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Xenophobia in Literature and Film as a Re-claim of Space and Re-make of Apartheid

Katunga Joseph Minga

**Abstract**

*Xenophobia in South Africa still needs more analysis just as the field of violence is still wide open for speculation. The primary focus in the evaluation of the causes of xenophobia is on micro-politics and political discourse while the cultural aspect is most often neglected. As a concept, xenophobia is often explained by reference to present-day social, economic and political crises. The explanation that most of the violence facing millions of Africans results from the demands made on people by globalisation is often accepted without question. Moving away from this thinking and mindful of the fact that people do not live outside culture and history, there is a need to evaluate the effect of history and the recent shift in culture on the cancerous violence that infects the soul of South Africa. It is hoped that drawing on the theory of 'home,' developed by Alfred Schuetz, and with an eye on film a window could be opened on culture for understanding xenophobia within its cultural context. In this discussion, the strategy to curb violence and suggestions to improve media representation of Africa are also tackled.*

**Keywords:** *Xenophobia, literature, film, culture, community of space, community of time, home, apartheid, Ubuntu*

**I. Introduction: Socio-Historical Context**

While it is impossible to deny that racial segregation characterised the social fabric of the South African society, it is also clear that the positive attitude of blacks towards their former white oppressors as opposed to their fellow blacks from the neighbouring countries presents a new sociology of events worth examining. The factors contributing to these complex relationships of tolerance towards some and hostility towards others need to be established before any claims, with regard to the nature of the intergroup relationships, is made. As we know, it is true enough that in Africa most countries are not just neighbours but related by bonds of kinship or ethnicity of which the white man who sliced Africa took no account. For example, the Ndebele are found both in South Africa and in Zimbabwe, the Tswana in South

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Africa and in Botswana, the Swati in South Africa and in Swaziland, the Bakongo are in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) while the Zande homeland lies across the frontiers of the Republic of the Sudan, Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic, just to mention a few. Today, one cannot help suspecting that the *Ubuntu* philosophy underlying the African cultures, which were built on the principle of commonality allowing them to live as one in spite of their problems, which in fact were often quickly settled, has changed over the years and the mention of it reduced to a mere slogan.

In the days of apartheid, African humanism “we” was slowly replaced by “I” of Western individualism. With new settlement plans the concept of diversity was destroyed in people’s minds. Assuming that the Africans needed a white man to direct their daily life, it was then thought wiser to create camps of some sort or ‘townships’ so that if there is trouble in Johannesburg, Orlando township, could be, for instance, easily contained. This topography (the mapping) of the city is given full account in Peter Abrahams’ *Mine Boy* (1989) and bishop Huddleston’s *Sophia Town* (1962). The birth of townships in South Africa dissolves into the historic contradictions in terms of which apartheid could be understood as the seed of Xenophobia. In his *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe cites Belinda Bozzoli who argues that the township was a place “where severe oppression and poverty were experienced on a racial and class basis” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 26). “[T]he terminating of land ownership by blacks,” “the control” of townships by whites, “the restrictions on productions for market by blacks in white areas,” “the denial of citizenship to Africans” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 26) were but xenophobic practices. There is no question why xenophobic attacks should start from townships today.

In spite of the country’s long history of racial division, the long absence of communication between South Africans and other Africans was heavy. As a result, the black

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South Africans identified themselves more and more with the Whites and Indians they shared the same space with, and, in their eyes, their African neighbours from other countries became more and more the 'Others,' simply put, the 'Foreigners.' On the other hand, the protest against apartheid united South Africans from different races. This, in one sense, paved the way for the country to introduce a new time frame and inclusive leadership, albeit a slow one to come. With the intensification of racism on one side and new human relations with other ethnic groups developing, on the other, there was an increase dislike of the Africans across the borders, who were no longer seen as sharing with same ancestors but as fundamentally aliens. It was then a mistake to assume that the *Ubuntu* principles would continue to unite Africa or be seen as a moral regulator in an Africa already defined by a system – colonialism – both in terms of time and space. This hatred towards each other, though deplorable, is culturally and historically understandable enough.

Writing about "Xenophobic South Africa," Mbembe (2015) argues that the "current hunt for 'foreigners' is the product of a complex chain of complicities — some vocal and explicit and others tacit." It can be argued that a number of studies directly concerned with xenophobia in one way or another acknowledge its destructive power. Of these studies, the most influential is the one undertaken by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), drawn from Michael Neocosmos' *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post South Africa* (2010), which is indeed a distinguished detailed study of South Africans' attitude towards foreigners. The culture of xenophobia will become visible only when one begins to examine it through the different spheres of society by which features such as race, political affiliation, language and so on become factors from which one can measure the effects of this intolerable dehumanizing experience.

Under the SAMP, the authors developed a 'composite xenophobic score' for each correspondent ranging from 0 (very xenophobic) to 10 (not xenophobic at all). It should be

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noted in passing that the average 3.95 was deemed the highest level of xenophobia and the scores were grouped by variables such as race, class, income, and so on, as already explained. As per ethnic groups, the results revealed the following scores: Whites people were found to be most xenophobic followed by Coloured and then Blacks with the Indians at the bottom of the ladder as the least xenophobic although still below 5. In Neocosmos' words, the categories of 'upper' and 'lower' revealed that the xenophobic highest scores were expected to be among the lowest income earners. Afrikaans speakers were much more xenophobic than other language groups. Measured against the requirements of people's adherence to political parties, it was found that the Democratic Alliance (DA) supporters were more xenophobic than the African National Congress's (ANC) supporters given the fact that DA initially had a large proportion of white people. Having said this, the argument that the attempt to separate, contain, and mend such categories as 'highly xenophobic,' 'less xenophobic' leaks for such concepts should not be seen as being in their natural positions. They are socially constructed and fluid: the less xenophobic of today can become highly xenophobic tomorrow and vice versa. However, these statistics challenge the perception of most people who take appearance for reality, thus accusing black people for being the most xenophobic while the opposite could be true. Xenophobia needs to be judged not only from street violence, but also from the policies and structures of the society that create conditions for people's frustrations and anger which make them turn against each other. The importance of the above study lies in its ability to raise the issue of xenophobia from prejudices directed towards one social group (blacks) as the most xenophobic to viewing this phenomenon as an experience of the country's different social and ethnic groups to which the citizens belong although many would have wanted to regard it as 'black on black crime', to use a popular idiom.

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Other studies too, taking here the case study by the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) at the University of the Witwatersrand, as an example, are rooted in the micro-politics of the country's townships and informal settlements which equally prove their worth for highlighting the political and economic interests of the local people who believe that the presence of the foreign competitor puts them in danger. What is significant about the study by FMSP is not the description of the local people's attitude towards the foreign nationals although that, in itself, is important. It is the involvement of local politicians, presumably a few xenophobic and chauvinistic members of the ruling party and police, who according to this report began to call for ethnic purity. Such self-hatred between brothers was experienced as early as the 1990s within the South African ethnic groups, namely Zulu versus Xhosa, before the new tidal wave of xenophobia found its new target in the foreign nationals.

The most recent development in the study of xenophobia comes from Neocosmos himself. This study bears on the most complex political issues of human rights, citizenship and the like. The study embodied the argument that xenophobia is a political discourse. The state is seen here responsible for this crisis. The author challenges both the privatisation of xenophobia and the belated response by the state despite it being aware that there was fire under the pot. He goes further to challenge the Human Right Discourse which has created in people the idea of 'struggle for their rights' from their state and once the claim to these rights fail, they become violent and seek for a scapegoat: the foreign national, being a fragile member of society, often becomes the first victim. In his explanation of how xenophobia is born and his attack of the state, he writes, "Xenophobia and the authoritarianism of which it is but an example, are a product of liberalism, liberal democracy and Human Rights Discourse" (Neocosmos, 2010, p. 114). "Xenophobia" he further argues, "must be understood and can only be understood as a result of a form of politics where the state is seen as the sole definer of citizenship and where, given the absence of prescriptive politics among the people,

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passivity prevails” (p. 115). The scholar also believes that “the overcoming of xenophobia presupposes the recovery of a prescriptive politics in society” and a “recovery of an active citizenship which alone, under current postcolonial Africa, can make such a prescriptive politics possible” (p. 115). Following the past experience of political struggle against racism “so must the struggle against xenophobia be a political struggle” (p. 115) he argues. He maintains that “people’s rights cannot be protected by state institutions, but ultimately only by an active citizenship and popular politics, for it is the state itself which is the main threat to such rights” (p. 115). It is not clear if Neocosmos refers to the para-state entities as the strength of the country. However, to deny the capability of the state to protect the rights of its people there must be a strong reason for doing so. In practice, the lack of attention to public interests by most of capitalist states, as we know it, confirms the hypothesis that the state cannot control a situation whose conditions it has created nor can it defend people’s interests it helps destroy. The argument that only active participation of citizens, as opposed to the state’s intervention, can bring down the tides of xenophobia, stands.

Here, as most readers have noticed, Neocosmos’ study moves away from the emotionally charged discourse of xenophobia to the state politics passing through the micro-politics above mentioned. To say, however, that the study of xenophobia unleashed harmful powers which are best understood only within the context of politics is not in itself very helpful. If the concerns raised by this issue of xenophobia are restricted to the fields of politics, economics and psychology, the study is still immersed in difficulties that derive from a limited viewpoint: most scholars who have studied the issue of xenophobia have often done so outside its cultural and historical contexts and have almost been convinced that, as a phenomenon xenophobia is ahistorical, and such a neglect of focus on its colonial bonds and the weakening of the ancestral culture, has, in my view, led the preceding researches on this topic a bit astray. A further complication is added by the fact that the term ‘xenophobia’ is

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more than just an event. In fact, what also makes the analysis of this concept difficult is the fact that it has come to refer to a behavior in people's everyday life; in other words, it is more than just the occurrences of violence witnessed in 2008 and 2015. Worse still, embarrassed by the fact that it occurred, South Africans hardly talk about it. The leaders continue to reduce it to instances of criminality, thus putting the blame on a few unruly members of society while the structures that feed it remain untouched. One may still want to know: why have (black) South Africans become so xenophobic? Has history and cultural trans/formations created change within other variables of society? What cultural elements are revealed in the films that inform us of xenophobia? Does the media representation contribute to solving the issue of xenophobia or does it perpetuate the stereotypes towards black people?

The argument in this paper calls to mind the history of the architectural forms of the South African culture and the historical presence of the past at its center informing new behavior patterns. In order to understand xenophobia, one should know that the history of apartheid has played double function in the formation of South African culture. It helped unite races to fight against it while, at the same time, it left people with a culture of struggles. For the black race, whose vast majority has been disfavored by history, the struggle for the 'space' of which they were denied the right (by apartheid regime in this context) to live in, has remained the sole meaning of their existence throughout history. The 1996 speech "I am an African" by the former President Thabo Mbeki touches upon this, "I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land" (Mbeki, 1988).

This political poet's stanza will not pretend to sing South Africa in its Afrikaans-ness. However, it brings in the space owned by the black people in which the blacks lived in harmony with nature. As it is, the 'I owe my being' speaks of privileges and authorized, self-positioning of black South Africans after a long period of humiliation. Races are folded into

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one country, but for 15 generations since the Dutch settled in South Africa in 1652, the country was left only to mourn the death of its own: Hottentots, Bushmen, Kaffirs, etc. as they were derogatory called. As such, the freedom was neither obtained nor given in any innocent way: violence was involved. (I shall come back to this when analyzing *Sarafina*) Today, there is a return to the discourse of violence for the same space, but it is a return made problematic as the former oppressor becomes friend and the returning brother an enemy. In this anthropological account, one recognizes the curse of the god of apartheid which taught people the chauvinism of conquest reinforced by centuries of racial inculcation and racial hatred which now find way in fratricide. War against humanity imposes its dominant violent culture which re-makes itself now and then. When there is no clear strategies and leadership that seek to contain it, what happened will certainly happen again. When identities change, negatively of course, repressed anger makes its way as a symptom of a sick society.

With the suggestive shadow of the above background in mind, it is time to turn to the paradigm of the community of space and community of time to make sense out of the present history of violence before our eyes. This paradigm seems to satisfy such a desire for understanding why it is possible for former enemies to become one and for brothers to invade each other. Discussion of the two concepts of 'space' and 'time' and their related conceptions is of help to the paradoxical nature of the subject of xenophobia at hand.

## **II. The Community of Space and the Community of Time**

In his *The Home Comer*, Schuetz's (1945) approaches the question of the 'home comer' through an analysis of the above two concepts drawn on to put xenophobia in context. Starting with the concept of 'home,' it is not surprising that Africans from other parts of the continent are perceived as foreigners. This is because they are regarded as coming from another home – their countries of origins. A number of Africans have been disturbed by thinking that black South Africans should regard Indians, Chinese, Jews and Whites as

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brothers while Africans from other countries are simply perceived as ‘aliens’ , ‘strangers’, foreigners (or *Makwerekwere*, in vernacular parlance). One remains unimpressed by the ability to define home in terms of one’s origins. For T.S. Eliot, "home is where one starts from" (Schuetz, 1945, p. 370) and for Joseph Beale’s, "home is the place to which a man intends to return when he is away from it" (Schuetz, 1945, p. 370). Each of these interventions has an important bearing on the definition of this concept as a location. The xenophobic phrase ‘They must go back home,’ on the lips of most South Africans, now more sung by South Africans than ‘Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika’ which was sung to unite Africa, constitutes a discriminatory force: the exclusion of those they call ‘others’ from their space, thus ruling out the possibility of living together. Perhaps the most fundamental reason for locating others outside the borders of South Africa is the reluctance to accept the full truth of the fact that all Africans are the product of the same race and share the same origin, home, albeit an ancient one. However, there is to such statements something special that makes it possible for people to define home that way: it is the question of borders and that of citizenship. Perhaps here is not the place to discuss these concepts. What can help is rather asking a different question: whether an African can be non-African wherever he is? Here again much depends on the kind of conception that shapes the mind of the one who gives the answer, whether he refers to citizenship or race. Whatever the case, no amount of xenophobia can obscure the fact that Africans share a common origin and no African is a stranger in Africa. I must now proceed to consider the question of the ‘community of space’ which itself may allow one to understand the ambivalence within which xenophobia operates by accommodating foreigners and rejecting brothers.

Underlying Schuetz’s theory of ‘home comer’ is the relationship between the “Community of space” and “Community of time.” Suppose we refer to local black South Africans as ‘a social group left behind at home’ (assuming that South Africa is the cradle of

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human life and migrations went from here upwards), the other Africans coming here as 'home comers' and the other settlers (Indians, Jews, Whites, etc.) as 'strangers' (I say this not in a pejorative sense). The concept of 'stranger' or 'foreigner' shifts, for example, from whites as former 'strangers' to Africans from other parts of Africa as new 'strangers.' Where does this shift come from? I am sure the economic and political factors in the near present as well as the removed past should be at the centre of this development, if not confusion. This issue, however, must not be viewed only from one side, for while there is the problem of habits and routines inherited from the apartheid system, there is also the need to signal Africa's internal problems: the continent lost touch with itself during the colonial era. It can be argued, therefore, that the balkanisation of the continent made it difficult for African people to maintain continuity of their common culture and relationships now left as though suspended in the air. This danger of discontinuity of African culture is still greater; it discredits the concept of African unity itself.

Schuetz's two concepts of the community of space and community of time assigned to the cultural analysis of xenophobia holds an important role. By the 'community of space,' he argues that "for each partner the other's body, his facial expressions, his gestures, etc. are immediately observable as symptoms of his thought." It does not surprise one that South Africans, as it is with all of us too, can pick up from one's looks, facial expression or accent that one is a local person or an outsider. The community of space also means that "a certain sector of the outer world is equally accessible to all the partners in the face-to-face relationship" (Schuetz, 1945, p. 371). Serving to lay stress on this is that in spite of their internal divisions and differences ranging from skin colour, socio-economic status and culture, South Africans, whites and blacks, share in their long history some things in common, which not only help to ease the pain they have inflicted on each other but also put a certain social demand upon each member of the society to accept others. Black and white

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people may have kept distance from each other, as apartheid would have wished them to, but they rub each other shoulders in the shops, on the farms, at the health care centers, and even when their cars collide on the roads, etc. Whether they like it or not, they all know that the nation shapes itself in such unplanned encounters. This harmony which no hand arranges greatly transcends the policies of the narrowly political systems which the ancient regime proposed or any effort to organise unity the new regime may claim. What community of space deals with, Schuetz, seems to argue, are these concrete situations which unite people. “The same things are within reach, within sight, within hearing, and so on. Within this common horizon there are objects of common interest and common relevance; things to work with or upon, actually or potentially” (Schuetz, 1945, p. 371).

