroughs in getting to the root of this anarchy."⁶

Government's framing of xenophobia in this fashion continued in the weeks before the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa when an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Xenophobia was created in the face of rumours that foreign national would be again attacked after the World Cup. The Minister of Police said at the time that: "We will not tolerate any threat or act of violence against any individual or sector of society, no matter what reasons are given to justify such threats or actions. Government is closely monitoring these xenophobic threats by faceless criminals whose desire is to create anarchy. We want to assure society that our police are on the ground to thwart these evil acts."⁷

The government's fall-back perspective on the xenophobia attacks – in terms of the frames of humanity and pan-Africanism – reflects an acknowledgement of social memory and the continental history of colonialism that is often ignored in research and scholarship on xenophobia in South Africa. However, "government leaders' statements criticizing xenophobia seemed to have little or no role in

⁶ See <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2008/08052009451002.htm> for a copy of the President's speech...

⁷ See <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=11245&tid=11428> for a copy of the Minister's statement dated 1 July 2010.

moderating public attitudes, because they were not followed by a serious attempt to match words with actions (Friedman, 2010:17)."

Re-membering wholeness and dismemberment from social memory

As stated in the blurb to his book, Wa Thiong'o (2009) argues that 'Over centuries of contact with the west, Africa has suffered the deprivations of slavery, colonialism, and globalization. An integral part of this tragic encounter has been Europhonism: the replacement of native names and language systems with European ones. Language is a communal memory bank. In losing its native languages, Africa would lose its social memory – its very identity. In his book *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* Ngugi wa Thiong'o traces the arc of Africa's fragmentation and restoration amidst the global history of colonialism and modernity. Seeking a revitalization of Africa, he argues that a renaissance in African languages is a necessary step in the restoration of African wholeness.

The argument is that when considering Dis-integration processes in Africa, they have to be understood in the context of a long history and social memory of dismemberment and fragmentation.

"The beheading of King Hintsa (of the Xhosa people of South Africa and the taking of his head to the British Museum) and the burial of Waiyaki alive, body up-side down, and the removal of the genitalia of the African in America, go beyond particular acts of conquest and *humiliation*: They are the enactments of the central character of colonial practice in general and Europe's contact with Africa in particular. . . This contact is characterized by dismemberment. An act of absolute social engineering. Of course, colonialist did not literally cut of the heads of (all) the colonized or physically bury them alive. Rather, they dismembered the colonized from memory, turning their heads upside down and burying all the memories they carried. (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:5 and 7)."

Wa Thiong'o (2009:33) raises the interesting question of why contemporary postcolonial African writers are fascinated by the oldest and best known African myth of dismemberment and re-membering – the Egyptian story of Osiris (father), Isis (mother) and Horus (only begotten son) which Obenga (2004) dates to the Pharaonic period in Egyptian history [2780 – 330 BC]. He argues that "the fascination of these writers lies in the *quest for wholeness*, a quest that has underlain African struggles since the Atlantic slave trade (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:35)."

In this myth Osiris is killed by his evil brother, Set, who throws the coffin into the River Nile. Isis recovers the box and hides it. Set, who stumbles upon the recovered box, is angry and cuts Osiris's body into fourteen pieces, which he scatters all over Egypt. The indefatigable Isis, in an act of love and devotion, travels throughout Egypt and recovers the fragments, erecting a tomb to Osiris wherever she finds a piece. With the help of the deity Thoth, she re-members the fragments and restores Osiris to life. Out of the fragments and the observation of proper mourning rites comes the wholeness of a body re-membered with itself and with its spirit.⁸

Wa Thiong'o argues that "colonialism attacks and completely distorts a people's relationship to their natural, bodily, economic, political, and cultural base. And with this base destroyed, the wholeness of the African subject, the subject in active engagement with his environment, is fragmented. It could be argued that the political and cultural struggles of Africans since the great dismemberment wrought by European slavery and then colonialism have been driven by the vision of wholeness (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:29)."

This poses an interesting question as we traverse the pathway from local perspectives to global perspectives on coping with Dis-Integration. To what extent is coping with Dis-integration premised on a collective vision of wholeness and what is the specific local vision of wholeness which is at stake?

Wa Thiong'o asserts that in the African context the specific local vision of wholeness at stake is an African renaissance. An African renaissance "means first and foremost, the economic and political recovery of the continent's power, as enshrined in the vision of Pan-Africanism. But this can be brought about effectively only through a collective self-confidence enabled by the resurrection of African memory, which in turn calls for a fundamental change in attitudes towards African languages (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:89).

It is in this broader context that term *Makwerekwere* needs to be understood. "*Makwerekwere* means different things in different contexts, but as used in South Africa it means not only a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages but also one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and

⁸ Cited in Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi (2009) Something Torn and New: An African renaissance. New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books.

culturally backward in relation to South Africa. . . South African blacks, perhaps reminiscent of the Boers who named the local black communities 'hottentots' to denote 'stutterers', deny black African migrants an intelligible language. All they claim to hear is 'gibberish' – a 'barbaric' form of 'stuttering' – hence the tendency to classify them as *Makwerekwere*, among other onomatopoeic references to the strange ways they speak (Nyamnjoh, 2006:39 citing Bouillion, 2001⁹)."

