

Interrogating questions of national belonging, difference and xenophobia in South Africa

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Abstract

Questions about gender and sexuality that were central to the colonial project where women negotiated their connection to the nation through liaisons with men continue to be central to the process of building postcolonial African states. The establishment of many African flag-democracies for instance has been embedded in dense body politics that often exclude genders and sexualities categorised as counter to citizenship. Exclusion in post-apartheid South Africa is evident in how black lesbians and queers are 'othered' for being sexually different. Consequently, one's gender, sexual and racial identities serve as a source of violence and constant negotiation for belonging to this flag-democracy irrespective of the progressive constitution. The feeling of not being a 'proper' citizen is equally evident in how nationals from the northern part of South Africa are in some spaces constructed by fellow citizens as bodies that do not belong. These polarised constructions generate outsider identities that are informed by notions of 'inferior pigmentation and language' vis-à-vis 'dominant ones'. Such dichotomised images of citizenship are reinforced by ever-evolving grammas and vocabularies about people foreign to South Africa, whose bodies and privacy warrant intrusion in very violent nationalised, racialised, gendered and sexualised ways as evidenced by the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks. Informed by my intersecting positionalities as a black foreign national who has lived in South Africa since 2008, the paper analyses Zimbabwean migrants' experiences of constantly negotiating the politics of national belonging and difference in South Africa that emerged during fieldwork engagements in Johannesburg between 2008 and 2015. The paper interrogates subtle and overt institutionalised and everyday technologies of difference that not only force foreign nationals to live through heavily patrolled black bodies marked as different within specific temporal landscapes, places and spaces but are also core to the xenophobic grammar that frames Zimbabweans as bodies that destabilise the very foundation and survival of the nation.

Keywords: gender, sexual, racial and national identities, technologies of difference, xenophobia

Gendered access to citizenship and national belonging: a historical overview

Drawing on the theory of nation as involving the dynamics of gender and sexuality engaged by dominant voices (Foucault, 1978[1990]; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989; McClintock, 1995, 1993&1991; Alexander, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; and Butler and Spivak, 2010), several scholars have mapped and profiled a very complex intellectual history on the links between gender, sexuality, nation-building and the inherent politics of citizenship and national belonging. The intellectual history frames the colonial project as a lens through which to research the emergence of the nation and the politics of gendered access to citizenship and national belonging. Scholars writing on the colonial project portray the way women were subjected to the hegemonic power of both colonised and imperial men (McClintock, 1995:6) and how this hierarchical power structure often relegated women to gendered and sexualised positions (Jeater, 1993:19). For instance, the gendered power structure reinforced interactional and labour systems in which women served "as mothers, prostitutes and concubines" (McClintock, 1995:6) among other roles. An example of these gendered roles is the way South African white women had to embrace their procreative role in the apartheid era (Peterson, 2000:64 citing McClintock, 1991) in order to fulfil their patriotic duty of giving birth to future inhabitants (Yuval-Davis, 2006:209; Yuval-Davis, 1997) and to ensure the future of the white nation. Other examples include how women were expected to bear children as a duty in Britain in the 1980s (Klug 1989:31), and the way women fulfilled their gendered role as "breeders of the nation" in Australia (see Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989:12). The preceding analysis is evidence that women's experience of nation-building was gendered (McClintock, 1993:67) and that their connection to the nation as in apartheid South Africa was negotiated through liaisons with men (McClintock, 1991:112). The gendered historical overview serves as an inroad into exploring questions of access to citizenship and meanings attached to national belonging in post-colonial contexts.

Literature on the establishment of flag democracy points out the perceived "continuities between the colonial and the post-colonial" (Mishra and Hodge, 1994:288). Such continuity is based on the insight

that questions about gender and sexuality that were central to the colonial project are still central to the process of building post-colonial African states. It is against this backdrop that post-colonial scholars infer that as the new powers engage in the project of building a new nation, they reinforce longstanding dense body politics that often exclude genders and sexualities categorised as counter to citizenship. The work of Lewis (2011&2008) among other scholars on post-coloniality profiles 'rights-based fights' that emerge within specific post-colonial zones as citizens negotiate their place in the so-called new nation. These overlapping 'rights-based fights' – often dominated by the ideas about democracy and 'the body' such as the politics of heteronormativity – are battles in which sexuality and gender are the very ground of contestations over who women are or should be. Deeply embedded in these fights is a theory of women as bodies through which the 'fight for ownership of nation' is engaged. Thus, "women's bodies and life circumstances" function as platforms where battles over interpretations of the idea of 'nation' are played out (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault, 2000:1). Nation emerges as that gendered, political and sexualised space (Posel, 2011) where citizens fight for access to citizenship and national belonging. These battles are central to our understanding of the feelings citizens attach to the nation as they search for meanings of living in such a hierarchised and marginalising space.

