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Rethinking the boundaries of self-Other and the logics of de/coloniality in Harare North *and* One Foreigner's Ordeal*: a decolonial perspective*

The African fictive landscape has been occupied with the subject of self-Other boundary in the context of xenophobia, geopolitics, racist tradition and migration, yet the topic has remained topical. Too often the term xenophobia has been used to mean the hatred of a stranger or foreigner, ignoring or under-estimating other opaque dynamics of xenophobia which could serve us in very important ways. The main contention of this study is that the definition of xenophobia in Africa should be expanded to mean the fear of difference whether one is white or black, national or non-national. This is meant to stir conversations that revisit the troubled terrain of self-Other boundaries in the context of nuanced forms of exclusionary practices in the postcolonial era. The study taps into literary writings which provide complex fictive cultural avenues to construct depth analyses of binary logics and the complexity of becoming in contemporary times. The study is located within the terrain of decolonial theorisations with the aim to enrich reflections on intricate mechanisms of exclusions that arise from the fear of difference and counter strategies that interject exclusionary discourses.

Introduction

Contemporary conversations on xenophobic attitudes and practices have brought to the fore critical insights which urge academics and intellectuals to reflect on the current understanding of xenophobia. Cilliers (2020) posits that the notion of xenophobia has time and again been interpreted as the loathing of a stranger or foreigner (*makwerekwere* in the South African context), disregarding other obscured subtleties and dynamics of xenophobia entrenched in the colonial past of the continent which should be investigated for deeper insights. The main submission in this study is that the definition of xenophobia in postcolonial Africa should be extended to mean the fear of difference whether one is white or black, national or non-national. This is meant to renew conversations about the troubled terrain of self-Other frontiers in the context of nuanced forms of exclusionary and dogmatic practices that re-inscribe in/visibility and dialectics of de/coloniality in the postcolonial era. In this sense, the tropes of the 'stranger or foreigner' assume new significations in different manifestations of xenophobia. This article delves into the subject of xenophobic discourses but takes its point of departure by expanding the term xenophobia to mean the complex and messy terrain of attitudes, self-Other logics/practices, stereotypical constructions and narratives informed by the historical past and global economics of knowledge. These understandings of xenophobia complicate efforts made so far as re-imagining a rebirth of humanism that encompasses inclusivity and diversity as imperatives of the postcolonial world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). This study invites intellectuals to further debate on how Africans conceive themselves in the postcolonial era. One of the most fundamental issues is that decolonial thoughts bring into question how Africans were made and continue to be made in such a way that they perceive themselves in specific ways which in turn confirm certain psycho-social-political and other constructs that seek to dominant discourses both in conscious and unconscious modes within these complex spaces. The self-Other dialectics that frame the discourses of xenophobia are examined through the following research questions which guide the reading and analyses of the selected Southern African literary writings:

What interpretive and discursive insights can be gained by interrogating thematisation of xenophobia in selected Southern African literary writings? How can the term xenophobia be extended in contemporary contexts in order to explore nuanced dynamics at play in framing of a 'stranger; embedded in self-

Other discourses'? How do decolonial views offer protest sensibilities which are apt for exigencies of the dehumanised 'stranger'?

Decolonial thoughts

The study engages with decolonial thoughts in the realm of Southern African literary productions to explore their potential to quiz and transcend xenophobic discourses in the contemporary period. The aim is to suggest deep insights about xenophobia and its injurious effects on human relations. The proponents of the decolonial school of thought include Maldonado-Torres (2007), Grosfoguel (2007), Mignolo (2001/ 2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013/ 2021). The framework is relevant to the discussion and understanding of xenophobia vis-à-vis notions of foreignness, stranger/ness, un/belonging and being an insider/outsider. Decolonial tenets provide significant discursive matrixes that interrogate and unearth some opaque othering predispositions in the present times. The gaze is on xenophobic discourses that are constructed and legitimised through the persistent colonial ontologies and 'cognitive empires' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). The abyssal thinking that divides the world into sites of being and non-being. This study is concerned with the experiences of those people marked as different, who become strangers/foreigners. Most significantly, the study engages with the ideas about colonial dehumanisation, binary thinking and cognitive empires which invade the mental universe of Africans. The binary systems disrupted co-presence that existed before the colonial encounter. In this way, the study interrogates these persistent colonial systems of thought that manifest in the fear of difference and dehumanising lexical items such as aliens, strangers/ foreigners, among others utilised to erect boundaries in the present-day world. The aim is to suggest options for liberating sensibilities through re-reading the selected Southern African fictive writings with particular emphasis on what Ngugi (1994) and Mignolo (2000/2007) elucidate as de/colonial aesthetics, discursive de/linkings and epistemic dis/obedience. It is however, imperative to recognise that de/linking, de/colonising and rehumanising the previously dehumanised bodies is not an easy undertaking because coloniality is deeply entrenched in the mindset of the postcolonial subject. The following questions frame the discussion; what can be done to undo a society from its entangled colonial past? How do Africans define themselves today?