In addition, the second sphere of relationships draws on the deeper involvement in communal things and works towards the expansion of the face-to-face relationship. “The community of time,” as Schuetz describes it, “does not refer so much to the extent of outer (objective) time shared by the partners but to the fact that each of them participates in the on rolling inner life of the other” (Schuetz, 1945, p. 371). The concept is not, one supposes, meant to be superficial in the way that the ‘community of space’ is, but there is here a clear work relationship defined around specific structures. The going into this space among the social group points to common future. For example, the great steps taken by the African National Congress (ANC) in terms of vision and methods of struggle were processes by which South Africans, across all races (Whites, Indians, Coloured and Blacks), participated not without central direction, but for historic progress. ANC was a state machine for the future, and there was not the slightest doubt that the party was going to teach humanism, democracy, tolerance and acceptance of each other, racial equality in the country including the recognition of black leadership in Africa and the world. The vision was in essence humanistic and an excellent one, to be specific, but it, unfortunately, ended up becoming too

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chauvinistic to the exclusion of the rest of the continent. It could be argued that after 1994 the leaders did not make enough efforts to introduce the belated independent South Africa to the rest of Africa and vice versa. This could be elaborated on further by arguing that this neglect had prepared South Africa for this crisis. By destiny South Africa, one could speculate, has a great role to play in the rest of Africa; for their destinies are intertwined. This neglect, however, translates itself in the language of most South Africans who tend to separate the westernised (South) Africa from Africa as a whole as often heard saying: ‘in Africa up there’ whenever referring to the rest of the continent. In other words, Africa, has become for South Africans “a place over there,” “the place of the other,” “to be acted upon, ‘led’ by politicians, studied by academics, ‘developed’ by investors or ‘visited’ by tourists in search of the natural and the authentic”, to repeat Neocosmos’ words (Neocosmos, 2010, p. 107). Taken further, “the subjective relations between South Africa and the continent have thus become quasi-colonial, intensified not only by South Africa and its economic dominance, but also by the role of South Africa as a bridgehead for Western political liberalism on the continent” (Neocosmos, 2010, p. 107). However, as was expected, the ruling party had to answer not only to South Africa’s problems but also to Africa’s centuries-long crisis of ‘unity’ and renaissance of the beloved continent. A stress is laid on the word ‘unity.’ In words, ANC by its formulation indicates that it would defend African interests as if to say the headquarters of Africa, for lack of a proper word, but in fact, it has not raised above its national interests. It is apparent that those who thought themselves in agreement in theories now find themselves in violent disagreement when those theories should be translated into practical rules to advance Africa. To better understand this debate, it is important to remind one of the burden of African renaissance Nelson Mandela felt when South Africa became free:

[W]here South Africa appears on the agenda again, let it be because we want to discuss what its contribution shall be to the making of the new African Renaissance. Let it be

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because we want to discuss what materials it will supply for the rebuilding of the African city of Carthage. (Ngugi, 2009, p. 101)

These words do not differ from any pan-Africanist's dream. David Diop's poem 'Nigger Tramp' shares the same vision:

We shall rebuild Ghana and Timbuktu  
 And refashion guitars inhabited by pounding hoofs  
 Echoing the sonorous pounding of the pestles  
 Of pestles  
 Resounding  
 From hut to hut  
 In the promise of dawn. (Blair, 1981, p. 61)

Returning to Scheutz's *Home comer* and assuming that the home comer's (foreign national from 'African up there' to use South Africans 'xenophobic phrase) presence in South Africa indicates his intention to re-unite or re-establish the 'we-relationships' with his fellow South Africans, this encounter with "the men left behind (native South African in this context) ... reveals that separation which "interrupts the community of space and time which the native "has experienced as a unique individuality" (Scheutz, 1945, p. 369, my extrapolations). "Both sides," Schuetz adds, "build up a system of pseudo-types of the other which is hard to remove and never can be removed entirely because the home comer as well as the welcomer, have changed" (Scheutz, 1945, p. 369). This is not out of tune from what we observe in South Africa today. Taken as a whole the above discussion amounts to a perspective in which:

[i]n the face-to-face relation I can grasp the other's thoughts in a vivid present as they develop and build themselves up, and so can he with reference to my stream of

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thought; and both of us know and take into account this possibility. The other is to me, and I am to the other, not an abstraction, not a mere instance of typical behavior, but, by the very reason of our sharing a common vivid present, this unique individual personality in this unique particular situation. (Schuetz, 1945, p. 371)

This face-to-face relation which Schuetz prefers to call “pure we-relation” forms the point of reference where history may not forget us. In the case of South Africa, this “pure we-relation” is still to build or rebuild between the locals and the home comers (Africans from across the continent). This “we” is possible only when African people will start to work again on their common heritage, a project given account of in a different paper. The uneasiness in Schuetz’s *Home Comer* is comparable to the situation in Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960) in which the returnees (Obi and Clara) find it difficult to be reintegrated back into their communities back home. These home comers display an existential uneasiness once back to Lagos. It is often argued that although the returnee’s memories are very much alive, s/he cannot easily connect with the past because time has changed him or her and the community itself. As Durrschmidt (2014) argues, this is because “home coming is not a story of space but mostly of time and so you can’t really return, you can’t capture the past” which has changed through history and has created new cultures or modes of existence. In this sense, the returnee can no longer be the same so is the native he saw before but has to compromise or readjust to the new realities of life.