The intersections of gender, sexuality and nation-building in a post-colonial space take this discussion to a contextualised analysis of how the politics of being gendered, and of living through a gendered body continue to unfold in South Africa. Prior to 1994, questions of sexual identity raised debates in both public and private spaces such that subversion and resistance meant dealing with punitive socio-legal frameworks. Post 1994, South Africa is celebrated as one of the countries with a progressive constitution (Mutua, 2011:458) but there are pockets of gendered and sexualised discrimination. Exclusion is predominantly evident in black South African townships where black lesbians and queers are 'othered' for being sexually different. This reality suggests that being black and lesbian or queer is indeed a violent process. Navigating these contested terrains entails explicitly or subtly embracing the 'other' label such that questions about one's personhood as a body gendered differently create discursive lenses through which the meaning of sexual and racial identity in South Africa could be explored. For instance, the reality that it is black lesbians and queers who continue to battle with the politics of exclusion illuminates the intersections of gender, sexuality and race that inform the feeling of not being a 'proper' citizen and of not belonging to South Africa. Consequently, the 'other' label one carries for being sexually and racially different serves as a source of violent tension and constant negotiation for citizenship and national belonging in this democracy irrespective of the progressive constitution and the rights of citizens enshrined in the same constitution.

Questions of national belonging, difference and xenophobia in South Africa

The feeling of not being a 'proper' citizen and of not belonging alluded to above is equally evident in how citizens from the northern part of South Africa are in some spaces constructed by fellow citizens as bodies that do not belong. For that reason, some minority citizens were not spared from the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks that resulted in the death and displacement of many people (predominantly foreigners). These ethnic minorities 'deemed too dark to be citizens' not only construct living in South Africa as a violent process but they also frame the democracy as an intricate and confusing space. Interestingly, this confusing space has witnessed a huge influx of migrants from other African countries especially those that have experienced socio-economic and political shifts in recent years. The city of Johannesburg for instance has played home to Zimbabwean nationals who by the turn of the 21st century migrated in huge numbers to South Africa to flee diverse socio-political and economic challenges they had experienced in their homeland (Landau and Wa Kabwe Segatti, 2009). Though contested by empirical-based researches (Makina, 2007:5), the estimation that 2-3 million Zimbabweans now live in South Africa (Landau and Wa Kabwe Segatti, 2009:6) confirms the heavy presence of these foreign nationals in the country. Deeply entrenched in the experiences of ethnic minorities and the migration realities above are profound analyses that allow scholars to further interrogate what questions of national belonging and difference in South Africa really mean. For instance, emerging out of a critical analysis of 'citizen against citizen' marginalisation is a thought-provoking question that 'if citizens are rendered inferior and outsiders in what is supposed to be home, what then is the place of black foreigners from other African contexts?' Given that national boundaries are set in ways that exclude and include certain individuals through a process that marks and distinguishes insiders from outsiders (Yuval Davis, 2006:204), the thought-provoking question posed above hints at how polarised constructions generate outsider identities that are informed by notions of 'inferior pigmentation and language' vis-à-vis 'dominant ones'. Such dichotomised images

of identities are further reinforced by ever-evolving grammars and vocabularies about people foreign to South Africa, defined in this paper as black migrants from the rest of the continent. It is against this backdrop that analytic discussions in this paper insert questions of difference and xenophobia into the argument that the process of marking bodies is intrinsic to defining national belonging in South Africa.