Synopses of Tavuya Jinga's *One Foreigner's Ordeal* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*

The preceding section offered a conceptual springboard for a decolonial reading of the chosen fictional narratives in this article. This segment provides a brief

summary of the two novels under discussion. *One Foreigner's Ordeal* and *Harare North* are debut novels written by Tavuya Jinga and Brian Chikwava respectively. The two Zimbabwean authors are respectively based in South Africa and the United Kingdom. These diasporic sites frame the kinds of thinking presented in the texts. There is evidence of canonical, lingo-cultural and geographical ruptures in the chosen novels. Both texts subvert cartography and construct a borderless human universe through their border crossing dynamics in setting, thematisation and linguistic composition. The novels problematise self-Other logics that inform xenophobic practices in Zimbabwe and diasporic spaces which are South Africa and Britain. They convey protracted mêlées and anti-foreigner sentiments informed by native/non-native dichotomies and other complex forms of binary logics that point to the fact that xenophobia is not only a Southern African problem but rather a global phenomenon. This study builds on decolonial conversations by specifically identifying these fictive writings as intricate cultural products that foreground the prevalent vicious cycles of conflict, aggressive attitudes and the messiness of un/belonging experienced in sites awash with notions of 'legitimate insiders' and 'illegitimate outsiders' (Crush and Ramachandran 2014: 2).

Jinga's (2012) novel *One Foreigner's Ordeal* is set in Zimbabwe and South Africa and the interconnectedness of these two neighbourly countries is retained in the text through thematisation, translingual and intercultural discourses. Similarly, Chikwava's (2009) *Harare North* is set in Zimbabwe and London. The protagonist is a fugitive and former Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) killer agent. Chikwava's main character is a cruel member of the notorious Green Bombers or 'jackal breed', which is a brutal killing machinery designed by ZANU PF to 'discipline' members of the opposition marked as 'enemies of the state' under the Robert Mugabe regime. The supposed-to-be youth training programme was politicised and used to unleash violence against opposition party members. In *Harare North*, just like in *One Foreigner's Ordeal,* Zimbabweans are leaving their homeland in 'droves', escaping the dire poverty originating from the ruined economy and toxic national politics together generating an unhomely homeland with thousands if not millions of citizens feeling unhoused and unhomed. Yet, the criminal nature of Chikwava's protagonist points out the idea that not all of the people who flee Zimbabwe deserve an alternative space in the diaspora. The unnamed character who is actually a ruling party's steadfast supporter goes to London on the pretext of being a political victim. It is equally reminiscent of the misconception that every Zimbabwean who left the country during the liberation struggle was politically motivated to do so. More recent research has demonstrated that some individuals were running away from criminal offences that might have found them in prison but used the liberation lens as an explanatory conduit to

escape the might of the Rhodesian law. In other words some criminals find their way into the diaspora and even cause havoc in the new host countries.

However, there are some Zimbabwean citizens who opt for foreign lands genuinely in search of a place to call a home. Yet, their fates haunt them when they find themselves being exploited, ridiculed segregated, rejected and become despised African immigrants who turn out to be "British Bottom Cleaners'" (BBCs) in London, United Kingdom and *matlhwantle* (outsiders) or perceived as *Ke makwerekwere batho ba* (these people are foreigners) in South Africa. Sadly, for most of these BBCs or *makwerekwere*, going back to Zimbabwe is no longer an option to contemplate because they have not yet forgotten the harrowing memory of a homeland with political suppression and violence, hunger, unemployment, economic ruin, uncertainty and exploitation (Mavengano 2020; Pasura 2009; McGregor 2007). The huge presence of Zimbabweans in South Africa and England speaks to the unhomeliness of the home country. They search for a sense of belonging or being wedded to a place, according to bell hooks (2009) in *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. Zimbabwe is a place of hunger, poverty, political violence and unemployment among other socio-economic and political ills that compel citizens to flee in droves (Mavengano 2020). The ruptured forms and creativity of the selected novels disrupt and challenge (post)colonial enclosures thereby reconfiguring the fictive open spaces that convey imaginaries of what the human world should become. The chosen fictive narratives thus foreground the sordid threadbare and precarious lives of othered bodies in both homeland and diasporic spaces.

The fear of difference as a contemporary problematic

The discussion in this section focuses on the notion of 'the fear of difference' and its various articulations embedded in the literary representations of current exclusionary, malicious stereotypical viewpoints and xenophobic practices. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama's (1992) utopian vision in *The End of History and the Last Man* in which he talks about the end of historical atrocities and an emerging human universalism, Sacks (2009) bemoans what he calls the destructive power of the hatred of difference in contemporary times. It is that fear and hatred of difference that has led historically to violence, war, genocide, etc. Robert Kagan, (2008) in his book *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, describes the current manifestation of hate and violence conflict as a repeat of the darkest chapters of human history. Cilliers (2020) notes that the term xenophobia is derived from Greek and it is composed of two words *xeno* (stranger) and *phobia* (fear) and recently has been expanded to encompass the hate of migrant people and refugees (Mavengano and Nkamta 2022). Xenophobia