As Wa Thiong'o argues, one of the tools in combating of xenophobia in South Africa has to be the claiming back by African languages of the title and ownership of the house they built. A ten-point programme for this effort is spelt out in the Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures. "It begins by calling on African languages to take on the duty, challenge and responsibility of speaking for the continent. . . and it concludes by emphasizing that African languages are essential for the decolonization of African minds as well as for the African renaissance (Wa Thiong'o, 2009:93)".

The everyday practices of 'doing memory' have been studied from a variety of theoretical traditions and in different national contexts. For a summary of the multiple links between individual and collective pasts, futures and identities -- especially focusing on emotions, embodiment, the senses, difference and power relations – in 'doing memory' see Kontopodis and Matera (2010).

Political subjectivities, motivating democratic imaginaries and action orientations

It is not only from traditions in literary studies/criticism that myths and narratives are used as tools to understanding processes and incidents of Dis-Integration. Augelli and Murphy (1997) argue that "motivating myths and ideologies" are central neo-Gramscian scholarship although from a materialist basis. "The focus of neo-Gramscian inquiries are the political and economic class struggles which give rise to ideological hegemonies and counter-hegemonies, rather than the content of the hegemonies themselves (Berry, 2008:16)." In the South African context, a key motivating ideology – nationalism – has a significant bearing on the politics of the post-colonial state and the potential for emancipatory discourses and practices. Both Ivor Chipkin (2007) and Michael Neocosmos (2010)

⁹ Bouillion, A. (2001) "African Francophone Migrants to South Africa: Languages, Images and relationships" in A. Morris and A. Bouillion (eds) African Immigrants to South Africa: Francophone Migration of the 1990's. Pretoria: Protea and IFAS, pp112-149.

give insightful explanations of Xenophobia in relations to nationalism, citizenship, identity and politics.

Chipkin (2007) focuses on nationalism as a specific kind of democratic imaginary and argues for differentiating between citizens and national subjects in Dis-integration processes.

For purposes of this paper one of the defining features of processes and incidents of Dis-integration was posited to be the way in most members of a society are some how personally implicated and confronted with the question– how am I as an individual responsible, through my actions or inactions, for these ruptures and public outbursts and what can I do to further or contain them? Chipkin makes the case that ones personal implication in processes and incidents of Dis-integration is influenced by ones ascription or self-definition as either a citizen or national subject. “The historical continuity of nations and citizens obscures their political-theoretical distance. Even though they are the products of the democratic imaginary, the citizen and the national subject are the effects of answering the question of democracy differently. . . .The citizen is hailed through democratic institutions and acts according to democratic norms – what I call ‘ethical values’. The national subject is produced in and through the nationalist movement, supplemented by states bodies if it comes to power (Chipkin, 2007:15).”

In this context Neocosmos (2010:141) argues that the fundamental causes of the May pogroms of ‘foreigners’ must be sought in the ‘politics of fear’ -- basically the widespread fear that foreign nationals would swamp and overwhelm the country in such a way as to make the hard won gains of 1990’s liberation irrelevant. This ‘politics of fear’ understood not “simply as a psychological attitude but as a political subjectivity and practice.” He attributes the current xenophobic character of South African nationalism to “a shift in nationalist discourse from a popular emancipatory subjectivity to a state subjectivity, from an inclusive and active conception of citizenship to an exclusive and passive one [founded on indigeneity] (Neocosmos, 2010:106).”

Conclusion: towards a performativity approach to Dis-Integration

Whilst supporting the arguments made by Chipkin and Neocosmos, this paper seeks to foreground both the political and the *scripted and social* nature of the xenophobic violence of May 2008. This paper has thus in contrast has sought at one level to examine how stories and

emotions play a significant role in the creation of meaning within the human mind. At another level it seeks to use multiple perspectives, stories, frames and metaphors to self-implicate the author in a public culture of xenophobia and forge connections between biography, structure and policy action.

The author situated himself inside a narrative on xenophobia in order to begin constructing a framework to make sense of the xenophobic attacks that occurred in May 2008. A framework that sought to link the past, present and future while acknowledging the power of communication in a networked society. This framework also sought to understand xenophobia in the context of Africa's dismemberment from social memory and a broader re-remembering of a quest for wholeness. Drawing upon insights from work on early warnings and weak signals in management studies, this paper also proposed using a typology of the umbrella concept of 'surprises' (as creeping developments, losses of meaning, sudden events, and routines) as metaphors of the processes and issues in Dis-Integration.