Broadly, the paper focuses on foreign nationals in South Africa with a specific emphasis on Johannesburg – a city with the largest proportion of South Africa's migrant population and is often referred to as a 'city of migrants' (Crush 2011:113). The paper interrogates subtle and overt everyday and institutionalised technologies of difference that force foreign nationals to live through heavily patrolled black bodies marked as different within specific temporal landscapes, places and spaces. Everyday technologies of difference include the use of language – especially grammars and vocabularies – as a marker of insiders and outsiders in public and private spaces. Framing the notion of language as a powerful theoretical and analytic tool in the context of identity and difference, I explore and unpack how language is experienced by foreign nationals. Subsequently, I pose a question fundamental to this paper: 'when does not knowing the language(s) become a violent process?' The preceding question paves way into sub-questions and discourses around the strategies and tactics that foreign nationals deploy as they navigate and make sense of contours of violence in Johannesburg. Over and above micro level experiences of difference, the paper also explores institutional symbolic violence especially the role of the state and how its structures and frameworks serve as technologies of difference that reinforce the 'other' identity. It is through such macro lenses that the paper broadens the scope of xenophobia to encompass categories other than physical violence against foreigners within which it is known to operate. Thus xenophobia, which created space for many in the academy to re/engage with the notion of violence albeit from a physical perspective, in this paper serves as an inroad into insightful empirical engagements with pockets of symbolic violence against outsiders articulated through everyday and institutionalised technologies of difference in Johannesburg.

Theoretically, the paper interrogates questions of national belonging, difference and xenophobia experienced when 'self' is constructed as the 'other'. 'Self' from this standpoint becomes the 'other' based on the ways an individual perceives or is perceived as different from the collective. The construct 'self as other' serves as a powerful tool of analysis that embraces various identifying intersecting categories – race, nationality, gender and sexuality – that best describe one's personhood simultaneously capturing how those constituting 'the other' category have negotiated being different in various pockets of Johannesburg. Therefore, empirical attention in this paper is on Zimbabwean foreign nationals primarily because of their heavy presence in Johannesburg and the country at large as alluded to above. The paper draws on narratives deeply embedded in the subjective meanings black Zimbabwean foreigners assign to their lived experiences of being different within specific time zones, spaces and places. Interrogations of selfhood and personhood vis-à-vis collective identities further our understanding of the politics of national belonging, difference and xenophobia, especially how 'othering identities' are imposed by the in-group, and how these identities are either internalised or challenged by the out-group as they negotiate living or passing through spaces to which they may not necessarily belong. On a methodological note, I have to admit that being a feminist scholar and a foreign national myself, a Zimbabwean in particular, who is located in the city of Johannesburg, I cannot afford not to draw on my personal trajectories and violent encounters in this space. Consequently, methodological standpoints adopted in this paper are informed by my intersecting positionalities as a feminist and a black foreign national who has lived in South Africa since 2008.

Methodological reflections

Arguably, the high unprecedented inflow of Zimbabweans (myself included) among other migrants who are seeking economic and political refugee in South Africa has been blamed for the pockets of violent discrimination in the city of Johannesburg as in other parts of South Africa evident in the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks. Although I was not physically attacked in both 2008 and 2015, the fear and the subsequent emotional attack was unbearable to the extent that the episodes of brutal and fatal violence sparked in me the pressing need to explore questions of living beyond the boundaries of my nationalised identity. I started, as early as 2008, to analyse the politics of diverseness, inclusiveness and exclusiveness by posing a self-introspective and interrogative question: 'who am I and how am I different?' In search for answers to the preceding question, I resorted to my intersecting multiple identities as a black Zimbabwean woman, an academic; an intellectual activist and feminist

who has been living in South Africa since 2008. Consequently, I captured and assigned meaning to my experiences of negotiating being the 'other' within specific time zones and geographical spaces foreign to me. Such experiences included moving around with a passport with a valid permit that I had to show to the police upon request to legitimise my stay in South Africa which indeed was a constant reminder of my foreign status. The policing made me realise that I had 'a best before date' attached to my foreign identity and presence in South Africa. Out of the reflexive self-discovery exercise emerged the consciousness that my intersecting positionalities did not and still do not allow me to ignore questions of national belonging, difference and xenophobia in South Africa. As such, my presence in the academy in South Africa has over the years created a platform for me to further engage in research activities and to organise seminar series that generate critical debates on these questions.