can be loosely defined as the fear of imaginary (and indeed real) strangers/foreigners. The choice of lexical term 'imaginary' is deliberate and purposeful because the basis for one to be a stranger or foreigner in xenophobic discourses is laden with biases, contestations, and stereotypes, hate and self-exoneration. The current reflections on xenophobia in South Africa from Cilliers (2020), Mavengano and Hove (2020), Schierup (2016), Banda and Mawadza, (2015), among others, interject narratives about rainbowism which they argue is far from the lived realities of the post-apartheid society. These scholars have problematised the Rainbow concept and argued that on one hand the state-written script about Rainbowism masks profound ethnic, economic and socio-political divides in the present-day South Africa. They regard the rainbow narrative as an attempt to impose unity on society in a way that crushes and forbids human difference and a bid to impose monolithic truth on a plural world. This narrative projects an artificial unity on human diversity.

At the same time the metaphor somehow ironically contains and retains the distinct races, social classes and tribes in South Africa. Thus, to use an example from Chemistry, some pejorative interpretations may argue that a mixture is such that one can still separate and identify the components whereas in a compound, once put together one might not easily disaggregate them.

The end of apartheid in 1994 was celebrated by people of colour across the African continent and beyond. Yet, the jubilation of 'independence' soon died off as the 'rainbow' concept began to show latent fault lines as complex dynamics of differentiation appeared (Cilliers 2020). The jubilations were short-lived because African immigrants soon realised that their presence in South Africa was highly regulated and in most cases, they were treated as unwelcome strangers or foreigners. The derogative term for African immigrants, *makwerekwere*, was famously coined to discriminate and ostracise African nationals who speak 'strange languages' (Matsinhe 2011). These 'African foreigners' are viewed as fugitives coming from debilitating economic conditions that have developed in some African countries, like the case of Zimbabwe. The term *makwerekwere* is burdened with self-Other discourses and deployed to construct a xenophobic life-world based on the beliefs and prejudices that foreigners do not belong to the community or group (Nyamnjoh 2006). This article seeks to read xenophobia as 'the fear of difference', a notion that goes beyond the fear of a stranger or foreigner but rather expands conversations of xenophobia to encompass ethnic, political and racial discrimination and suppression that usually turn into violent eruption of these tensions in the contemporary world.

One Foreigner's Ordeal exposes the inconsistences and ambivalences in the post-apartheid society because exclusionary boundaries and criminalisation of

the black African bodies are some of the problematics that show the continuation of apartheid ideology. It is unfortunate that black South Africans view their kith and kin from the continent as 'dangerous criminals' who should be expelled by violent means from South Africa to make it a safe country (Jinga 2013: 67). Matsinhe (2011: 295) explains this xenophobic attitude as "Africa's fear of itself". The post-apartheid environment reflects what Kagan (2008) views as the return of history. The perceived *makwerekwere* in South Africa are exposed in the same way that the indigenous black people were subjected to dehumanisation during the apartheid era. Cilliers (2020) concurs with the idea that there is an overbearing white legacy in South Africa which continues to inform human relations today.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020, 2021) writings on decoloniality or decolonisation provide useful insights relevant to the present discussion of self-Other logics. He points out that postcolonial subjects are products of colonial experience and that historical fact continues to shape the mind-set of previously marginalised people. This is a vexing situation. For instance, in one of the telling passages in *One foreigner's ordeal*, black South African security guards at the Department of Home Affairs in Johannesburg accuse an African immigrant of being 'a cheeky immigrant' and beat him up. The Home Affairs officials also repeatedly mentioned that 'cheeky immigrants' in search of legal documentations were to be sent to Lindela Repatriation Centre (Jinga 2012: 52-53). The mere mention of the Lindela Repatriation Centre reminds readers who are familiar with South African history of ugly apartheid experiences. Matsinhe (2011) and Isike and Isike (2012) argue that black South Africans adopted hostility towards blackness from the apartheid regime since white people used to beat up 'cheeky natives' during the apartheid era. The term 'aliens' is also deployed for further estrangement of the African immigrants in *One foreigner's ordeal*, which is rather disquieting. White foreigners in South Africa are fondly embraced as tourists and investors who have a lot to offer to black South Africans (Isike and Isike 2012). This unfolding reality speaks about the enduring socio-economic inequalities. The works of Ngugi (1994), Mbembe (1992, 2003) Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2020) and Mignolo (2000, 2007) provide useful insights about the difficulties of rupturing from the conditions of coloniality and imagining new African humanity disentangled from the empires since there are cognitive empires that shape African beings today. Ngugi (1994: 11) comments on the problematic coloniality of being of the previously colonised people in the following remark:

> How we view ourselves, our environment even, is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial stages; that if we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today, then we have to

> coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to
> us and to our view of ourselves in the universe.