So far it was shown how the concepts of community of space and time in literature were almost exclusively focused on a culture obsessed with space and rightly so. Natives’ forgetting that this place is not detached from the rest of Africa has become a problem as a returnee is impatient to the challenges he faces in the process of his or her re-integration in the community. The re-claim of space will be discussed further, but here it is worth emphasizing that despite the natives’ claim that they belong to a distinct time-frame, the idea

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of their common origins is still acceptable. The Bantu migrations which overflowed populations in the central and southern regions of the continent speak clearly to their common home, wherever it was, and of the cultural and linguistic links between them. The excessive patriotism, citizenship conceived in its narrow sense, and the borders whose meaning is little more than the walls of Berlin that reinforce isolation than they unite Africans, Xenophobia, were it to be explained, tends to be understood as a product of some historical and new cultural behaviors which cannot be dismissed as being of little interest in the study of the foundation of this state.

To move on to my second point, there is a question that begs for an answer: what is South African film about? The film, it should be noted, is not just a means for entertainment; it is a source of culture. It is not clear whether media scholars understand that they could shape the culture of violence if their representation is out of focus. The analysis that follows has much less to do with xenophobia than it is with its representation in film.

### **III. Analysis of Two South African Films on Violence**

There are powerful reasons why *Sarafina*, for instance, suited best the apartheid and post-apartheid dramatic medium, and why the youths who survived death live their new lives in *Gangster Paradise: Jerusalema*, *Totsi*, etc., movies which naturally link to *African Jim* (or *Jim Comes to Johannesburg*) directed by Donald Swanson in 1949 claiming ancestorship.

Mbongeni Ngema's *Sarafina* was a 1987 successful Soweto musical which transited to America's screen a few years later. The story in *Sarafina* does not come to one's screen without its own set of meanings, some violent and others not. More than anything else, the movie is first and foremost a racial story. Read as a story of black South African youths resisting white people's supremacy, there must arise what I call 'race against race conflict.' As such, the message of the film may be understood as the appellation of youths into their positions as citizens of South Africa and nothing less. The oppressor, Boer, himself cannot

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resist seeing into the youths more than just a cry to give them better education. With children featuring Mandela in their school concert, the film director pretends not to write for us of the natives' claim of future rule by their black President, the man that history has come to regard as one of the greatest world leaders, once out of prison. On the other hand, the rejection of Afrikaans in schools as the language of education makes one to believe that the subject of the film is courage in a period when everybody felt in their bones that western civilization and languages were not only different, but superior to Africa's primitive ones. The movie plays the emphatic voice of the country's grief for its dead youths, but it also detonates the youths' anger and retaliation. At the very least, no one could ever be sure that violence, even by the victim, was not the vehicle of civic thought. Jailed, tortured for killing the black constable, our beautiful star, Sarafina, utters a few words to her mum (played by Miriam Makeba) that makes the viewer think hard and long, 'Mum you are a hero ... Nobody tells you that.' There is a scene in which Sarafina realises that her mother's patience and the non-violence of her generation was a good approach to solving the country's problem. It also takes a lot of courage to suffer patiently. "There are no heroes in the killing of people, no matter how good the cause," said a scholar.

The story of xenophobia to which one must return is, if anything, a recycling of the culture of violence of the 1970s. There is a sense in which the youths' violence in *Sarafina* could be regarded as a prelude to xenophobia. As shown in the killing of the black constable, burnt alive by the mob of angry youths for siding with the white men, the black youths find the relational structure of brother to brother imploded. While the story offers some positive lessons, however, the violence by the white perpetrator and the reaction by the Soweto born-youth, created a violent world not inconsistent with the passion for hatred, destruction and vengeance as we witness these on the streets today. I argue that the youth's hostility towards the foreign nationals has two sources, the first is by a recording of the violence of the past as

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a reaction against apartheid or racism, and the second is the outburst of anger against the conditions of poverty which were created by the same regime of which, in the eyes of the natives, the foreigner has mistakenly become the cause.

If one is to feel its push, they will need to grant xenophobia something of the ‘brother fighting brother.’ This is how, in xenophobia, the hatred is read: a place that has made problematic every inclusion and exclusion, every confusion between stranger and kin and one where is discharged both anger and joy of killing. What surprised the world the most in the past xenophobic attacks of 2008 and 2015 was not the violence but the perpetrators’ enthusiastic hatred towards migrants. It made things look very strange indeed.

The history of apartheid describes a fatal trajectory from racism to tribalism and xenophobia whose evils were inherited. Perhaps without noticing it, the scene of burial in *Sarafina* is the most important one. As Scott Holland once said, “We are powerless against the dead. It is they who are strong; it is we who are as impotent .... Those who are in their graves long ago put out their wills upon the living world of today and forbid it its free growth ... They hinder us, therefore from understanding where we are, or taking true measure of forces under which we are living” (n.p). The ghosts of slavery, imperialism, and apartheid are gone, but they have not taken their works with them, and it is our responsibility to bury them.

If it has been argued that hatred against each other in *Sarafina* is a purely historical act, *Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema* (a 2008 South African crime film written and directed by Ralph Ziman) is constructed in such a way as to show the effects of apartheid. It remains a ghost which continues to haunt people even if believed dead. What remains to be seen here is how xenophobia is also part and parcel of this ideology of brother against brother in this film. Set during the political death of apartheid, *Jerusalema* cries for the place of the youth in South African post-apartheid economy and education and gangsterism has been the

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inevitable outcome of the marginalised youth in any country as the only means for survival. Unable to get a university scholarship, Lucky Kunene starts stealing cars and ends up as the top gangster and property owner in Johannesburg's Hillbrow. Kunene's criminal career path reflects the disillusionment and disappointment he and many other young township dwellers face even today. *Jerusalema* takes its filmic space to expose what apartheid had produced: 'fathers-who-were-sons remake sons-who-will-be-fathers in their own form' (Henderson, 1998, p. 229). The different types of characters – the Afrikaner woman who helps Kunene's register his 'Hillbrow People's Housing Trust,' a Portuguese slumlord whose building Kunene steals, the Jews from whose family he has a girlfriend, Leah Friedlander, whose brother he offers to rescue from drug dealers although he dies as a result of his drugs – offer a credible insight into South Africa as a mix of racial groups and 'rainbow-nation' in which all come in search of better life. However, it is not when it comes to Kunene's attitude towards his fellow brothers from the neighbour countries among whom the most known being the Nigerian drug-lord, Tony Ngu. The film can itself become the place for the interpretation of signs – skin colour. Chris Chatteris (2008) observes that, "[x]enophobia is also presciently there as Lucky and his gang come eyeball to eyeball with Nigerian drug dealers, the leader of whom turns out to be a pretty irredeemable villain as he takes frightful revenge after being sidelined by Lucky." He further argues that "most nationalities at some time have to put up with being the really bad guys: back in the eighties it was white South Africans, then it became Arabs, followed by Russians and now it's Nigerians" (Chatteris, 2008).

*Jerusalema* feeds its viewers with hallowed horrific scenes of brothers-in-death, brother chasing brother, and brother killing brother. The movie reinforces the stigma and fear by the natives of foreigners being job takers, carriers of HIV/AIDS, criminals, and so on. I must indeed stress, as does Timothy J. Corrigan (2007), that "analysing our reactions to themes, characters, or images [in movies] ... can be a way not only of understanding a movie better

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but also of understanding better how we view the world and the cultures we live in” (Corrigan, 2007, p. 4). The film anticipates, if that is the right word to use, the xenophobic attacks of 2009 and 2015. One cannot fail to see the realistic presentation of xenophobia within society of which *Jerusalema* gives a characteristic glimpse. There is no evidence to support the theory that people’s hostile views towards foreigners during the past years were influenced by such movies, but there is no proof to deny it either. Otherness informs the discourse of xenophobia and makes it visible on allegations such as ‘Nigerians spoil our children with drugs’ on which account Ngu was killed.

The politics of exclusion is based on the fear to share the same space which many have come to identify as *afro-phobia*. By so doing, one may ask whether the film remakes apartheid. My answer is yes. The hostility against foreigners becomes something Kunene vainly wishes to delete as the racism that turned him into a criminal will not allow him to see foreigners as sufferers of misfortune as he is. While the romance between Kunene and his Jewish girlfriend shows a step towards the country’s integration, the “we” of Schuetz and of the *Ubuntu* principle, Kunene’s disrespectful eye on Africans from other African countries nullifies it. What concerns Kunene the most is why Ngu occupies his space with drugs. Thus, he kills him and throws his body as something which abominates him to aversion. *Jerusalema* is what it tells us it is – a tale of criminality, hatred, theft and the difficulty to live together with others of foreign nationalities. What disturbs in the movie then most is Kunene’s narrowly defined intellectualism by which he claims the words of Karl Max and Al Capone, American gangster, as his source of inspiration:

I have two heroes: Carl Marx and Al Capone. Al Capone said, “If you’re going to steal, steal big and hope like hell you don’t get caught.” Carl Marx said, “All property is theft ...” I think they would both be proud of me. (Ziman, 2008)

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Taking this further, ultra-nationalism/chauvinism has made natives' anger towards the non-nationals uncontrollable. Again, one should not be deceived by mere appearances into believing that the culture of xenophobia is wholly foreign to South African black middle class – the intellectuals. If it is looked at more nearly, it will be found that they are today's re-makers of apartheid. Achille Mbembe (2015) exposes their xenophobic colours quite clearly:

South African big business is expanding all over the Continent, at times reproducing in those places the worse forms of racism that were tolerated here under Apartheid. While big business is 'de-nationalizing' and 'Africanizing,' poor black South Africa and parts of the middle class are being socialized into something we should call 'national-chauvinism.'

The above quote presents the context which has caused many to place xenophobia on the same footing as that of racism or apartheid. However, the danger of national chauvinism is that it does not only make victims from one side, but rather it is, as Mbembe suggests, "in permanent need of scapegoats" (2015). Like cancer, "It starts," he goes on, "with those who are not our kins but very quickly, it turns fratricidal. It does not stop with 'these foreigners'" (Mbembe, 2015). "It is in its DNA" and ends up "turning onto itself in a dramatic gesture of inversion" (Mbembe, 2015). For example, a gunfight in which Ngu was killed, Kunene's friend, Nazareth, was also killed while Kunene sustains serious injuries himself. This reminds us of xenophobia's vicious circle.

Xenophobia, however, is not a new phenomenon. It did not begin with South Africa nor will it end with South Africa. Frantz Fanon (2002) gives account of it in his *Wretched of the Earth*. The years 1960s saw this phenomenon across the continent: in Senegal, Congo, and Côte d'Ivoire. The foreign nationals had their "shops burnt, their street stalls wrecked with ... government[s] commanding them to go in order to give the nationals satisfaction" (Fanon, 2002, p.125). Here, the locals "jumped at the chance which was afforded them by their leaders to get rid of the [foreigners], who, they thought, hamper them in commercial matters

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and administrative posts” (p. 126). “The sole motto of the locals, as is the case in South Africa today, was “[r]eplace the foreigner” (Fanon, 2002, p. 127).

That said, let me turn to the issue of the representation of violence and black people in this film. “It is debatable whether portraying the arch-villain as foreign is helpful just at the moment, when we are trying to recover from such violence” (Chatteris, 2008). In his assessment of the situation, Chatteris sees the relationship between South Africans and foreign nationals as a slippery ground. He believes that the film’s representation of violence was not well-managed. The viewers could not avoid contemplating up close the hatred for each other. The film more inspired in most viewers hatred than it did reconciliation.

Most South Africans view with satisfaction *Jerusalema* as exposing the apartheid. Emily Milstein (2014) argues that “a key feature of post-apartheid South African film is the use of film as a platform from which to communicate one’s grievances, beliefs, and political views” (p.183). The movie, critics say, points out the government’s “failure to provide adequate housing and social services to impoverished, black South Africans,” and it shows that “poverty and a lack of economic options drive people to drug” (Milstein, 2014, p.186). While this has been partly achieved in the above movies, however, it is worth taking a moment to ask if the film industry (media) could have done more than that to heal the nation and make relations between the brothers in conflict understandable rather than just stereotyping them.

Whether *a film* succeeds or not in its critique (of the state or society) is determined by how it does it. Josef Gugler’s *African Film: Re-Imagining a Continent* (2003) finds a good example of representation in *Xala*, the masterpiece of Sembene Ousmane, a man who has come to be regarded as the father of African cinema. Ousmane will be discussed further in due course.

While Ziman’s storyline involves the Johannesburg city ills of post-apartheid South Africa – theft, gangsterism, xenophobia, drugs, etc. – his portrayal of black characters is, to me,

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inappropriate. The movie tackles the effects of leaving the causes murky. The principal character should not be the boy of the 1990s, Kunene, a victim of the violence of apartheid himself because ‘real’ gangsters, we need to observe, are the bourgeois. While Ziman’s observation of the city of Johannesburg is accurate, it generates an ambiguous narrative in which the social space of violence, by an irredeemable black man, leaves a lot to desire. One expected to see actions of the gluttony of capitalists from which frustrations arise, yet again they are less articulated. “The fable of equality” (Fussell, 1983, p. 17) is a hidden form of violence, and it is difficult for ordinary people to notice how it works silently to destroy society. It is, therefore, the work of the artist to bring these injustices forth and help viewers understand that xenophobia a byproduct of a system and not something which has come to us in unexpected ways; it has a history, a culture. The 1992 *Sarafina* could be read as an account of juvenile violence caused by racism while the 2008 *Jerusalem* is its mature, continued and extreme dramatic expression due to lack of choices in a post-apartheid society faced with growing aspirations.

The creation of the black gangster as a character is nothing more than a tool used by artists to show a post-apartheid South Africa gone violent. Most South African films, as already argued, present this representational gap. Perhaps it is not wrong to say that most post-apartheid films aim at portraying black people as anti-heroes. This imagery is found in *Jerusalem* (2008), *Mampantsula* (1988), *KZN Ruins* (2011), and so on. Boggs found out that postmodern cinema often depicts society in the midst of chaos and violence (as cited in Monk-Turner & Cunningham, 2004). The problem of most films depicting blacks in South Africa, particularly if one holds the same opinion as Boggs does, is that stereotypes are deliberately produced – it is an attack on human dignity. The theatricality of black characters developed in the above films is too stereotypical that it needs attention. The representation of a black male from a hero, who defeated the mighty apartheid, to a villain who destroys his

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own community and commits crimes in order to survive has to be discouraged. Lance R. Lütge's 2011 monograph *Representing the 'Black' Male Gangster: A Comparative Analysis of Stereotypes in Three South African Films - Mampantsula (1988), Jerualema (2008), and KZN Ruins* moves in that direction. However, the point of this argument is not simply to restore the dignity tarnished by the media of black men. It is also meant to restore our perception of the concrete situation in which xenophobia must be taken seriously: it is deep-seated in South African culture and history across all races as a problem whose deep roots continuously cause frustrations among the youths.<sup>1</sup> Media scholars may find themselves making the mistake of eliminating any possibility to educate the masses and rescue society from violence if the focus is to turn black people's experiences into theatrical scenes. Unless the media find another way of representing black people, unless media owners use their public space to suggest change in people's behaviour, they will neither build South Africa nor contribute to Africa's knowledge production.

Josef Gugler (2003) raises the concern about news that reaches our screens. The media, he argues, focus "on disasters: droughts, epidemics, and war. It is the news of crises. It rarely touches on achievements, and it certainly does not portray every life in Africa" (Gugler, 2003, p. 1). Similarly, Mai Palmberg (2001) argues, "The black image in good or bad remains tarnished" and "the negative images and stereotyping are as old as the relations between Europeans and Africans" (p. 7). While there has been no denial that "crises news is important in that it can play a major role in mobilising public opinion" (Gugler, 2003, p. 1) one needs a better understanding of it in its context. Some also maintain:

Media violence is generally seen as a problem because it may desensitize viewers,

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<sup>1</sup> The South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) teams up with others to argue that the underlying causes of xenophobia rest not in the foreigners but in the structures: the "intolerable levels of poverty, unemployment and crime, and shortage of housing in poor community" (Neocosmos, 2010, p.122). To this COSATU adds, "[e]ven if they [foreign nationals] were all to leave tomorrow, the levels of unemployment would remain about the same, and so would the extent of poverty which afflicts at least half our population" (p. 122).