Beyond my personal trajectories and subjectivities, I collected data between 2008 and 2015 through informal and formal in-depth interviews as well as observations of how my fellow countrymen among other black African foreign nationals have experienced Johannesburg, and South Africa at large. Small talk with personal contacts helped me to negotiate entrée, meet and establish rapport with possible research participants from their sphere of influence. The technique allowed me to generate a snowball sample of 10 people (five women and five men) because not all people were available to participate in the study. Throughout fieldwork, I was at work to capture responses to questions about how these Zimbabweans have experienced living in South Africa and the meanings they assign to their bodies marked as foreign in a space where questions of national belonging, difference and xenophobia are highly contested. Deep reflections of what exactly comes to mind when asked about living beyond the borders of their respective homelands tell a particularly interesting narrative about the meaning of national belonging read through questions of difference and xenophobia in South Africa. Overall, the interviewees' narratives about being constantly reminded in formal and informal interactions that they do not belong allow analytic discussions in this paper to analyse explicit and implicit technologies of difference and notions of institutionalised xenophobia in South Africa.

The use of language as a technology of difference

Language as a technology of difference relies on constructions of identity that are deeply embedded and sustained by the politics of inclusion and exclusion in South Africa. These constructions are evident in how 'belonging' and exclusion are experienced by foreign nationals in South Africa. Central discussion here draws on the ways in which language operates to shape the complex interactions between citizens and foreign nationals in different pockets across the country. Emerging out of their interview narratives are insightful analytic ideas that take this discussion to the construction that language is violence because it excludes. Though one might want to argue that the use of language as violence is not always xenophobic, overwhelming evidence from interviewees' stories suggests otherwise. Language is used as an identifying category that marks and distinguishes insiders from outsiders such that those who do not speak isiZulu among other languages experience failure to speak as a violent process. An excerpt from Regina's interview narrative captured below clearly demonstrates the inherent expectation that black foreign nationals should be able to converse in local languages no matter how foreign the language in question is to them.

If you ask for directions in central Johannesburg or for change in a taxi in English, you often get responses like 'you want me to speak in English...I am not a white man.' In some instances, you are interrogated: 'You are black, why can't you speak Zulu?' or they say: 'You claim that you can't speak Zulu but you are black.' These stubborn Shonas from Zimbabwe...they don't want to learn Zulu...Ndebeles can speak Zulu.

The narrative above points at some form of symbolic violence that locates foreign nationals, similar to minority citizens, at the receiving end of the continuum. Though not explicit in the excerpt above, interviewees' observation that men, especially those in the taxi industry, are predominantly violent towards foreign nationals concurs with the claim that "it is black South African men who are the most hostile" (Sanger, 2008:2). The reality of gendered xenophobia is closely linked to the nationalist discourse that revolves around how these xenophobic men tarnish the international image of South Africa as a reconciled and transformed space (Gqola 2015). As such, a foreign national identity that triggers violent xenophobic acts is perceived as a threat to both the ongoing process of building and sustaining South Africa as a nation. One can also infer from the same narrative that the use of language as a technology of difference is racialised because no white person is expected to automatically speak local languages. The black against black violence is further articulated by the

observation that black South Africans attack mainly “black (im)migrants and asylum seekers/refugees from other African countries” (Warner and Finchilescu, 2003:36). Subsequently, the racialised experience of language as violence among foreign nationals surpasses the longstanding racial tensions between black and white population groups that characterised the process of building South Africa, and other African contexts. These black to black tensions are also evident in the interrogative conversation I personally had to deal with in Johannesburg. Upon realising that I could not speak isiZulu, a South African woman quizzed me:

You only speak Shona and English...now you want me to speak to you in English...I am not white...you should learn Zulu. I know you Zimbabweans...especially you Shonas...you are tough ...you are difficult...right? Why can't you learn and speak Zulu like Ndebeles?