This remark speaks about the African mindset that has been poisoned to the extent that it rejects the self in an African Other (Afrophobia) something entrenched in the very psyche of the colonised African. The black security guards at the Home Affairs offices in Johannesburg 'team up' and use their batons to discipline the African 'aliens' (Jinga 2012: 53), and the same guards ironically are ready to serve 'with great respect' all whites who want services at the Home Affairs offices. These attitudes can be explained by the fact that these postcolonial subjects were educated to hate blackness during the apartheid/colonial era. The challenge that Africa confronts today is to undo such long-standing coloniality of being and to re-educate the previously colonised people to believe in themselves once again.

The novel also criticises the postcolonial leaders whose manner of governance generates ineffable misery for the common people. In *One Foreigner's Ordeal*, the protagonist is from the 'wretched' proletariat of the civil servants in Zimbabwe. He is a trained teacher escaping from the economic and political miseries in Zimbabwe that emanated from Mugabe's misgovernance. Through these characterisation and settings, the text foregrounds Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political challenges together with the crushing ordeal of those who fled from the woes in their motherland. In this sense, the ordeal experienced by Zimbabwean immigrants in diasporic sites is state-generated.

The novels also expose another dimension of the fear of difference that is relevant in this discussion. In *Harare North,* nativist discourse in Zimbabwe is questioned since it emerged within racial essentialism of the ruling party's toxic politics that differentiates ZANU PF supporters from the rest of the citizens (indiscriminately, whether one is white or black). Those who align themselves with the ruling party enjoy the privilege of being 'patriotic citizens' or 'sons and daughters of the soil' whereas those who remain aloof from ZANU PF lose the entitlement of citizenship and are labelled sell-outs, enemies of the state and unpatriotic puppets of the West who should leave the country. These claims are part of the state discourses constructed to overshadow the realities of poor governance, corruption, and economic and political instabilities. Paradoxically, the protagonist in the novel *Harare North*, who is a unflinching ZANU PF supporter, points at the daunting economic situation in the following extracts when he says: "[...] price of everything [in Zimbabwe] jump up zillion per cent and they (ordinary Zimbabweans) can't afford food or brew now, all them big stomachs gone, they belts is down to they last holes but trousers is still falling down, big fat cheeks now gone ..." (Chikwava 2009: 12).

The moving memes of starved Zimbabweans serve as a rare acknowledgement of economic collapse in Zimbabwe under Mugabe's authoritarian rule and is submerged and sandwiched in the state's self-preserving narratives. Yet, the visual imageries in the above passage speak about a choking home space generated by a tyrannical leader who ignored the harsh realities affecting his people. Ironically, the economic and political realities of ordinary citizens in Zimbabwe conveys an ideological dissonance. The despotic government in Zimbabwe under Mugabe, at the peak of its economic and political crises, lost sensibility to the aspirations of self-reliance, the celebration of black consciousness, restoration of human dignity, anti-classism among others embedded in African socialism, African nationalism, African humanism, Negritude, Pan Africanism, Garveyism and African renaissance, which are all articulations of the quest for a new and desirable African humanity for the people emerging from the long repressive grip of colonialism.

In *One foreigner's ordeal*, the protagonist's maiden entry into South Africa discloses an amazing distinction between the two nations in relation to their road infrastructure and economic conditions right from the two border posts. Commenting on the presence of the Limpopo River as both physical border and a point of contrast between South Africa and Zimbabwe, the narrator in Jinga's novel employs visual imagery, irony and satire in the following passage:

> This is the river which upon crossing it, in a direction that I will not mention, a person will miss the pleasant smell of raw sewage and redolent toilets. This is the river which will make it possible for one to see on one side, hungry-looking policemen clasping batons and dressed in faded khaki fatigues, washed-out bibs and worn-out brown shoes. Their counterparts on the other side are paunchy ones, wear crisp blue uniforms, shiny black shoes and strap sleek guns on their plump hips (Jinga 2012: 10).

The deplorable economic conditions are also conveyed by empty shops in Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans flock to Musina, a border town in South Africa, to buy anything including, "socks, sanitary pads, shoe polish, candles, matches, flour, rice, sugar, sweets, salt, cooking oil, soap, tooth paste, yeast, electric bulbs, pens, pencils … you name it" (Jinga 2012: 14.). At the South African side of the border, travellers interact with 'police with plump hips' and shops are packed to capacity with goods for sale (Jinga 2012: 14).

This observation re-enacts Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013a: 74) submission that contests the birth of the postcolonial world. He submits that:

> The triumphant African leadership continued the colonial legacy of turning against democracy. This [is] was so because

> the achievement of political independence only changes the
> composition of the managers of the state but not the character
> of the state, which remained much as it was in the colonial era.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, just like other African intellectuals such as Mbembe (1992) and Ngugi (1994) among others, are cynical about the ability of postcolonial governments to fulfil the aspirations of the indigenous people.