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making them less sensitive to violence in general; it may cause viewers to distort their world view, which increases their fear of victimisation, it may lead to behavioural effects where viewers imitate such violence thereby increasing antisocial behaviour as well as increasing their taste for ever more violence. (Monk-Turner & Cunningham, 2004, p. 2)

In this manner, these movies may have contributed to the culture of violence, however indirect that may have been. While it is true that the viewing of violent films is inevitable since violence in today's world happens every second, but careful attention is required regarding how it should be represented. One needs to reflect on these questions: who owns media companies? How often are there debates on media violence regulation? What model do the media provide for children when portraying violence? Is there any hope that the negative portrayal of black men in the media could change? Should we count on the distant western media involved in the denigration of black humanity before we have our dignity back and unite on our own soil? Is not there some need for a serious role to be played by the media in Africa to restore the tarnished image of their continent? As things stand, the image of black man in the media is positioned as an 'other,' and it is a subject for which the study of films is needed.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Coming out of Intractability**

It is not helpful complaining about xenophobia, but the question is how do we fix the problem? In few words, the solution lies, in part, in helping to change peoples' identities. Discussion of the consequences of media stereotypes and finding strategies to regulate film industry are important issues. It has been argued that films (documentaries) play an important role in mobilising international opinion. Movies about apartheid like *Sarafina*, *Last Grave at Dimbaza* by Nana Mahomo, and others have done so. Let us not forget that South Africa plays an important role in film industry in Africa. As such, if the films here are westernised

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and perpetuate negative stereotypes about the continent, this industry is destroying the image of Africa. African films must play their role to “*re-image* Africa,” to use the words of Gugler (2003, p. 4), despite being dependent on financial support, technicians and productive facilities from Europe. Written literature as well as the media should try to use strategies to educate school children and large audience how to solve their problems. They should try to present issues such as genocide, xenophobia, corruption, apartheid, rape, hunger, diseases, migration, etc. in their ultimate contexts and propose practical solutions reflecting African perspectives without denying our challenges.

If there were a need to refer to a work of art which addresses Africa’s problems in a critical and entertaining style while suggesting solutions, there would be no hesitation to cite Ousmane Sembene’s *Xala* whose qualities have not been celebrated. The story of El Hadji’s *Xala* is an allegory in which a rich Senegalese man “represents, experiences, and eventually articulates the impotence of his class (Gugler, 2003, p. 126). It is an account of El Hadji’s impotence as a result of a spell cast on him on the night of his third wedding. Although *Xala* exposes the economic and cultural impotence of post-colonial Africa in very strong terms, the film does so in an entertaining way. Rama, El Hadji’s daughter, unlike her father respects her African roots, is dressed in African attire, adores her Wolof language, decorates her room with pictures of African heroes, and is a modernised young lady. Sembene creates this female character to show that not all is destroyed, and that there is still hope for Africa. The film ends with the beggars, often regarded by El Hadji as human waste, storming his residence. They request El Hadji to undress while his wife and kids are watching as a way of humiliating him while restoring his manhood at the same time. The film defends neither western democracy nor communism but African socialism and unity.

The major response to the crisis of identity and xenophobia, along with the desire to authentic African heritage, is African unity. *Intractable Conflicts and their Transformation*

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by Louis Kriesberg, Terrel A. Northrup, and Stuart J. Thorson (1989) suggests strategies to come out of an intractable situation by “settlement” and “transformation” (Kriesberg, Terrel, & Thorson, 1989, pp.76-81). The authors argue that with derigidification intractability is transformed into tractability, and “we” replaces the “us/them” split (p. 80) with the result that the parties in conflict “accept their difference and even value them.” This, however, is reachable once identities are transformed – facilitated by ‘dialogue.’ Although mention is made of Schwartz, Schuetz, and Kriesberg, nobody explains the “we” better than the African himself. African people distinctly perceive not the “I think, therefore I am” of Descartes, but rather the “I am because we are.” Objection could be raised that an African man speaks of no personal consciousness but of “we,” but for the African the collective “we” is taken seriously. To him, it is the social group’s existence that gives meaning to an individual being for if the ‘self’ is overemphasized, it will be at liberty and result in selfishness. Among the ties which bind men together what is stronger than the sense of brotherhood? However, like Cain who killed his brother Abel and when asked by God “Where is thy brother?” we answer, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Henry, 2010, p. 16). We have forgotten that life within family or tribe is linked together not for punishment but for preservation. It was, therefore, no fiction what the French Philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, wrote in his 1958 essay entitled ‘Nous sommes tous des assassins’ (‘We are all assassins’). It is the Bible he was transposing; it is the brotherhood of man, fatalism and responsibility he was referring to.<sup>2</sup> It is important to stress that *Ubuntu* is associated both with humanism and unity. Humanity is one great body, and we as

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<sup>2</sup>According to Sartre, French citizens were all culpable for the French government’s action of enforcing the death penalty for its actions in Algeria. He seems to ask: ‘Are we less responsible for such horrors happening at our door steps because we didn’t kill anybody?’ In Sartre’s view, you are personally responsible for all the injustice in your country if you choose to do nothing about it. For example, you are responsible for the deaths at sea of immigrants coming over on boats, for those devoured by lions when crossing your borders or for any parts of your country’s foreign policy with which you disagree but then do nothing about it while people continue to die. Passivity in the face of inhumanity, says he, is equal to complicity.

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individuals are all members of that body. Man is united to man, nation to nation, and stupid is the idea that convinces us that man lives to himself. Xenophobia is not sufficient to override the ancient testimony by the Arabian who said that “He who has drunk from the waters of Africa will drink again” (Ben-Jochannan, 1989, p.108). I should add, however, that it does not matter in whose hands Africa and its people fall, in a writer’s book, on a painter’s canvas, or even behind the television screen that tarnishes their image day after day. Barthes was right when he thought of hatred between brothers as something that, in fact, would unite them:

Hatred does not divide the two brothers .... it brings them closer together; they need each other in order to live and in order to die, their hatred is the expression of a complementarity and derives its force from this very unity: they hate each other for being unable to tell each other apart ... What brothers seek in order to vent their hatred is not battle, the abstract, strategic annihilation of enemy; it is the individual clinch, the physical conflict and embrace; and this is how they die, in the lists. Whether it is womb, throne, or arena, they can never escape the same space that confines them, a unique protocol has ordained their birth, their life, and their death. And the efforts they make to tear themselves away from each other is merely the final triumph of their identity. (Henderson, 1998, p. 224)

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