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New Nationalism and Xenophobia in Africa – a New Inclination?

Norbert Kersting

In May 2008 a wave of xenophobic violence spread all over South Africa. More than 60 people, mainly citizens from Somalia, Mozambique or Zimbabwe, were killed by mob violence. Despite a subsequent solidarity campaign, the image of the South African rainbow nation was profoundly damaged and made the world, once again, aware of the growing inner-African sentiments against so-called foreigners.

In his seminal work Horowitz (2001) analyses hundreds of lethal ethnic riots and related forms of xenophobia. He distinguishes between four reasons for such outbursts: Firstly an “ethnic” or “national” antagonism; secondly a “reasonable” justification of violence; thirdly a response to a certain event; and fourthly aggression in a situation where the mob does not face any, or only a small, risk of punishment. In the following, we focus on strong nationalism as the underlying antagonism. As a result of individual socialisation it is strongly embedded in the individual affective and normative system. As a highly emotional orientation it is seen as one possible triggering factor for xenophobia and violence.

As a result of globalisation, the nation-state is said to be of diminishing relevance today. The global economic order, with its new information and communication technologies as well as its new transport systems, has greatly enhanced the mobility of capital and labour. This has triggered international migration on an unprecedented scale. On the other hand, national identities and local cultures are being reinvigorated. Strong nationalism may enhance in-group solidarity, but under certain conditions it may also strengthen out-group hostility.

Nationalism in sub-Saharan Africa was often regarded as another form of anti-colonial protest. Territorial nationalism, however, was often considered inauthentic because African states were delimited along “artificial” (meaning: colonially imposed) boundaries, which fenced in multiple ethnic groups, and created territorial entities characterised by strong cultural heterogeneity. The ethnic and language cleavages often overlapped with class and extremely inequitable income structures. The nation-building process, driven

by the new African elite, followed the vision of a centralised system of national unity.

Boundaries were declared sacrosanct, and ethnic or cultural diversity was often suppressed. Citizens in most African countries nowadays seem to accept the concept of state and do not question the notion of nation. They have developed a feeling of national solidarity and identity based on an imagined shared history and a common destiny. National symbols such as anthems, flags and soccer teams have fostered a “banal nationalism”. To what extent does such nationalism differ from the early independence days? Is it related to the discourse on nativism and autochthony? Does a new wave of nationalism exist, and if yes, what are its roots? What are its economic, social and political repercussions? Are Pan-Africanism, the African Union and the African Renaissance elite projects, that are not backed by current trends among African populations? Is new nationalism a strategy, which even questions the national strategies of multiculturalism and destabilises the state? This issue of *Africa Spectrum* explores the new forms of nationalism and ethnic antagonism.

On Theory and Concepts of Nationalism

National identity is one pattern of orientation within a set of multiple social identities, which becomes relevant in different contexts. It concurs with other identity narratives. All are important for cohering social groups and for the fostering of individual self-esteem. Identities are constructed and may be deconstructed. Identity may be seen as a form of ugly chauvinistic nationalism and out-group hostility. It may also be defined and constructed as a kind of constitutional patriotism, as pride in a social welfare state or pride in policies of social inclusion. In consequence, pride in democratic performance, in societal values and in peaceful policies becomes important. In his seminal work Deutsch (1969: 3) highlights the construction of the identities and nationalism as well as its latent xenophobia. Nationalism is defined as a doctrine where people believe that their culture, history, institutions, religion or principles are distinct and aspire to self-rule under a political system that expresses and protects those distinct characteristics (Snyder 2000: 23-24). Gellner (1983) distinguishes between ethnic and civic nationalism. In ethnic nationalism the inclusion of people in the group is based on criteria such as language, religion, or a myth of shared kinship. In civic nationalism inclusion is based on residency, loyalty to a set of political ideas, allegiance to institutions and a shared history. Civic nationalism is found in Western European societies and ethnic nationalism is more likely to be a phenomenon in the

Eastern countries (Gellner 1983; Greenfield 1992). The latter seems to be more prominent in so-called developing countries too.