The strained diplomatic relations between Zimbabwean and Western governments is used as a basis to erect self-Other boundaries in the Zimbabwean political landscape. The self-Other binaries are generated from the fear of being politically and ideologically different. The members of opposition parties in Zimbabwe are defined and associated with 'condemned American and Britain whiteness' by the Mugabe regime. Dissenting voices are labelled 'white puppets' who sing the song of their white masters. Such exclusionary logics are discerned from the state-sponsored violence that is performed by the 'green bombers' in the novel *Harare North*, *in* order to intimidate or eliminate othered bodies that are perceived as a threat to the well-being of the 'us' group. The ruling party through its 'patriotic history' projects itself in self-glorification discourses and nativist rhetoric as the progenitor and authentic guardian of post-independent society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012: 1). The fear of the political stranger is visible in hostility towards politically othered bodies who become targets of politically motivated violence. The grammar of violence and tropes of in/visibility in *Harare North* speak about the troubled distinction between the non/nationals. Through its vulgarity of power, the ruling party condescendingly imposes inside labels on 'authentic' citizens and outsider labels on those deemed to be non/citizens. In other words not all citizens are 'real citizens' in the nation space.

In the South African context, the exceptionalism ideology informs some xenophobes who believe the country is unique in the Southern region. The vilification of immigrants also takes place in the political domain of host countries (Cilliers 2020). Mavengano (2020) contends that self-Other boundaries are the product of discursive debates between state and society because the former provides the policy framework that defines the il/legality of immigrants. The state's ideology, especially as it relates to immigration, has a profound influence on foreigners' livelihoods within its borders. Xenophobia in this sense is thus linked to ideas of non/nationality determined by the sovereign state in an Agambenian sense. In South Africa, it is ironic that even those who earn the legal status of citizenship are rejected by anti-immigrant activists (Bwanya 2021). The distraught poor black South Africans vent their anger by constructing fresh forms of black-on-black apartheid and binary discourses meant to blame othered bodies for the emerging challenges in the post-

apartheid era. The recent rejection of the Johannesburg Mayor Jolidee Matongo, whose origin is traceable to Zimbabwe, is telling evidence of how xenophobia continues to prevail in South Africa. The xenophobic outcry is captured in the statement "I never thought I would see a day where a Zimbabwean is at the helm of Johannesburg" (Bwanya 2021: 1). The ascendancy of Matongo was seen as an indication of foreigners taking over South Africa. However, it is also essential to recognise and interrogate the problematics of South African politics in which political history and the broader issues of identity are not just about xenophobia but a constructed deflection of not engaging with the complex legacies of apartheid perpetuated by the former colonial masters in shrewd ways that find an easy buy-in among the local African people who themselves are living with ascribed tribal identities that they never associated with until the colonial masters labelled them so! The everyday anguish that shapes the habits of being for those who are lost, wandering and searching (hooks: 1). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) made an important remark about the need to rethink or even unthink the thinking itself if a decolonised world is ever to emerge.

Of concern to xenophobes is that 'these people are foreigners' so they do not 'belong here' (Jinga 2012: 69). Both novels, *Harare North* and *One foreigner's ordeal*, end with characters in a state of disillusionment perhaps to suggest the disorienting effects of living as a *makwerekwere* or alien. Immigrants in both novels recognise their precarious conditions. In *Harare North*, the seclusion and exploitation of migrants in London generates great distress. It is again the Mugabe government that created a failed state with impoverished citizens who plead for employment and general survival. Both *One foreigner's ordeal* and *Harare North* employ tropes that speak about Mugabe's misrule in Zimbabwe. The narratives criticise such conditions that lead to precarity and immigrants feel uneasy by "the mere sight of a police van" (Jinga 2012: 41). The pitiful condition is amplified by the discovery that "for the first time in their lives, their status has changed from being law-abiding citizens into something else whose spoor the police or immigration officers are keenly interested in" (Jinga 2012: 41).

The above passage conveys the nerve wracking circumstances of the despised African immigrants in South Africa who live in perpetual terror. *One Foreigner's Ordeal* evokes historical memory to critique the enduring colonial understanding of African humanity. The hero in the novel laments colonial cartography that gave birth to the self-Other logics that continue to haunt Africans today.

The myths of 'post' colonial/apartheid world

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) posits that one of the pervasive myths in postcolonial Africa is the view that the attainment of independence ushered in a decolonial

world. As earlier mentioned, Mbembe (1992) contests the idea that attainment of independence gave birth to the postcolonial world. In this section the topic of xenophobia is examined vis-à-vis the utopian notion of the postcolonial world. There is a striking verse in the epilogue of the novel *One foreigner's ordeal*. The persona grabs the audience's attention by lamenting the fate of his homeland Zimbabwe, which faces multiple crises in the postcolonial period. The funereal poem positioned in the concluding chapter of the novel endorses a pessimistic worldview about the fate of postcolonial states under black African leadership. The expectations of ordinary Zimbabweans to enjoy economic and political stability are profoundly dashed as the 'politics of eatery', exploitation, marginalisation of oppositional voices and suppression take precedence in the country. The notion of 'politics of eatery' or excessive consumption by those in positions of power as suggested by Mbembe (2003) refers to the egocentric culture shown by the political leaders who are bent on amassing wealth at the expense of the common man or the precariat whose lives become bare. The common man is reduced to the figure of *homo sacer* in an Agambenian sense since his life does not matter and can be sacrificed usually by the sovereign power (Agamben 1998). *One Foreigner's Ordeal* ends with the poem titled 'An elegy from the Diaspora', which poses significant questions to those in power as illustrated in the following passage:

> Zimbabwe how can I disown you?
> You in whose warm bowels I was conceived,
> You, on whose very soil I learnt to crawl.
> And on whose firm grounds I learnt to stand…
> Some politicians may somersault and like chameleons change
> And they, like possessed dragons, fire and destruction may breathe
> Your name, in the worst of tatters may lie
> Yet Zimbabwe, never will I disown you. (Jinga 2012: 185)

Clearly, from the above quotations common citizens are forced to leave their motherland by circumstances beyond their control. The novel also thematises the hollowness of independence by deploying the farm setting in the South African context. There is a huge material arroyo between the conditions of black farm labourers whose employment is 'orange picking' and that of a rich white boss. Both black South Africans or *Ba ka mo* (insiders) and non-South Africans *Matswantle* (outsiders) are indiscriminately dehumanised and marginalised by the white Afrikaner farm owner. The farm owner rudely addresses all black labourers, "hey boy, hey boy, pick up the rubbish here. Pick up the rubbish in this compound." (Jinga 2012: 127) Quite disturbing is the fact that all blacks are nameless bodies whose identity to the farm owner is just 'a boy', reminding us of the apartheid encounter and glaring social inequalities. Once again, the novel articulates the

reality of self-Other in terms of the socio-economic divide between the two races which is reminiscent of the colonial injustices perpetrated against the people of colour. The black South Africans together with immigrants are victims of the persistent colonial legacy as indicated through fenced and gated white-owned farms to further underscore racial separation. This troubling scenario interjects xenophobic narratives woven around notions of authentic and non-authentic citizens. This is telling evidence of the unfulfilled national aspirations about egalitarian societies which remain an elusive dream. The postcolonial subjects continue to project the images of 'the wretched of the earth' (Fanon 1967/2007).

In one of the compelling passages in *One foreigner's ordeal*, the narrator problematises xenophobic violence or what he calls 'black on black apartheid' in South Africa when he comments about how South Africans attack their fellow Africans in the same way the ZANU PF government turned against urban populations in an orgy of state-sanctioned violence code named the *Murambatsvina* programme. The narrator satirically points out this parallel: "The sons and daughters of the soil involved in this operation (xenophobic attacks) should have taken a leaf from their Northern neighbour's Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Remove Dirt) launched in 2005" (Jinga 2012: 108).

It is disturbing to note that the trash to get rid of refers to African immigrants including Zimbabweans who could not stand Mugabe's authoritarian rule and economic instability. The search for sanctuary in the diaspora is futile as they become a target for xenophobia attacks:

> In Mzansi case, the combatants (unleash violence just like war veterans in land farm invasions in Zimbabwe – my emphasis) slightly got mixed up on who exactly deserved to be knifed, punched, kicked, thrown out of a moving train or burnt. How was a dedicated cadre of this struggle supposed to differentiate a Ndebele from Mpumalanga's *Kwa Ndebele* in South Africa and one from Zimbabwe's Mzilikazi Suburb, Nkayi, Khezi or Mapisa? Let us suppose Lerato Mokoena, a South African, is married to Muzondiwa Pazvakarambwa of Zimbabwe. Does that qualify Lerato for *kwerekwere-ship* or *Makwerekwerisation* logic? (Jinga 2012: 109).

These passages expose and question self-Other logics in xenophobic constructs like *kwerekwere*, strangers, which are used derogatively by South Africans to refer to their 'African siblings' from other countries. Fanon (2007) talks about the self-loathing of the postcolonial subjects who still believe in whiteness and mistrust blackness. In a parallel scenario in *Harare North,* African immigrants in London suffer dehumanisation, mistreatment and segregation. Due to structural

violence and discriminatory labour policies in Britain, African immigrants find it difficult to secure formal employment and as a result they take pitiable jobs as British Bottom Cleaners (BBCs). The lexical choice in the title of Jinga's novel, *One foreigner's ordeal*, foregrounds a torrid nightmare and the catastrophic results of misrule in Zimbabwe which gave birth to the demise of a nation compelling its citizens to flee in droves and become isolated scroungers in diasporic sites. The ordeal involves the painful hunt for asylums and legal documents that would be handy for securing formal jobs. This is not an easy undertaking but is rather interrupted by the xenophobic attitudes of the workers at Home Affairs offices in Johannesburg and the necropolitics of the immigration policies. It is quite troubling to note that despised and marginalised *kwerekwere*s only secure tedious jobs that have earned the scandalous abbreviation BBC in the novel *Harare North*. The acronym precisely conveys and punctuates the forbidding fate of African immigrants in London who take despicable jobs. Due to their illegal status, African immigrants have little choice other than to secure work in care homes, cleaning human excrement and 'sewage drains'. Aleck, who is a Zimbabwean immigrant in London, survives through "picking old people's *kaka* off beds" (Chikwava 2009: 118). Likewise, In *One Foreigner's ordeal*, Zimbabwean teachers who fled from earning "a salary of less than a fifty rand note" take jobs similar to the BBC jobs which are "orange picking", "*mkhukhu* construction" and "cattle minding". *Mkhukhu* is makeshift accommodation used by poor South Africans in high density areas. These texts contest labels that are constructed to define immigrants. This draws attention to what Bauman (1995) refers to as a complex process of un/making strangers in xenophobic narratives. In this way, both novels contest vexed ideas of foreignness that are constructed in othering discourses. Cilliers (2020) posits that the rainbow notion is utilised as divergent narrative to blindly avoid talking about the problematics of belonging which have remained an astonishing reality in South Africa. This view also problematises romanticised discourses of newness and the re-birth of a post-apartheid nation probably meant to mask the ills of the present-day society.

Othering politics in lingo-cultural semiotics

This section focuses on the de/construction of the other as outsider/stranger within the realm of language in fictional texts to further locate and interrogate Africa's dis/connection and epistemic violence within the debate about xenophobia. The achievement of independence by African states ushered in the hope for the rehumanisation of the indigenous African humanity which was previously vilified and marginalised ethnically, religiously and linguistically during the apartheid/colonial period. Kachru (1992), Canagarajah (2013) and Mavengano and Hove (2020) are of the view that linguistic silos are part of self-Other logics

that re-inscribes native/non-native demarcations. The linguistic fabric utilised to construct the novels *One Foreigner's Ordeal* and *Harare North* ruptures linguistic essentialism. However, despite heated conversations on decolonisation, the task to re-conceptualise humanity in these evolving contexts has not been easy against the background of lingo-cultural frontiers, geopolitics, persistent colonial logics and bigoted traditions.

For decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo (2007/ 2011) and Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2013), the logics of coloniality are rooted in the attitudes and practices of former colonies and decoloniality becomes an imperative emerging form of consciousness (Ndlovu 2021). Decolonial theorisations complicate structured conceptualisations of humanity which inform the present discourses of lingo-cultural fundamentalisms and narcissisms. These issues are germane in debating linguistic dichotomies that create coloniality of being with detrimental effects on African humankind. In Africa, the subject of language is a polemical one and is brought up in conversations around linguistic imperialism/decolonisation and language rights which are pertinent in discourses about re-imagining the futures of Africa in the postcolonial era. Yet, African countries inherited monolithic ideologies, problematic heteroglossic and poly-cultural discourses in the postcolonial African societies. Wolff (2017) notes that the language question is topical in Africa because the continent is still entrapped in Cartesian thinking.

The Sesotho philosophy of "*Batho Pele*" which means 'people first' (Jinga 2012: 73) is informed by Ubuntuism that challenges the othering of *lekwerekwere*. The selected texts point to the urgent need to unthink imperiality of being. These are fundamental insights that provoke the following disconcerting questions: How is African humanity conceptualised or imagined through languaging in the selected novels? Can the postcolonial subjects redeem themselves from imperial logics? Lastly, how do the contact zones in these texts engender possibilities of new humanity? These are fundamental questions which show the politics of languaging remains a nebulous and tremendously contested subject, especially when we consider critical insights from decolonial thinkers that encourage unthinking thinking itself in order to imagine the possibilities of new consciousness.

A careful consideration of polyglossic clues is important in discussing xenophobia today. Languages are fused into each other and as a result new codes emerge which could be interpreted as an attempt to reconfigure new humanity that embraces lingo-cultural diversity. In other words, the synergy of linguistically diverse codes in lexical transfer and code-meshing shows multilingual settings (Canagarajah 2013). In both *Harare North* and *One foreigner's ordeal,* heteroglossic speech is used to deconstruct monolithic views that promote linguistic silos. The texts through their linguistic composition interject self-Other logics in the realm

of language by presenting intercultural dialogue. Thus, the linguistic versatility of the novels offers a complex fictive avenue with new grammars to pursue a transformative agenda in the postcolonial period. In *One foreigner's ordeal* the narrator criticises xenophobia for "eating its very own children and disregards the values of *Batho Pele* or people first" (Jinga 2012: 95), which can be interpreted as a humanist principle borrowed from Ubuntu philosophy. This remark is constructed using translated English and Sesotho, one of the indigenous languages in South Africa probably to convey philosophical antagonism between Eurocentric and Afrocentric worldviews about human relations.

Jinga's novel suggests that the rabid longing to return to the Cartesian world shown in the xenophobic Operation *Buyela Ekhaya* (Operation Return Home) by South Africans targeting black African immigrants is destructive and cannibalistic, whereas *Batho Pele* is a welcome conception that paves the way for reconfiguring the human world today. Such discrimination and xenophobic violence also inscribe in/visibility and become tropes of the cocooned existence of 'strangers' in a post-apartheid society. *One foreigner's ordeal* poses polemical questions that reveal the imperatives of reconsidering the semantic significance of political independence without the development of new thinking. In another case of linguistic unbordering, the text invites readers to reflect on the meanings of *mfecane* or *lifaqane, difaqane* (Jinga 2012: 109), further contesting the insistence on difference between South African natives and non-natives. These are some of the depressing issues in the present 'rainbow' nation. Equally, in *Harare North* the London linguistic landscape is infiltrated with immigrants' linguistic behaviour in the dominant translated discourses. This way, the novel also troubles British local-foreigner binaries and linguistic ideologies constructed around standard and non-standard linguistic forms.