The various pathways explored in this paper in an effort to construct a framework that uses narrative analysis for understanding xenophobic attacks in South Africa point to the potential utility of a performative approach to the subject. "Performativity is not simply about the social construction of subjects, but rather it is about the discursively-regulated practices that inscribe boundaries between subjects and reify them in that very process (Feldman, 2005:222)." Xenophobia is not something that one has, but rather something that one does. "Performativity focuses on how subject positions are constituted as effects of reiterative and citational practices that construct fundamental differences between subjects and conceal those subjects' lack of ontological foundation (Feldman, 2005:214)." This paper thus closes by suggesting the utility of a performative approach to Dis-Integration.

References

- Alvesson, Mat; Cynthia Hardy and Bill Harley (2008) "Reflecting on Reflexivity: Reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory" in Journal of Management Studies 45:3 May 2008 pp480-501.
- Amisi, Baruti (2010) "Synthesis Report: Migrant Voices" in Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010) South African Civil Society and Xenophobia: Synthesis. Johannesburg: Gauteng City Region Observatory. <http://www.gcro.ac.za/news/xenophobia-reports-released>.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei (1995) Osiris Rising: A Novel of African Past, Present and Future. Popenguine, West Africa: Per Ankh.
- Augelli, E. and C. Murphy (1997) "Consciousness, Myth and Collective Action: Gramsci, Sorel and the Ethical State" in S. Gill and J. Mittelman (eds) Innovation and Transformation in International Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berry, Craig (2008) "Political Economy and Ideational Analysis: Towards a Political Theory of Agency" IPEG papers in Global Political Economy no.36 July 2008.
- Bond, Patrick; Trevor Ngwane and Baruti Amisi (2010) "Xenophobia and Civil Society: Why did it happen?" in Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010) South African Civil Society and Xenophobia: Synthesis. Johannesburg: Gauteng City Region Observatory.
- Castells, Manuel (2009) Communication Power. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Chipkin (2007) Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, democracy and Identity of 'The People'. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Crush, Jonathan and Sujata Ramachandram (2009) "Xenophobia, International Migration and Human Development", Human Development Research Paper 2009/47. UNDP.
- Cunha, Miguel Pina e; Stewart Clegg and Ken Kamoche (2006) "Surprises in Management and Organization: Concept, Sources and a Typology" in British Journal of Management Vol. 17 (317-329).
- Damasio, Antonio (2003) Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Ekine, Solari [ed] (2010) SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press.
- Feldman, Gregory (2005) "Essential Crises: A Performative Approach to Migrants, Minorities, and the European Nation-State" in Anthropological Quarterly Vol. 78, No. 1 (Winter, 2005) pp.213-246.

- Friedman, Steven (2010) "One Centre of Power: The African National Congress and the violence of May, 2008" in Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010) South African Civil Society and Xenophobia: Synthesis. Johannesburg: Gauteng City Region Observatory. <http://www.gcro.ac.za/news/xenophobia-reports-released>.
- Froese, Marc (2010) "Towards a Narrative Theory of Political Economy" IPEG papers in Global Political Economy no. 41 January 2010.
- Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010) South African Civil Society and Xenophobia: Synthesis. Johannesburg: Gauteng City Region Observatory. <http://www.gcro.ac.za/news/xenophobia-reports-released>
- Kontopodis, Michalis and Vincenzo Matera (2010) "Doing Memory, Doing Identity: Politics of the Everyday in Contemporary Global Communities". Outlines – Critical Practice Studies No. 2 (1-14). <http://www.outlines.dk>
- Mendonça, Sandra; Gustavo Cardoso and João Caraça () "Some Notes on the Strategic Strength of Weak Signal Analysis" LINI Working Papers No. 2. Lisbon Internet and Networks, International Research programmes (lini@lini-research.org)
- Minnaar, Antony (2001) "The new vigilantism in Post-April 1994 South Africa: Crime Prevention or an expression of lawlessness?" Institute for Human Rights & Criminal Justice Studies. Technikon SA (May 2001).
- Misago, J.P. et. al. (2009) "Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa" IOM, DFID, FMSP, University of the Witwatersrand, February 2009.
- Neocosmos, Michael (2010) From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa. Dakar: CODESRIA
- Nyamnjoh, Francis (2006) Insiders & Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa. Dakar: CODESRIA
- Obenga, Theophile (2004) African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period [2780-330 BC]. Popenquine, West Africa: Per Ankh.
- Riessman, Catherine (2005) "Narrative Analysis" http://www2.hud.ac.uk/hhs/nme/books/2005/Chapter_1_-_Catherine_Kohler_Riessman.pdf
- Smith, Matthew (2010) "The Media's Coverage of Xenophobia and the Xenophobic Violence prior to and including May 2008" in Gauteng City Region Observatory (2010) South African Civil Society and Xenophobia: Synthesis. Johannesburg: Gauteng City Region Observatory.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi (2009) Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance. New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books.

Wood, J. Carter (2005) "The process of civilization (and its discontents): violence, narrative and history" in Dirk Wiemann et. al (eds) Discourse of Violence – Violence of Discourses: Critical Interventions, Transgressive Readings, and Post-National Negotiations. Transpects: Transdisciplinary Perspectives of the Social Sciences and Humanities (1). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang