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Editorial (p. 3)

Focus Section: Xenophobic Violence and the Manufacture of Difference in Africa

▶ **Xenophobic Violence and the Manufacture of Difference in Africa: Introduction to the Focus Section** Laurent Fourchard / Aurelia Segatti (pp. 4 – 11)

"Go Back and Tell Them Who the Real Men Are!" Gendering Our Understanding of Kibera's Post-election Violence Caroline Wanjiku Kihato (pp. 12 – 24)

A Reappraisal of the Expulsion of Illegal Immigrants from Nigeria in 1983 Daouda Gary-Tounkara (pp. 25 – 38)

Collective Mobilization and the Struggle for Squatter Citizenship: Rereading "Xenophobic" Violence in a South African Settlement Tamlyn Jane Monson (pp. 39 – 55)

Protecting the "Most Vulnerable"? The Management of a Disaster and the Making/Unmaking of Victims after the 2008 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa Lydie Cabane (pp. 56 – 71)

Open Section

The Domestic Democratic Peace in the Middle East Uriel Abulof / Ogen Goldman (pp. 72 – 89)

Group-based Compunction and Anger: Their Antecedents and Consequences in Relation to Colonial Conflicts Ana Figueiredo / Bertjan Doosje / Joaquim Pires Valentim (pp. 90 – 105)

The Secret Society of Torturers: The Social Shaping of Extremely Violent Behaviour Jürgen Mackert (pp. 106 – 120)

Validation of the Greek Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) Scale: Examining Its Relationships with Sexist and Conservative Political Beliefs Alexandra Hantzi / Efthymios Lampridis / Katerina Tsantila / Gerd Bohner (pp. 121 – 133)

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Xenophobic Violence and the Manufacture of Difference in Africa: Introduction to the Focus Section

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Over the past decade, the exploration of xenophobia, particularly of the violence xenophobia may unleash and its related effects on citizenship outside of Western Europe, has been limited. If there is a large body of research on autochthony and xenophobic practices in a number of African countries, much less is known on the outcomes of xenophobic violence and how it reshapes the making of authority, the self-definition of groups making claims to ownership over resources and the boundaries of citizenship. Analyses of collective violence in Africa have devoted much attention to conflict over land ownership, civil wars or vigilantism while quantitative studies have placed much emphasis on putative difference between labelled groups in the production of "ethnic violence". In this issue, we understand autochthony, nativism and indigeneity as local concepts used by actors in situations of xenophobia. Xenophobia is consequently understood as the systematic construction of strangers as a threat to the local or national community justifying their exclusion and sometimes their suppression. Drawing on extensive empirical research undertaken over the past four years across three countries (Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa), this issue intends to offer renewed analysis on the understanding of xenophobic violence focusing on local and urban scales using historical and ethnographic methods. Focusing on micro-level qualitative research helps avoid reflecting a monolithic image of the "state", "society" or "community" and underestimating internal struggles among elites in the production of violence; it also helps contesting analyses which exclusively look at violence inflicted on behalf of a group claiming to share an exclusive identity; it eventually allows to reconsider how processes of violent exclusion are contested, disputed, ignored or fought against by a number of actors.

The outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa in May 2008 left sixty-two dead, seven hundred injured and over one hundred thousand displaced. The targets of the violence were mainly foreigners from other African countries, although South Africans made up one-third of the dead. The violence started in Alexandra township in Johannesburg before spreading to other townships, mainly in the province of Gauteng and in and around the cities of Cape Town and Durban. Many of the 140 affected areas were townships and so-called informal settlements. However, the 2008 xenophobic riots are best understood if envisaged as a specific moment of crisis along a broader continuum of low-intensity violence emerging in the mid-1990s and manifesting itself regularly after 2008: in 2010, 2013 and again in March and April 2015. This now seemingly deeply-rooted expression of rejection has lead some analysts in South Africa to consider xenophobic violence as one idiom in the growing repertoire of protest (Von Holdt and Alexander 2012). Cases of mass violence against groups considered as foreign to the national body or the local community that have emerged in several other African countries (Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Kenya) have been labelled not as "xenophobic" but rather as pertaining to "ethnic cleansing", "religious riots", "communal clashes" or "autochthonous or indigenous conflicts". These different labels, which reveal the multiple manners in which citizenship, state institutions and social relationships have been historically constructed in different countries, need to be interrogated. Viewed from outside the continent, envisaging these manifestations of group violence could lead to an analytical bias: the risk of considering the continent (except for its most industrialised countries like South Africa) as more prone to a specific type of belonging divorced from other historical trends; in other words, as a continent domi-

nated by "ethnic", "religious" and "first-comer claims" rooted in the past as opposed to other regions, mainly the West (and South Africa), characterised by nationalism and "non-ethnic" citizenship associated with territory through place of birth and/or residence (Zenker 2011). There is thus a need to return to the meanings of the words as well as questioning the continent's supposed differences.

The word "xenophobia" is understood as the systematic construction of strangers as a threat to society justifying their exclusion and at times, suppression. It often refers to discourses and practices that are discriminatory towards foreign nationals. Wimmers (1997) sheds light on the existence of deeper political struggles for the collective goods of the state and the building of structures of legitimacy in accessing those. This is especially the case in times of social conflicts: the appeal to the national community aims at securing the future by safeguarding the rights and privileges of the indigenous whom the state is supposed to protect. Xenophobic discourses define those who deserve to be cared for by state and society and those who should be excluded. Xenophobia is an integral part of the institutional order of the nation-state (ibid., 32). It is inexorably linked with the historical formation of the state.

Renewed academic interest in xenophobia in Europe should first be understood in the framework of the resurgence of right-wing nationalist parties and their increasing popularity in European countries in the last twenty to thirty years (France, Switzerland, Denmark, Italy, and, since the end of the Cold War, in Eastern Europe and Russia) (Taras 2009, 2). Surveys indicate a substantial increase in anti-foreigner sentiment in the two last decades of the twentieth century that is more pronounced in places with greater support for extreme right-wing parties (Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). The radical right possesses a "common core doctrine", a distinct ideological platform that distinguishes it from other political parties and movements in contemporary liberal capitalist democracies. As suggested by Betz (2003), "its main characteristic is a restrictive notion of citizenship, which holds that genuine democracy is based on a culturally, if not ethnically, homogeneous community; that only long-standing citizens count as full members of civil society; and that society's benefits should be restricted to those members of society who, either as citizens or taxpayers, have made a substantial contribution to society".

While these parties are perceived as challenging the foundations of post–Second World War democracy in Europe (Brems 2002), this is only one side of the story. In recent years xenophobic speeches in the media and on the internet have reduced tolerance towards foreigners and refugees in many countries (Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme 2014). The decade that followed September 11, 2001, was marked by the constitution of an international body of popular literature against Islam that has experienced an unprecedented level of success for its genre and contributed significantly to the dissemination of nationalist and popular xenophobic representations of Islam and the Arab world (Vitale and Cousin 2014).[1] Several studies have also shown the prevalence of mundane xenophobic practices and racist stereotyping located within state institutions (for instance racial profiling in the police in France, the United Kingdom and the United States, see Fassin 2011; Jobard and Levy 2009; Waddington, Stenson, and Don 2004) and the persistence of discrimination against minorities or foreigners in the housing and job markets, in access to credit and in consumer interactions (Beauchemin, Hamel, and Simon 2015; Pager and Sheperd 2008; Ross and Turner 2005).

While xenophobia has historically received much attention in Europe and the United States, far less is known of the indigenous paths it has taken in developing countries. Now faced with the same issues as their Northern counterparts, in terms of both accommodation of diversity and mobility and of concentration of often underprivileged populations in large urban centres devoid of employment-led growth, governments and societies in the South are slowly facing

1 Oriana Fallaci in Italy, Éric Zemmour in France, Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, Bruce Bawer in Norway, Melanie Phillips in the United Kingdom, Mark Steyn in Canada, Glenn Beck and Brigitte Gabriel in the United States.

up to this new challenge. The tensions associated with the management of strangers within their midst have often led to violent exclusion and various forms of discrimination. For the relatively better-off emerging countries, increased mobility is often happening concurrently with the emergence of more redistributive social support systems based on citizenship. An influx of economic and political migrants often exacerbates or revives ancient divides and rhetorical constructions of otherness.

Like in Europe, the word xenophobia in Africa refers to discourses and practices that are discriminatory towards foreign nationals. Kersting suggests that most xenophobia in Africa is Afro-phobia: although there is xenophobic discrimination and violence towards non-African minorities such as Chinese and Indians, violent xenophobia is mostly oriented towards migrants from other African nations (Kersting 2009). The most frequent occurrence of the word in the continent is found in post-apartheid South Africa. It is more rarely used in post-colonial Gabon, Botswana and Nigeria, where other words are more prevalent in the media and the academia (autochthony, indigeneity, ethnicity) (Gray 1998; Dijk 2003; Nyamnjoh 2006).

In many African countries autochthony, which expresses the claim "to have come first" or "to be rooted in the soil" (Geschiere 2009, 28), is the preferred term. Its renaissance in the last twenty years is largely linked to the 1990s democratization and decentralization processes, which had the paradoxical effect of triggering an obsession with belonging. In addition, in situations of war or conflict (Ivory Coast, Eastern DRC, Rwanda), exclusion and mass violence have been used to distinguish citizens according to their supposed ancestral origins rather than to their belonging to the nation state which might explain why xenophobia has been of limited use. (Banégas 2006; Cutolo 2010; Chrétien and Kambenda 2013; Jackson 2010). In most cases, however, differences between xenophobia and autochthony are blurred in the literature and it is often hard to find a conceptual difference between them. There are even instances where they could well be two sides of the same coin, as in emerging debates on "local beneficiation" in economic development policies, where local infrastructure or property development projects are increasingly expected to benefit "local" populations over others, leading to unresolved dilemmas regarding the definition of "local" in polities that guarantee equality of treatment to all citizens. These "local beneficiation" policies have been shown to sometimes lead to a reinforcement of autochthonous tendencies, as in the case of mining projects in Guinea (Bolay 2014).

While it makes sense to explore the terms most commonly used by actors in different African contexts (xenophobia, autochthony, indigeneity), autochthony and indigeneity are historically and theoretically loaded and therefore require cautious use (Fourchard and Segatti 2015). Discourses of indigeneity and autochthony are highly politicized, subject to local and national particularities, and produce ambivalent, sometimes paradoxical, outcomes (Pelican 2009); they place the researcher at the heart of power struggles (Geschiere 2011, 212). Autochthony as a claim made by first-comers to secure privileged access to state resources and land is sometimes hard to distinguish from far-right political agendas in Western Europe, which can be reduced to a slogan – "Our own people first" – and a demand – "national preference". Contemporary xenophobia in Western Europe is very much about exclusionary welfarism and the wish to protect the fiscal and national integrity of the welfare state through highly exclusionary immigration policies (Betz 2003). Xenophobic discourses in South Africa are, at least partly, a wish to retain a relatively new privileged access to an emerging welfare state for South African nationals. This welfare state has been historically constructed against black South Africans who fought for decades to have the same political and social rights as the white minority (Seekings and Natrass 2006). In this context international migrants might be perceived as being beneficiaries of this emerging welfarism without having participated in the historical struggle against racial discrimination (Monson 2015). But exclusionary welfarism is only one side of contemporary xenophobia and cannot in itself encapsulate the different meanings of xenophobia. This is the reason why it might be worth considering autochthony, nativism and indigeneity as local concepts used by actors in situations of xenophobia.

If there is a large body of research on autochthony and xenophobic practices in a number of African countries,

much less is known on the outcomes of xenophobic violence and how it reshapes citizenship. Analyses of collective violence in Africa have devoted much attention to conflict over land ownership (Lund 1998; Chauveau 2000; Kuba and Lentz 2006; Bøås and Dunn 2013; Lund and Boone 2013) and civil wars. The sociology of conflict has shifted the lens from looking almost exclusively at ethnic tensions to the modalities of conflicts, the complexity of motivations, the uneven rationality of actors and situations of "no war, no peace" (Marchal and Messiant 1997; Debos 2013; Richards 1997). More recent research has focused on less obvious forms of political violence such as vigilantism (Veit, Barolsky, and Pillay 2011), a body of research which has helped to document the ways in which performance of violence shapes insider/outsider boundaries within various groups and communities (Anderson 2005; Fourchard 2011; Higazi and Lar 2015; Last 2008; Maupeu 2002; Pratten 2008; Kihato in this issue).

While the work presented here is resolutely qualitative in nature, it is not oblivious of some of the key questions raised by quantitative studies of conflict and violence which have included African empirical data. Authors such as Brubaker and Laitin have showed that work on ethnic and nationalist violence has essentially emerged from two largely non-intersecting literatures: studies of ethnic conflict and studies of political violence. Only recently did these studies start converging, the former attempting to understand the political dynamics of violence and the latter focusing on its ethnic component. As Brubaker and Laitin show, such studies essentially rely on three strands of work: inductive work at different levels of aggregation, trying to understand the mechanisms behind such violence; theory-driven modelling, essentially derived from game and general rational action theory; and finally, culturalist approaches looking at the symbolic, discursive and ritualistic dimensions of such violence (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Of particular interest to our work is the effort of a smaller group of these researchers, more preoccupied with spatialised and, in particular, urban conflicts, to theorise the structural conditions conducive to spatially limited and chronologically short outbursts of violence. Among others, Laitin and Putnam have insisted, albeit with different emphases, on the role played by socio-cultural features in fostering homogeneity or heterogeneity as a key factor in conflict processes (Laitin 2007; Putnam 2007). Whether trying to understand the contextual determinants of strong or weak "social capital" (ibid), or the unfolding of riots and their key triggers (Horowitz 2001), scholars usually study difference and "ethnicity" not as cultural traits but rather as historically constructed features of groups and of their power relations with others. In most definitions, the "putative" difference is central to planned targeting processes and violence codification and legitimisation. Yet, how "ethnic" difference combines historically and spatially with other contextual dimensions propitious to inter-group violence is acknowledged as one of the main challenges in this research area (Putnam 2007). This is where more micro-level qualitative research can bring added value to the discussion. In this vein, some fewer studies examine the local and urban configuration of autochthony claims, mundane practices of xenophobia and very localized outbreaks of xenophobic violence and its related effects on citizenship in African polities (in Nigeria: Higazi 2007, 2015; Douglas 2002; Akinyele 2009; Fourchard 2009; and Adunbi 2013; in Kenya: Lonsdale 2008; Médard 1996; Smedt 2009; in South Africa Wa Kabwe-Segatti 2008; Misago et al. 2009; Landau 2011; and Monson 2015). This nascent body of research suggests that episodes of extreme violence reshape both the making of authority, the self-definition of groups making claims to ownership over resources, and the boundaries of citizenship (Adunbi 2013; Hilgers 2011). Several African countries thus offer an ideal lens through which to take these analyses further as they combine, on one hand, a variety of xenophobic mobilizations and on the other, a set of common features: colonially crafted ethnic divides in diverse societies, increasingly acute inequalities, and rapid and jobless urbanization. The three countries selected for this issue (South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria) have all witnessed recent outbreaks of collective violence combined with supporting discourses against groups identified as "strangers" to the polities and communities in which violence erupted.

Unlike studies of national contexts, our work focuses on local and urban scales because xenophobic and autochthonous practices, by definition, rely on struggles over local political leadership, claims to localized resources and competing definitions of belonging to a certain territory. Our

focus is on violent exclusion and its effect on statecraft, sovereignty and citizenship. The issue documents how processes of violent exclusion based on religious, ethnic, national and local forms of belonging are contested, disputed, ignored and fought against by different actors.