Living in South Africa, Johannesburg in particular, has redefined my Africaness through meanings assigned to my skin colour. My identity as a black person in public spaces generates the expectation that I should be conversant with all Bantu languages which in the context of South Africa are multiple. The reality is I am not conversant with any of the languages, and failure to speak any of them raises questions about my Africaness. In this regard, I consciously contest the dominant perception and reading of my black skin and the expectation that heavily weighs on me as ‘a different black or African’ who lives in a foreign country. This rebelliousness serves as a personal strategy that allows me to internally cope with the pressures of a looming identity crisis and simultaneously embrace who I am and that which I consider to be my African identity against all odds. Likewise, Stewart’s interview narrative below further problematizes ‘a black African identity’ that is reduced to the ability to speak Bantu languages in South Africa.

It is very difficult to learn a language when you are this old because I did not acquire the Zulu sound codes as a child...there is no way I can decode the language now...whether you yell, shout or speak in a very calm voice. Besides, South Africans are coming from a background where they learn other ‘native’ languages through the concept of first additional language at school. We do not have that in Zimbabwe...English and your home language [Shona or Ndebele] are the norm.

Similarly, Batibo notes that Ndhlovu’s work illuminates “the complexity of identities and nation building in postcolonial Africa”, specifically the history of languages in Zimbabwe – a space where language has been used as a tool of violence along tribal lines (see Ndhlovu, 2009: xiv). Ndhlovu demonstrates how minority languages (and their speakers) have been excluded from “the mainstream domains of everyday social life in postcolonial Zimbabwe” (ibid: xiii). It is evident that the exclusion of minority languages in Zimbabwe has been deeply informed by the pressing need to ensure “linguistic uniformity” by political leaders as part of their hegemonic strategy and endeavour to build the nation and preserve national identity. In the process of building Zimbabwe, Shona and Ndebele emerged as the dominant languages (and so did their speakers) but ironically, in ways that significantly sustain “a form of linguistic imperialism” (ibid: 34) and exclude minority citizens in the country. The language-based violent exclusion that black South Africans who do not speak the ‘dominant’ ethnic languages experience points at some form of linguistic imperialism in South Africa. It is against this backdrop that Lucy challenges the proudly South African collective and nationalist identity:

In 2008, when foreigners were attacked and displaced, there were minority citizens who were also attacked...those who could not speak Zulu...yes, those from Limpopo Province. Eish...those people suffer everyday...the only difference between them and us is that they have South African ID books...which unfortunately cannot defend them when trouble strikes...they suffer.

Lucy’s narrative suggests that South Africans from the northern part of the country can fully enjoy their national identity in the confines of their province because beyond that boundary, such an identity is undermined by language differences that sustain notions of exclusion in South Africa – a nation they should freely and proudly belong to. South Africa emerges as a space where these minority citizens perpetually live as foreigners in what is supposed to be ‘home’. The narrative attests to how contested language is in South Africa. Language in this regard “is situated in an ongoing struggle over issues of inclusion and exclusion” (Giroux, 1999:22) and those on the latter end of the continuum often experience it as violence albeit symbolically. The analysis above illuminates that language is indeed a key identifying category that distinguishes insiders from outsiders and simultaneously instills

a sense of national belonging in very marginalising ways. As Makanaka highlights below, language emerges as a profound symbolic tool for marking those who belong and those who do not.

It is clear that we do not belong here...South Africans embrace their multiple official languages in a way that excludes those who are not conversant. For example, citizens switch from one language to another in a single conversation making it very difficult for us. I can pick one or two words such that being able to converse and engage in a meaningful conversation with citizens entails learning more than one language.

Deeply embedded in the use of language are the complex grammars and vocabularies about bodies and people that influence the way we understand national belonging and difference. These grammars and vocabularies are usually located on 'a legitimate/illegitimate' binary plane where the former represents that which is 'authentic and acceptable' while the latter stands for the 'intolerable and undesirable'. Interview narratives point at how Zimbabweans have often been defined by South Africans as "dark-skinned...a category of people who smell." Framed and considered too dark to be South African, foreign nationals become 'easy to identify because of their difference marked on their bodies, through phenotype which renders them visible' (Gqola, 2008:211). These dehumanising stereotypes speak to notion of "the embodied nature of prejudice" through which Allport, over six decades ago, illuminated that "when people express distaste for others they frequently start by referring to the smell or sight or touch of others" (Reicher, 2007:820). Fidelis' narrative below adds to these sensory stereotypes the notion of sound emerging from the language differences between foreign nationals and citizens.