Mavengano and Hove (2020) remark that Afrikaans and English are historically connected to subjugation of the black indigenous other in South Africa. In another illuminating scene on a white Afrikaner's farm, Afrikaans and English are deployed to issue warnings against black people trespassing on the farm. The signs on the fenced farm bear words PRIVAAT EIENDOM (Private property), GEEN INGANG, AIKONA NGENA (No Entry) (Jinga 2012: 102). The sign retains colonial dichotomies that did not promote meaningful interaction between whites and blacks. The latter's function as labourers serving the white community has not changed in the post-apartheid society. The farm setting metonymically becomes a replica of social classification of human population and persistent inequalities. Land is owned by whites and blacks provide labour to the "Van Rensburg Boerdery, Zandel Coetzee, Eizaan Viljoen Dewald\" among others of the Volk community in the present South Africa (Jinga 2012: 102). The novel calls for the reconstruction of a deracialised and deimperialised post-apartheid society. The black workers

live in squalid conditions in farm compounds where they eat baboon meat. The smell of baboon meat pervading the compound and dilapidated buildings serve to underscore the pitiable existence of black workers. The disgusting smell makes the compound comparable to a mortuary and speaks of the dehumanisation of black people in contemporary times. It is unfortunate that instead of the workers speaking out together against racial injustice, they engage in xenophobia when black South African farm workers fight the *makwerekwere* on the farm, ignoring their common subjectivity. The troubling question that is evoked by this racial representation is whether black lives matter in a postcolonial world?

In *Harare North,* English, Shona and Ndebele are deliberately interwoven into the fabric of multilingual discourse that gives texture to the novel. The multilingual textuality needs to be further understood as a means of "breaking down" lingo-cultural boundaries (Blommaert 2010). This is in line with Mignolo's (2005) argument that the decolonial paradigm aims to uncover and dismantle longstanding hegemonies and accommodate the other's thoughts. The selected narratives privilege pluralisation of Englishes through appropriation or Africanisation of English. In another context but relevant to this study, Kachru (1992) regards these linguistic strategies as part of non-native speaking which fosters linguistic justice after years of linguistic imperialism. For instance, the following citation reveals translation by migrants to demonstrate their linguistic repertoire. In *Harare North*, the narrator bemoans Tim's English accent in the following quotation: "It has been hard. Everything. Tim - his accent and cockney thing, you can't hear anything. And when you hear it don't make sense and you have make your anus tight and listen up to figure things out" (Chikwava 2009: 82).

Readers are told that this character is partially illiterate by Sekai, who says "Green Bombers are just bunches of uneducated thugs" (Chikwava 2009: 89). Yet this does not dismiss the fact that new linguistic codes in diasporic sites are part of the immigrants' ordeal. Thus, the act of communication serves as a process of deconstructing binary logics in the contemporary world. The sociolinguistic landscapes of diasporic sites like South Africa in the novel *One foreigner's ordeal* and London in *Harare North* are infiltrated with the perceived *makwerekwere* discourses articulated through their languages. The ChiShona phrase *'Rambai makashinga'* (forward ever and remain patriotic) in the concluding chapter of *One foreigner's ordeal* was popularly used in Zimbabwe especially when Mugabe's leadership faced legitimacy and economic crises, to encourage Zimbabweans to continue to persevere during difficult times (Jinga 2012: 114). It should be noted that *Rambai makashinga* is part of the state-scapegoating discourse that accuses the West of the unfolding economic and political problems in Zimbabwe.

Concluding remarks

The discussion in this study has shown that the subject of xenophobia is a multifaceted and complex one and its interrogation should not be limited to the 'hate' or fear of a foreigner or stranger but there is need to reconceptualise xenophobia in the postcolonial world and reconsider the complex issues that trigger the fear of difference. Some of these issues are traceable to the colonial experiences of African people. The article has highlighted the imperatives of rethinking African humanity and undoing mentalities that undermine the quest to deconstruct colonial myths which are part of epistemic violence and ideological injustices against people of colour. The subject of self-Other logics that inform xenophobia brought to the fore the tragedies of African people who face the challenge to know themselves after a long period of colonial dehumanisation. What is clear is that for a deeper understanding of xenophobia in Africa, it is imperative not to ignore colonial experiences that shaped the African who emerged today. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that in reality, African humanity is not free beyond flag independence. After many years of experiencing imperialism, there is need to engage in open and frank conversations about the primary urgency on how to redeem African humanity from the bondage of enduring colonial legacies. The discussion above has shown that Africans have remained ensnared by the empires of the mind and should seek to redefine themselves and reconstruct images that project self-respect and self-pride. However, the question that remains to be addressed is whether Africa will be able to free herself from these enduring empires after many years of experiencing imperialism?

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