Within the process of nation and state-building, unity and homogeneity became important goals. In fact strong ethnic cleavages are seen as the main problems triggering violent action. In the new states, governments and presidents regarded nation-building as a panacea to avoid tribal conflicts. At the time of independence, leaders such as Sekou Toure (1995) were optimistic believing that harmful tribal, ethnic, or religious rivalries could be overcome in a short period of time.

Nationalism was an important element of decolonisation. As a consequence, scholars in development studies perceive nationalism less negatively (Young 2007, Dorman et al. 2007). After independence the nation state apparently requires periodic self-assurance. The usage of national holidays, national anthems and daily flag-raising ceremonies at administrative headquarters, omnipresent flags, its currency, its postage stamps, national football teams, its passport, which defines the citizen status, seem nowadays to be much more inherent to African nations than e.g. to their former colonial powers (but not necessarily to the USA, China or other countries). Banal nationalism spreads widely. In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminder is so familiar, so continuous that it is not consciously registered. Banal nationalism is not a flag waved with passion; it is the often unnoticed flag hanging on all public buildings (Billig 1995: 8.) Nevertheless, as Hannah Arendt (1962) points out, banal nationalism does not mean that this must be harmless or benign. There is another affinity between banal nationalism and African neo-patrimonial states. The high level of personification of politics often ends in a personality cult regarding the political incumbents.

In addition to common language and national symbols, a shared history and narratives are used as an element of social cohesion. Collective memory must have its history. This historical narrative is simultaneously collective marketing. Nations celebrating their history, forget their socio-economic reality (Billig 1995). In most African countries decolonisation or liberation wars are highlighted as part of a main national narrative. The sovereign National Conferences in Benin, Congo, Mali, Togo, Zaïre serve the same purpose. In addition, normative frameworks such as the constitution are used for national identity. Nationalism is also supported by the international system. Banal nationalism even seems to be effective when state-building is failing. This may lead to a situation where the state collapses entirely without disappearing from the international arena and where the nation continues to exist in the social imaginary (Young 2007).

Nationalism is not necessarily defined by ethnicity although they frequently overlap. When it comes to processes of secession, ethnically based nationalism is often seen as having a triggering effect. There are few cases of successful secession, but the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict shows this old nationalism. *Gebrewold* describes different instruments for nationalism in Ethiopia and the use of colonial aggression, Islamic threats and Eritrean secession to maintain national identity. Hereby, the ethnic conflicts leading to the separation of Eritrea are seen as a fraternal war. In Ethiopia the verdict that “difference breeds hatred” doesn’t seem to be applicable. According to Simmel (1964), it is more that similarity exacerbates conflicts (“hatred deriving out of broken love”). Strong anti-Eritrean sentiments are used to strengthen national identity. Identity is based on a banal nationalism using sports events, athletics, cultural symbols such as the Axom Obelisk (used as a symbol of cultural superiority) and religious coexistence for nation-building. Internally this heads towards an “oppositional nationalism” where non-patriotism is stigmatised. The construction of national identities is used to maintain Amhara dominance over the disadvantaged strong Oromo population. It leads to a glorification of the past and national identity and seeks to cover up actual social and economic inequalities and poverty.

Claude Ake (1996) describes a second or “new nationalism” as a fresh wave spreading across Africa. The first phase of nationalism happened in the process of decolonisation. It was directed against colonial powers, which meant against other states. This second nationalism is, as a rule, no longer directed toward other countries but against denizens (non citizens) living within an African state. So this kind of nationalism is directly related to internal xenophobia (see also Rex 1996; Delanty 1996). The inclusiveness of the beginning of independence is gone, now the exclusion of social groups within the same society defines the new nationalism.

The main reasons for the new nationalism lie within the process of globalisation and in growing national inequalities. In the international perspective Africa is still a continent with a low level of urbanisation. However, African countries now face strong internal and external migration. In the last decades African migration figures have skyrocketed. The increase of the urban population is much higher than in other continents. In some countries this was caused by “push effects” such as civil war and ecological catastrophes. But there are economic reasons for migration too. In the European countries it is often overlooked that the economically more advanced and politically stable countries in Africa are more frequently seen as targets for migrants than European countries. So economic inequalities within the African continent can be seen as the most important factor for continental migration. The economic hegemons in Africa have a long tradition of attract-

ing the African labor force. In South Africa, for example, the mining sector and the agricultural sector rely to a large extent on international migrants. Countries such as Gabon have more migrants than autochthon inhabitants.

Despite the often artificial nation-building process and heterogeneity of many African societies the number of separatist movements is rather small. Ethnic secession and separatist movements base their claims upon existing administrative territories: Most prominent were the cases of the former Eastern Nigeria and Biafra (Igbo); Casamance (Diola) in Senegal; Eritrea, Somaliland and the three separatist southern provinces in Sudan; Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the anglophone region of Cameroon. In recent years separatist movements such as in the Comoros and in Zanzibar have been reinvigorated. In other countries, ethnic groups have been co-opted, incorporated and included. Under certain rules and agreements de-ethnicised territorial nationalism co-exists quite harmoniously with ethnic politicisation.

The new nationalism focuses on the new political cleavage of autochthony and origin. The new national question seems to be “who has citizenship but should not have it, and who should have it but does not have it” (Weber 2008: 125). Citizenship is seen as a key factor. Rights to social welfare, to employment, to land etc. are increasingly denied to newcomers and immigrants.

Internal economic inequality can be seen as a trigger for these new trends. Geschiere (2004) points out that political and economic liberalisation was accompanied by struggles over belonging. Autochthonic claims triggered violent forms of exclusion of “strangers”. Even when they were long-term denizens of the same country they were not regarded as “sons of the soil” and “Africans”.

As in Europe and the United States, in Africa the argument is the lack of capacity for integration of the migrants (“the boat is full”). Under the increasing pressure of the EU, African governments are trying to develop stronger border controls similar to the “Schengen area” (“fortress Europe”, “fortress South Africa”). Ethno-nationalism leads to an expulsion of foreigners and strangers from the homeland of the autochthon people. Jackson (2007: 481) points out that in the last couple of decades the laws regulating citizenship and nationality have become more restrictive in African countries. Migrants have more frequently become victims of national campaigns and xenophobia and these “travellers in permanent transit” (Nyamnjoh 2006) were demonised in Cameroon, Mozambique, and Ghana as “Zombies”. In fact most of the xenophobia in Africa is an Afro-phobia. Although minorities, such as Chinese people, face discrimination as part of a xenophobia against non-Africans, and the Indian inhabitants in the East African coun-

tries were strongly victimized in the 1970s, violent xenophobia is mostly oriented towards citizens coming from other African nations. Mobutu repealed his 1972 presidential decree granting citizenship to Rwandan and Burundian immigrants in 1981, in reaction to national resentment. Immigrants were seen as competing with locals for land and economic opportunities. Mobutu manipulated these feelings and used anti-foreigner rhetoric to inspire ethnic cleansing in North Kivu in 1993 and tried to expel Congolese Tutsi in 1996 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2004: 405). The infighting allowed him to garner support from French troops and increase his grip on power. Omar Bongo in Gabon encouraged violent attacks and mass expulsions of foreigners in order to build up a Gabonese nation state and divert attention away from intra-ethnic tensions that could cause political instability. Mass expulsions in Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana can also be seen as a process of building the nation by excluding groups based on ethnic nationalist criteria (Whitaker 2005: 118). In 2008 migrants from the DR Congo were brutally expelled by the Angolan state agencies (Neocosmos 2008). The examples of internal ethnic clashes with locally resident foreigners, such as in the Ivory Coast with people from Burkina Faso and Mali, in Nigeria with Ghanaian and other foreigners and in Kenya with Somalis, are increasing.