The sound of our languages operates in ways that shape the complex interactions between citizens and foreign nationals especially in Johannesburg. When we speak, they [South Africans] call us [Zimbabweans] makwerekwerwe...yes, because of the way we speak...just because the language is foreign to them.

Representations of what are supposed to be read as 'marginalising grammars and vocabularies' are often justified by those who deploy language as one of the technologies of difference. For instance, one of the participants in a study by Tafira (2011:117) noted that "when African immigrants speak, the phonetic sound goes like "kwerekwerekwerekwe", hence the name "makwerekwerwe"." Foreign nationals are read as speakers of a 'strange' language consisting of phonetic sounds uncommon and foreign to South Africans. Interestingly, these marginalising grammars and vocabularies are aestheticized on the premises that they are central to the construction and safeguarding of national identity. Such legitimation is evident in Hall's elaborate response to questions around why difference matters and the secret fascination of 'otherness' captured in the excerpt below.

'Difference' matters because it is essential to meaning: without it, meaning could not exist. [...] We know what black means [...] because we can contrast it with its opposite – white. Meaning, he argued, is relational. It is the 'difference' between white and black which signifies, which carries meaning. [As such] we know what is British not only because of certain national characteristics but also because we can mark its difference from its 'others' – Britishness is not-French, Not-American, not-German, not-Pakistani, not-Jamaican and so on (Hall, 1997: 234-235).

Given that categorisations of who can belong or claim allegiance to a nation are set in ways that exclude and include certain individuals, non-citizens constantly negotiate questions of belonging and difference read through the intersections of race and nationality. Black Zimbabweans, Nigerians and Mozambiqueans among other nationals in the context of South Africa emerge as "throw away people [...] deemed 'foreign' because their bodies are marked as such" (Gqola, 2008:211). As noted earlier, these 'othering' constructions are deeply informed by dichotomised images of their pigmentation and languages vis-à-vis the dominant pigmentation, emerging grammars and vocabularies. It is these polarised images that qualify them as people foreign to South Africa whose bodies and privacy warrant intrusion in very violent xenophobic ways. Foreign nationals as a result constantly negotiate contested terrains as they try to come to terms with the reality of deep seated embodied prejudices and the anxieties of not belonging to South Africa – a space they currently live in, which to some extent compels them to consider it 'home'.

The institutionalisation of symbolic difference and xenophobia

Closely linked to the use of language as a technology of difference is the observation that although interviewees have never been victims of physical violence or attack ever since they came to South Africa, they have and continue to experience some form of symbolic violence often excluded from mainstream conceptualisations. Their narratives speak to the institutionalisation of difference and xenophobia that reads violence symbolically through structures that reinforce xenophobic interactions and relations. For instance, though not physical, South Africa's immigration policies and practices are indeed violent because of the subsequent injustices that foreign nationals have to deal with. Gqola (2008:211) concurs that foreign nationals are often defined as "nameless people, 'victims of violence', immigrants from the African continent"; and when these marginalising xenophobic grammars and vocabularies are institutionalised and become the norm, they produce foreign bodies that are not only different but are safe to violate. Trevor shares his experience of how violating South African Home Affairs practices are:

My temporary residence permit is only valid for three years, and I am employed on a contract basis...there is no job security at all. I cannot get a five year car loan with a good interest rate...I am considered high risk because of my work and residence statuses. I feel that Home Affairs and employers are both short-changing foreigners.

Trevor's excerpt suggests that the presence of a middle class foreign national in a taxi or taxi ranks, who can afford to buy a car but is limited by the structures in place, is indeed an illumination of the politics of institutionalised symbolic difference and xenophobia in South Africa. For Daniel, this institutionalisation is deeply embedded in the fact that the Department of Home Affairs delays to process immigration documents which for foreign nationals are central to how they negotiate and navigate different contours in South Africa.

I have a permanent residence permit but I do not have a South African ID book yet...my permanent residency status is useless without one. For instance, I cannot get a home loan neither can I get a [driver's] licence because issuing institutions want to see an ID book. Home Affairs takes forever such that foreign nationals have to wait for almost two years. This is indeed a violent reminder of who I am in South Africa.

