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Apartheid Vertigo

The Rise in Discrimination Against Africans in South Africa

David M. Matsinhe

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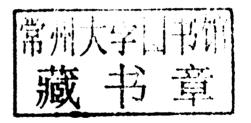# in Ethnic, Gender and Class Relations

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About the Author

David M. Matsinhe was educated in Canada, Mozambique and South Africa. He holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Alberta. His research interests include historical sociology of emotions, political sociology, group relations, violence, and development. He is an Adjunct Professor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada.

Preface

This book is about apartheid vertigo – the ghostly presence of a past we would rather repress – the weight of nightmares on our collective conscious and subconscious –the dizzying sensation of tilting and spinning that convolutes our surroundings, disorients and distorts our reality perception. This book examines the hangover of our collective and personal histories – our twisted being in the world that overshadows and contaminates everything we touch, build, think, say, know, ignore, envy, love, hate, etc. Most importantly, it mediates the ways in which we relate to one another in South Africa, whether we are insiders or outsiders.

From 1994 to 2000, I lived in South Africa as an international student. I arrived in Johannesburg from Maputo, Mozambique, in March 1994. I was naïve. The apartheid regime had fallen. Nelson Mandela had been released. The ban had been lifted from all anti-apartheid organizations. The exiles, the freedom fighters, had retuned home. F.W. de Klerk was still president – but not for long. In the following month, the first black government was elected with Mandela and the African National Congress on its helm. Clearly, blacks were coming in from the cold. Now they were rising to power. Alongside these events was an uncomfortable atmosphere all around us. It was palpable. The stench of a dying past still filled the air. We breathed it. Apartheid had left enormous footprints on the land, on the social and political culture, and on the collective and individual psychic structures. The fruits of apartheid – misery, anger, fear, shame, violence, and seduction of revenge – were all there. Then came the Truth and Reconciliation Commission opening the veins of a sick society and exposing the depth of raw human cruelty and emotions. I already said I was naïve. However, I was soon to eat from the fruit of knowledge. For not only did I learn but also experienced myself for the first time in my short life as black. Yet there was something peculiar, uncomfortable, about this blackness, which set me apart from local blackness. My blackness was excessive. I overflowed with surplus blackness, some locals found hard to swallow. The reflections put forth in this book were shaped by this lived experience.

The contents of this book have been the subject of discussion with friends and colleagues who, in the process, shaped my thoughts significantly. At the University of Alberta, I am grateful to Ali Abdi, Amy Kaler, Ernes Khalema, George Pavlitch, Guy Thompson, L. Mawuko-Yevugah, Malinda Smith, Max Zhira, Nick Jonh, Phil Okeke, Rob Shields, and Sara Dorow. At Queen's University in Kingston, I extend my gratitude to Marc Epprecht. At the University of Johannesburg, I thank Celestin Muboyayi, Fili Chambo, Hilma Shindondola, Justice Lepheane, Ken Phiri, Marcel Korth, and Peter Alexander. At the University of the Witwatersrand, my thanks go to the Director of Forced Migration Studies Programme, Lauren Landau. I am

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Series Editor's Preface

Biko Agozino

On a trip to South Africa to give a talk at one of the top universities, the taxi driver that picked me up from the airport did not waste time before telling me that the high rates of crime and violence in the country were largely to be blamed on Nigerian immigrants. As he drove to the hotel, we passed some large billboards with the face of a familiar Nigerian professor, Kole Omotoso, fronting the Vodacom 'Yebo Gogo (Yes Grandma) cell phone marketing campaign in the country. With notes of caution from my hosts to be careful, I later went to the local market and could easily overhear some of the traders speaking in Igbo, my Nigerian language. A Professor from Zimbabwe finally answered my doubts about the alleged crime-proneness of Nigerian immigrants by telling me not to believe the hype because he knew many Nigerian immigrants who would hold down two or three jobs at a time and still manage to run a business on the side. He believed that the hostility is born out of envy that the immigrants from other African countries came and some of them prospered in a very short time, compared to many of the natives who appeared stuck in poverty and chronic unemployment.