To a certain extent the Zimbabwean seizure of land can be seen as xenophobia, or as “nativist”. It is not a land reform where unproductive land is redistributed, or where wealthy farmers have to contribute and share. It focuses almost exclusively on the white population. Parallel high ethnic polarisation took place in the Nigerian Civil War and in the genocidal episodes in Rwanda and Burundi. In Congo-Brazzaville, Southern Sudan and Nigeria a tendency towards deeper primordialisation of ethnicity seems, slowly and unevenly, to be in progress.

The most important conflicts in Africa focus on the question of land. The nationalisation of the land conflict is related to the increasing value of natural resources (despite the ups and downs of the international market). At the time of independence the exit option to avoid conflict was an alternative because of an abundance of land and easy immigration into other areas. It is now a scarce product.

Land is a special substance, it is not increasable, non-renewable, and central to both material livelihood and the politics of belonging (Lentz 2006: 30).

Land and soil are tangible assets, but often play an important role for identity and social, spiritual and community belonging (Walter 2006: 288 ff.). Citizenship is strongly related to the question of having access to national

resources such as land. Because land rights are often contested and negotiable, the belonging to and membership in a group is crucial.

New nationalism is based on the narrative of a common history. It overlooks/ignores the long tradition of migration and integration in African societies. These societies developed instruments to integrate foreigners into the local community. *Bøås* shows in his article that the new cleavages frame around the stereotype of the “son of soil” versus “immigrating newcomer”. New laws and regulations regarding nationality and citizenship have become stricter in the last decades. This has led to an exclusion of “strangers” who have been living in the countries for decades. Mostly, land titles and the land issues were in the centre of conflicts. In general the land often became a scarce resource and this was the triggering effect for the contested citizenship status as part of a new nationalism. In Liberia a conflict between the Loma and Mandingo emerged in the 1990s. The latter were seen as foreigners and the local conflict developed towards a national conflict and civil war. This happened although a rather friendly coexistence between these two groups had continued for decades.

Many African countries had procedures and rituals to include foreigners. In Liberia the Mandingo were included in a “stranger-father” institution, which defined a subordinate relationship but also allowed the distribution of land to these “adopted” foreigners. In the Eastern Congo the land right question is also related to concerns about citizenship. Here, traditionally, migration originates from the East and from Rwanda and Burundi. Under Mobutu’s government in 1972, citizenship was granted to all migrants living in the Congo before 1950. In 1981 a bill tried to redefine citizenship more rigorously. Now citizenship should be granted only to those living “on the soil” since the Berlin conference (1885). Although the bill was not implemented, it led to violent attacks against Banyarwanda in 1993. The 2005 Constitution defined this “time of entry” as the year of independence.

Migration in the Ivory Coast was traditionally very strong. Especially migrants from the North were integrated. This “moral economy” gave land to everybody who needed it for subsistence. Good strangers had to accept the duties towards the local communities such as giving gifts, labour and money to the community. When land was abundant, integration functioned and led to strongly heterogeneous villages. In the Ivory Coast in 1999, however, 1500 Burkinabe and Northerners were attacked and had to leave the town Tabou. President Laurent Gbagbo reclaimed the “second war of liberation” to strengthen the rights of the autochthonous populations in the Western regions. Legislation from 1998 forbids land ownership by the non-autochthonous population, which means foreigners who migrated to the

Ivory Coast as well as internal migrants from the Northern parts of the Ivory Coast.