This issue draws on three years of extensive empirical research across three countries. Each research project involved months of fieldwork in the specific localities affected by these forms of violence, in most instances over several years before, during and after the events in question. In all three countries, researchers have systematically explored the historicity of patterns of xenophobic exclusion and the spatialization of such mobilizations. This particular ethnographic and historical approach may help avoid two shortcomings in analysing violence. First xenophobia cannot be presumed from the mere fact of the existence of discrimination concerning foreigners (Miles and Brown 2003). Focusing on the sociology of actors is an antidote to a monolithic image of the "state", "society" or "community" and underestimating internal struggles among elites. An overhasty presumption of xenophobia among administrative, political, professional and intellectual elites may result in other more subtle, complex or underlying forms of social and political discrimination being overlooked (Deplaude 2011). There is thus a need to clearly dissociate actors in situations of xenophobia from institutions promoting xenophobic apparatuses and their role in triggering violence (for example the police in South Africa, discriminatory access to state resources in Kenya and Nigeria).

Secondly, violence can be inflicted on behalf of a group (nationals against foreigners, indigenous against non-indigenous) but the claim to share an exclusive identity is not sufficient explanation: not all members of the group resort to violence. It is therefore necessary to constantly steer away from any analysis that accepts the "common identity" illusion (Bayart 1996): on the contrary, identification with a group is always contextual, relative and multiple (ibid., 98). Microsociological and microhistorical approaches help avoid such pitfalls and have been favoured in this issue.

The papers focus on three main overlooked processes on the continent. The first is the sociology of perpetrators and key actors of xenophobic violence, looking at invisible gendered dynamics of spatial urban exclusion (Caroline Kihato in Nairobi; Kihato 2015). Kihato's article interrogates how social constructions of manhood and womanhood influenced violent mobilizations in Kenya's most notorious slum, Kibera, after the 2008 national elections. She shows how gender roles shape the nature of conflict and conversely, how engendering conflict shifts the assumptions made about gender roles in society. A situation of violence changed roles in society: instead of being criminalised as usual, the violence of young idlers became a celebrated resource, while women were integral to the production of violent exclusionary mobilizations as perpetrators of violence (assaults and murders), but also through mundane everyday practices (pushing their husband to fight, supplying food and cooking for the fighters, and so on).

Secondly, the issue turns to mobilization and exclusion techniques. Daouda Gary-Tounkara examines one of the most massive expulsions in the history of post-colonial Africa: the expulsion of three million West African nationals by the Nigerian state over a few months in 1983 (Gary-Tounkara 2015). This exceptional event against the so called "undocumented aliens" should be placed at the intersection of three political, social and economic processes: a deep economic crisis leading to massive unemployment since the early 1980s, the political calculation of President Shagari to weaken his opponents' supposed electoral base in the forthcoming election, and the resurgence of a nationalist discourse based on revenge for Ghana's expulsion of Nigerians in 1969. This event reveals the density of the political crisis of the Second Republic and its very short-lived democratic experience before the military coup in 1983.

The issue then moves on to the South African context of the late 2000s and its xenophobic tension and violence. Tamlyn Monson revisits the understanding of xenophobia in South Africa by shifting to the micro-local scale and historical observation (Monson 2015). In doing so, she builds on the discovery of a significant association between informal residence and the incidence of "xenophobic" violence. This exploration of contemporary and historical insurrectional citizenship in a South African locality, drawing on a case study built over several years, is heuristically powerful in

shedding light on otherwise seemingly irrational or one-dimensional analyses of the 2008 riots. Lydie Cabane adopts a very different angle to examine this time of crisis in South Africa by looking at state response, and more specifically at mechanisms, discourses and mobilisation strategies designed and produced by the South African state to protect victims of xenophobic attacks (Cabane 2015). Cabane shows how the treatment of the crisis as a "disaster" has both allowed state mobilisation but also constrained its ability to address the deeper causes of violence in the longer term.

This special issue makes no claim to being the definitive answer to the question of the relevance of xenophobia in African contexts. It merely hopes to broaden possible readings of the phenomenon, through several national case studies and multidisciplinary approaches. In particular, the collection of articles presented here taken as a whole or individually documents how violent xenophobic expression, in Africa as elsewhere, constitutes one of the repertoires of nation-building and exclusive citizenship.

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