Dr David Matsinhe has finally delivered a scholarly explanation for the cycles of violence against mainly black African immigrants in South Africa since the end of apartheid, a phenomenon that he experienced personally when he lived in South Africa from 1994–2000 as an international student from Mozambique with 'overflowing blackness' that the natives found 'difficult to swallow'. His naivety that the transition from apartheid would mean a more just society for all suffered from disillusionment. Based on his doctoral dissertation in Canada for which he spent time doing fieldwork in South Africa, he explains that the phenomenon is to be understood as part of 'apartheid vertigo' or 'ghosts and hangovers' of the past that prove irrepressible in transitional societies with tendencies to categorize people into insiders and outsiders.

Using the book, *Kaffir Boy*, by Marc Mathabane, as a point of departure for his book, Matsinhe argues that having been treated as undeserving of decency for decades by the apartheid regime, many black South Africans may have internalized the racism by looking at their own kind as sub-human while desiring to be given access to the privileges reserved for the white minority. *Kaffir Boy* was the racist term used by white South Africans as a derogatory remark for black African men who were expected to accept this insult, stand out of the way of whites on sidewalks, and learn to love classical European music and white sports like tennis while shunning African customs like male circumcision, living in the Bantustans,

and deferring to chiefs and elders. He suggests that with the formal ending of apartheid, black South Africans did not wish to fight over scarce resources with too many black immigrants from other African countries who speak an incoherent language and are therefore snubbed as *Makwerekwere* or people of *Kwerekwere* language, apparently the new *Kaffir Boys* of post-apartheid South Africa.

Readers of this book are welcome to compare the analogy of *Kaffir Boy* with the accounts of the troublemaker to be found in the memoirs of the freedom fighters who refused to bow to the ideology of white supremacy and instead chose to fight for the dignity of all South Africans, irrespective of race, gender, class, or language. The *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, for instance, would serve as an antidote to the painful self-deprecating narrative in *Kaffir Boy* and offer a glimpse of hope to all Africans that the violent brotherphobia highlighted in the media as xenophobia is not embraced by every black South African. For instance, the survey opinions from Afrobarometer quoted by the author repeatedly showed that only one-third of the samples were anti-African immigration. In addition, the author shows that the black African immigrants came to South Africa from countries with their own painful histories of mass violence of one sort or another but without a legacy of *Kaffir Boy* as an explanation in their own countries of origin. Hence, David Matsinhe is not out to prove that South Africa is unique in this respect, rather he attempts to outline the human costs of social deprivation that frequently leads to the search for scapegoats in divided communities.

Following the 'process sociology' of Norbert Elias, the author attempts to examine the processes through which individuals and groups interact in a dynamic fashion alien to the systems theories of structural functionalism. Using European dance styles to represent the processes of human figuration, Elias suggested that the changing patterns of the steps in line with partners indicates that human relationships are not frozen. For South African readers, it will be interesting to see if this analogy of dance as a symbol of social relations is applicable to the gum boot dance or even the *toi toi* dance with loaded political meanings aimed against oppressors who would not dare join the dance of freedom fighters without turning it into a fight. The view of Elias that human society is a society of individuals may be challenged by the fact that intergroup relations are very much evident everywhere such that immigrants might be attacked by other groups not for being individuals but for belonging to the outsider group. In-group and out-group dynamics could be observed in communities that are racially and religiously homogenous, as Elias admitted, if something like a new housing estate could be used to differentiate between the old village dwellers and the new residents. Anticipating critique that he may have adopted a Eurocentric framework for dealing with an African problem, the author announces that he set out to borrow theoretically without regard to race or origin of thinkers.

Drawing from the work of Du Bois and Fanon, the author makes the theoretical framework more relevant to the South African situation by considering the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. On the one hand, it is true that the colonized might internalize the racism of the colonizer and even express it

towards other colonized people but it is also true that many of the colonized rebel against colonialism and fight for freedom, equality and dignity for all. For instance, Fanon warned against the 'Pitfalls of National Consciousness' because of the tendency for the search for national purity to continue even after the foreigner had been forced to withdraw, leading to civil strife. Also drawing from African studies texts the author tried to show that apartheid and colonialism involved citizen-subject or outsider-insider dualities that continue after decolonization (Mamdani); that Africans are the inventions of European philosophers who control the thinking of Africans still (Mudibe); and that the post-colony signifies that the ex-colonials were still seen as animals who fight one another over trivialities (Mbembe). Readers from Africana Studies or Black Studies might want to challenge these views from the work of Africa-centered scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop, Molefi Asante, Karenga Mualanga, Ifi Amadiume, Nkiru Nzegwu, Oyeronke Oyewunmi and many others who insist that Africa was the origin of civilization and that scholars of African descent have made enough contributions to knowledge not to be ignored in the dash for Eurocentric ideas even by scholars of African descent whose research focus on African issues and should therefore be more Africa-centered.

The methodology of participant observation was adopted by the author for the ethnographic research in inner city Johannesburg but he also acknowledged that being located in Canada as a scholar gave him privileged access to the field that he may not have had were he simply a student from Mozambique. He considers explanations for the tendency to target black Africans during violent attacks and rejects the bio-cultural visibility thesis given that white immigrants were bio-culturally visible but rarely touched by xenophobic violence. He prefers an explanation based on the fact that since the end of apartheid, black South Africans were offered opportunities to become insiders in South Africa for the first time and it can be expected that they would guard this right jealously against any potential rivals. However, given the fact that it is the elite blacks who were given access to become insiders while the urban poor remained outsiders, the influx of large numbers of poor immigrants in their midst resulted in the formation of in-group and out-group identities among the poor based on national pride.

To make the matters worse, public officials like police officers, the military, immigration officials and some leading politicians seek to maintain the outsider status through discriminatory practices. The suggestion is frequently that the outsiders are evil, though sometimes necessary evil, as Chief Buthelezi once put it. In return, the immigrants begin to organize their own separate religious practices where services are held in their own languages and the insiders see such as further evidence that the immigrants do not wish to look and sound local. The immigrants then spread their own retaliatory gossip to blame poor South Africans for all their troubles, forgetting that the discriminatory policing that they suffer, for instance, also affects poor South Africans to the extent that more than 85 per cent of the prison population in the country is made up of black South Africans.

The author goes on to chart the invention of whiteness in South Africa and all the attendant ills of white supremacy that contributed to the de-civilization of

the country along violent repressive lines. His conclusion is that Makwerekwere emerged from the history of bitter exclusion of the majority from their own country and suggested that the end of apartheid with truth and reconciliation might prove inadequate to tackle the problem of mass violence unless the continued exclusion of the poor South Africans is addressed through some form of education that would expose the futility of blaming outsiders and through economic empowerment for the masses of the poor.

This book is a good addition to the Ashgate Publishers Interdisciplinary Research Series in Ethnic, Gender and Class Relations given that it helps readers to come to terms with black-on-black violence in South Africa that is similar to violence against black people by white-supremacist groups in Europe and North America. The suggestion here is that since the violence is often dominated by poor young black men as perpetrators and as victims, we need to seriously theorize the role of ethnicity, class and gender as well rather than focus on racism alone, following the insights of the South African scholar, Harold Wolpe, and those of Stuart Hall who followed Wolpe to develop the theory of race-class-gender articulation, disarticulation and re-articulation in societies structured in dominance.

Blacksburg, VA, USA

Abbreviations

ACAS	Association des Cameroonais en Afrique du Sud
AESCA-SA	Association of English Speaking Cameroonians in South Africa
AIAS	Association des Ivoiriens en Afrique du Sud
AMESA	The Association of Momo-Elits South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
ASTP	Asylum Seeker Temporary Permit
CSVR	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
FF	Freedom Front
FMSP	Forced Migration Studies Program
GHAJOSA	Ghanaian Association in Johannesburg
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
IFP	Inkhatha Freedom Party
IJR	Institute of Justice and Reconciliation
IPM	Institute of People Management
LHR	Lawyers for Human Rights
NFMSA	The Nigerian Family Meeting in South Africa
NP	National Party
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OJSI	Open Society Justice Initiative
PAC	Pan-African Congress
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADF	South African Defense Force
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAMC	South African Medical Council
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
SANDF	South African National Defense Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
TPPP	Temporary Permit to Prohibited Persons
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

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