Government policies are important to banal nationalism as well as to immigration laws. Policies are often incoherent when it comes to their application by different ministries (foreign affairs, home affairs). Xenophobia may be stimulated by immigration laws for a long time. With the development of the African Union, a policy shift has become obvious in some countries where new immigration policies allow for higher mobility between African countries. African Unity is on the agenda of most governments. *Whitehouse* describes in his article the long tradition of migration from Mali and Senegal towards Brazzaville in the Congo. Nonetheless, in September 1962 the football match between Congo and Gabon sparked xenophobic riots in Brazzaville. In September 1977 the government deported 6,000 West Africans and seized their shops and businesses, which were distributed to the citizens. Legislation forbade foreigners to become petty traders and to own small shops such as bakeries, sidewalk vending etc. This expulsion and the trade policy happened in the absence of strong xenophobic attitudes within the population. Attitudes towards the West African population, however, did not even change when they played a positive role in the countries' reconstruction after the bloody civil war in 1997. West Africans are described as "ndingari" which means a "tick sucking blood from the attached cattle". They are often described as corrupt, lying, violent, criminal and unclean. In this the government is not playing the main role, although its expulsion policy from the 1970s is still remembered. Now the government seems to highlight the African Charter ratified in 1986 on human and peoples' rights which forbids mass expulsion for national, racial, religious or ethnic reasons. But xenophobia comes from below. It paints a picture of foreigners stealing the country's wealth and getting a free ride. In 2005 national legislation barred foreigners from owning small transport companies, bakeries, and sidewalk stalls. In this manner the Congolese seem to react against globalisation and confront the softest and most prominent targets. A stronger focus on inclusiveness and the development of an identity on the continent should lead to a stronger cosmopolitanism in the development of multiple industries and belonging to multiple places.

The debate on cosmopolitanism or nativism has a long tradition in Africa but it seems to be reinvigorated by globalisation. The question of autochthony is readily used for the populist argument because it impedes the redistribution of resources. In South Africa it is the expropriation and looting of the Somalian shop owner; in Zimbabwe it is the seizure of the white farms without compensation. *Ndlovu Gatsbeni* focuses in his article on the new developments in Zimbabwe since the late 1990s as well as the emer-

gence of the Native Club and xenophobic violence in South Africa. According to him, there has been a metamorphosis from developmental nationalism towards nativism. Developmental nationalism was a cultural project of nation-building, not solving but hushing up socio-economic issues. Nativism reinigorates the idea of Africa for the Africans. In Zimbabwe in the so-called *Third Chimurenga* (Third liberation war) Robert Mugabe focused on the “unfinished business” of land distribution to the black population. The descent into an economic crisis at the end of the 1990s, following not very successful structural adjustment programmes, opened the way for this new “patriotic citizens” strategy. It started with the banal nationalism using the liberation war, the nativist revolution, the redefinition of national days and heroes days to rewrite patriotic history. The new nativist “Africans first” – ideology was justified in the name of autochthony. It uses the vocabulary of slavery, apartheid and imperialism. In Zimbabwe it continued the Africanisation of the public sector by replacing the predominantly white judges in the judiciary system. In South Africa the focus on Afro-radicalism and nativism is based on the tradition of Garveyism in the 1920s and Black Consciousness movements since the 1960s with slogans such as “Africa for the Africans” by the South African Pan African Congress. The Native Club in South Africa stands against the concept of a “rainbow nation” and liberal civic conceptions of citizenship that are derived from the Freedom Charter of 1955. The Native Club promotes African languages, cultures, tradition as well as music and is heading towards a moral regeneration. It identifies an African identity crisis due to globalisation and neo-liberalism which are preventing democratic transformation and national reconstruction and which are producing materialistic clones following pure US American consumerism. Lastly nativism can be seen as the retrogressive cultural naturalism responsible for the xenophobic violence in South Africa. New African nationalism became nativism to compensate for the crisis in decline. The old idea of developmental nationalism and a broad African cosmopolitanism failed because of being a purely elite project, which was not solving social economic problems and inequalities. Nativism goes beyond the ending of colonial oppression, the seizure of political power and the indication of a “collective racial inferiority complex” towards a new citizenship defined in nativist terms as excluding “white racists” in the name of autochthony.

Banal nationalism is not the only triggering effect of xenophobia. But it may support xenophobia as long as there is no coherent policy of integration but in fact a xenophobic attitude in the government’s behaviour. This may counteract multicultural government strategies and destabilise the role of the state. *Landau and Misago* describe in their article the incidents in South Africa and in Kenya. In both cases criminal opportunists used historical

identities. In Kenya, the Orange Democratic Movement mobilized ethnic groups to control central government. In South Africa violent protest was less organised and less intense but focused much more on an anti-state political culture. This anti-state political culture becomes obvious in its combination of nationality and the entitlement to national resources and space. Weak states seem to lose the control of regulation. The violent nativist-revival builds up the ideological platform to remove the unwanted foreigners. For politicians this nationalism and xenophobia is often seen as a successful strategy to find scapegoats and to retain people's trust. The human rights of foreigners and their welfare rank low on the list of the countries' preferences for South Africa. This contradicts the rainbow nation-strategy that focuses on inclusiveness and integration. So it questions the role of state and destabilises the developing state.

Conclusion

Xenophobia is, to a certain extent, constructed by national media and other opinion leaders. Xenophobic attacks in South Africa and elsewhere were not a sudden eruption and not the action of criminals but were a latent mindset in the midst of society. "Dirty xenophobic thinking too easily and too quickly leads to dirty actions" (SAMP 2008). Xenophobia seems to be a result of a longer development, which could have been prevented. Immigration policies by the government would have been one important measure. But also the media railing against the flood of illegal aliens reinforced the attitudes against foreigners. Illegal and corrupt police behaviour revealed/took place in a context where illegal violent action against foreigners wouldn't be prevented but, more probably, even allowed.

People's perception of foreigners from other African countries are not strongly related to the discourse of Pan-Africanism run by African elites and the middle-class. These mostly see people from African countries as comrades who supported the liberation struggle. In the low income areas perceptions of citizens from other African countries are different. Poor African migrants, mostly from neighbouring countries, are often not accepted or even tolerated in most of the low-income areas. Traditional instruments for integration, which were working well in the rural areas are not applicable in the urban contexts. Immigrants are seen as competitors for social welfare programmes etc. Social distance and xenophobia against foreigners from other African countries is high. This othering is related to a strong new nationalism. The old nationalism, which was an instrument at the time of independence, aimed to include different social and ethnic groups and discouraged tribalism. It had an external enemy in the form of the former colonial power.

In a post-colonial often neo-patrimonial setting, banal nationalism with flags, anthems etc. has stabilised the often one-party systems and their incumbents. Developmental nationalism often disguised the social issues and inequalities. Because of its symbolic character it has not brought sustainable social cohesion. On the contrary, the new nationalism focuses on internal othering and excludes social groups within the society and their access to state resources. Here the land question becomes relevant and important.

The strategy of nativism and autochthony contradicts all strategies of broad integration and multicultural societies. Its motto is “Africa for the native Africans” instead of “Africa for All” (South African’s Freedom Charter, African Union’s African Charter). Its endemism contradicts Pan-Africanism as well as national multiculturalism. As a populist approach this new nationalism uses identity politics in its scramble for resources. It seems to be popular because African states apparently fail when it comes to tackling social inequalities and poverty reduction.

National identity is one pattern of orientation within a set of multiple social identities, which becomes relevant in different contexts. It concurs with other identity narratives. All are important for social groups and individual self-esteem. The construction and reconstruction of identities may follow different directions. Identity may be seen as the form of ugly chauvinistic nationalism and out-group hostility. It may also be defined and constructed as a kind of constitutional patriotism, as pride in the social welfare state or pride in policies of social inclusion. Pride in democratic performance, in societal values and in peaceful policies becomes relevant. Although there is always a small ridge between “negative nationalism” and “positive patriotism” the latter must not be destructive per se.

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