Ironically, Daniel cannot go back to Zimbabwe and initiate, let alone finish the process of getting a driver's license because of time constraints. The immigration policy in Zimbabwe allows him, like any other permanent resident of South Africa, 30 days only when he visits the country. Therefore Daniel expresses his frustration particularly a sense of not belonging to both of these nations. Daniel feels that these policy structures have to be deconstructed to eliminate the symbolic challenges of being different that foreign nationals like him who live and work in South Africa deal with daily.

I feel violated and stateless because of these immigration policies that frame who I am and limit what I can be or do. I am not just a body here in South Africa, I mean, I am a tax payer someone has to do something about our experiences with these systems.

Daniel alerts us to the fact that black foreign nationals are not just bodies that can be violated. Rather, they are key players who drive the economy in South Africa to the extent that "the country will not meet its short and long-term development targets without significant migration of skilled and semi-skilled labour" (Landau and Wa Kabwe Segatti (2009:1). Hence the need to embrace difference taking into account the positive contribution of Zimbabweans in professional and semi/unskilled employment across the country. That notwithstanding, the utterance: "You Zimbabweans...you foreigners...go back home and deal with Mugabe" illuminates that some South Africans really want Zimbabweans out but as Tererai declares below, foreign nationals are here to stay.

At work, they often ask me with sharp sarcasm "when are you going home?" a question which leaves someone with a permanent residence status, working towards getting South African citizenship, wondering where home is. Home for me for now is South Africa, because when I knock off at 4pm, I go to my house North of Johannesburg. What the general public does not understand is that with a permanent resident status, I am entitled to the same rights as a citizen except that I cannot vote. I am sure if they knew I would have been a victim of physical violence.

Likewise, Vakai declares: “*I am harassed left, right and centre but I am here to stay irrespective of the violence.*” Vakai endures the symbolic violence against all odds because of the reality that he fares better, economically, in South Africa than in Zimbabwe. The sympathy and ‘pride’ inherent Gladys’ narrative advises South Africans to embrace differences:

I really feel sorry for South Africans who are xenophobic. As long as there are roads and airports that connect South Africa to Zimbabwe and other African countries, South Africans really have to learn how to live with those who are different from them.

Against this backdrop, the interviewees note that symbolic and structural violence alone is not a push factor for foreigners who always find ways of navigating the contours of Johannesburg. They admit that foreign nationals are constantly violated but they deploy strategies and tactics as they navigate interactional and physical spaces to which they may not necessarily belong. Tobias’ narrative: “*My residential location and workplace North of Johannesburg are safe spaces...no pressure at all*” affirms that foreign nationals their use socio-economic capitals as a tool that locates them for in places where experiences of both physical and symbolic forms of violence are perceived to be very minimal. Interviewees infer that their locate them The preceding claim is somewhat validated by the fact that foreign nationals who live and/or work in highly populated spaces like Alexandra and Soweto had to learn local languages as a strategy for trying to belong and survive episodes of physical violence but were attacked for not being proficient during the 2008 xenophobic attacks. Combined, one’s intersecting positionalities – residential location, education background and socio-economic realities – are pivotal to our understanding of how those who do not belong negotiate difference and xenophobia in South Africa.

Concluding remarks

Deep reflections of foreign nationals’ experiences juxtaposed with those of minority citizens in South Africa tell a complex narrative read through the intersections of national belonging, difference and xenophobia. It has emerged that foreign nationals constantly negotiate ‘the right to be’ in very violent nationalised and racialised ways such that with ‘a black foreigner’ tag, one can ‘never’ belong to South Africa. The paper has argued that both everyday and institutionalised technologies of difference are core to the xenophobic grammar and vocabularies that frame Zimbabweans like Nigerians and Mozambiqueans as bodies that destabilise the very foundation and survival of the nation. Foreign nationals’ accounts of difference and xenophobia in the city of Johannesburg raise insightful theoretical and empirical questions key to our understating of national belonging and the ever evolving process of building the 20 plus year old democracy. The paper concludes that serious engagements with foreign nationals’ narratives of the violence they encounter and survive are critical for all stakeholders interested in further interrogating the deleterious impact of subtle and overt forms violence on the social fibre and mores in the broader society.

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