

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS; A CASE STUDY OF
SOUTH AFRICA

By

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South Africa is used to show how this discourse relates to the South African nation-building exercise, with particular references to the xenophobic violence of May 2008. What emerges from the case study is that despite evidence that this framework is a good fit for thinking critically about instances of xenophobia in South Africa, there is also evidence of a counter discourse about refugees/asylum-seekers that casts them as deserving of compassion and generosity.

Key words: refugee, asylum-seeker, social construction, nation-state, public discourse, South Africa

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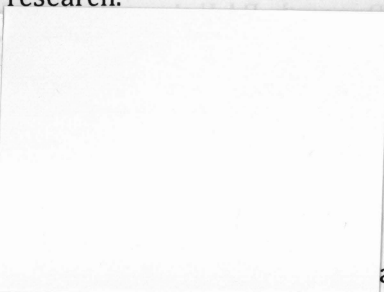
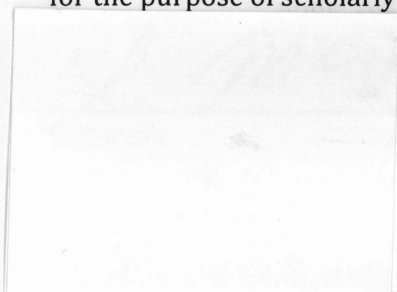
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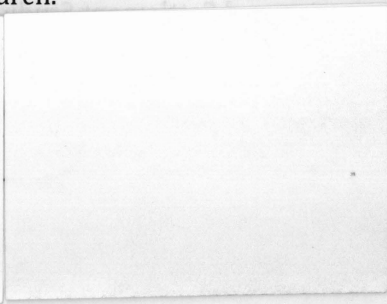
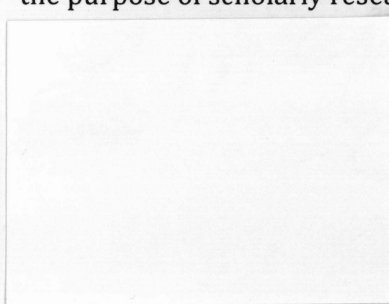
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ABSTRACT

Refugees/asylum-seekers are socially constructed as being economically, politically and culturally threatening to the nation-state in which they seek asylum. Evidence of this social construction can be found in media, statements by public officials and in opinion polls. By synthesizing the results of research we can identify the commonalities amongst discourses from different nation-states. This allows us to see how refugees/asylum-seekers serve nation-building in general. A case study of South Africa is used to show how this discourse relates to the South African nation-building exercise, with particular references to the xenophobic violence of May 2008. What emerges from the case study is that despite evidence that this framework is a good fit for thinking critically about instances of xenophobia in South Africa, there is also evidence of a counter discourse about refugees/asylum-seekers that casts them as deserving of compassion and generosity.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5-7
Methodology.....	8-9
Part One:	
Definition of Terms.....	10-14
Social Construction of Refugees/Asylum-Seekers as Threats to the Nation-State.....	15
Economic.....	15-19
Political	19-25
Cultural	25-28
Refugees/Asylum-Seekers and the Nation-State.....	29-30
Part Two:	
Case Study: South Africa	
Why South Africa?	31-34
Brief History of South Africa	34-39
Social construction of refugees/asylum-seekers in South Africa	39-41
Economical	41-45
Political	46-49
Cultural	49-54
Xenophobia	54
What happened?	54-56
Main discourse	56-60
Alternative discourses	60-65
Conclusion	65-66

Introduction

All over the world, nation-states have been enacting policies that increasingly restrict the movement of people into their territory. Despite the belief by some scholars that the globalization of capital would result in the demise of the nation-state, it would seem that in the realm of immigration at least, the nation-state is in no danger of disappearing. Nation-states actively assert their existence as a sovereign territory by controlling immigration policy, making it widely referenced as 'the last bastion of sovereignty' (Kofman, 2005). Countries such as Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa have increasingly put more restrictions on who is eligible to enter their territory and this has been particularly evident in policy towards refugees and asylum-seekers. Policies that detain refugees and asylum-seekers in prison-like detention centers have increasingly become the norm, and there has been a movement by many to prevent refugees and asylum-seekers from reaching their shores at all, with the establishment of 'safe-havens' closer to countries of origin (Schuster, 2003). The widespread enactment of restrictive policies against refugees and asylum-seekers has become a necessitated practice by nation-states, constructing these social arrangements as "the only possible or legitimate ordering of practices we can have" (Falzon, 1998, p. 50). To understand how restrictive policies towards refugees and asylum-seekers have come to be accepted as legitimate, one must examine the discourse that surrounds this group. Discourse here, refers to a specific group of texts as well as the social practices to which they are linked (Doty, 1996, p. 126). Discourse is a powerful tool of the nation-state, constructing particular versions of reality as natural, natural

here, taken to mean metaphysically prescribed (Falzon, 1998, p. 50). Vital to the understanding of the power of discursive processes is the recognition that they are socially constructed and always serve an interest, most often that of the ruling elites, according to Eric Hobsbawm (as cited in Smith, 2001, p. 48). By considering this discourse as one that is socially constructed to serve a purpose, and not as a natural social arrangement, it is possible to identify common ideologies in nation-states all over the world that makes the enactment of increasingly restrictive policies seem like a natural progression.

This paper will use social construction theory to explore the discourse surrounding refugees and asylum-seekers, and the challenges they face, wherever they find themselves. According to Schuster (2003),

Asylum-seeker is now a term that is used unambiguously, and immediately conjures up cheat, liar, criminal, sponger – someone deserving of hostility by virtue not of any misdemeanor, but simply because he or she is an asylum-seeker - a figure that has now become a caricature, a stereotype in the way that 'Blacks', 'Jews' and 'Gypsies' have been and still are.

Refugees/asylum-seekers represent a socially constructed, universally discriminated against group of people in nation-states all over the world. Similar to the discrimination suffered by Blacks, Jews and Gypsies, refugees and asylum-seekers are subject to discriminatory policies, intended to mitigate the socially constructed threat they represent. According to Robert Miles, any argument that legitimates inequality between groups by claiming inherent differences between them, qualifies as racism (as cited in Schuster, 2003). In the past, racism towards

Blacks was validated by a socially constructed discourse that portrayed them as less than human, and divinely selected to be used as labour in the imperial system. The racist discourse sought to maintain the exploitation of Blacks for the economic gains of Whites (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 63). It will be argued here that the discourse surrounding refugees and asylum-seekers constructs them as an inherently threatening group to the nation-state. This discourse supports the nation-building projects of the countries of asylum and has become widespread. What follows is a literature review of research that sought to identify ideologies that support discrimination against refugees/asylum-seekers through discursive analysis of media and public policy statements as well as through public opinion polls. This paper will demonstrate that there are universal themes in the construction of this social group in nation-states all over the world and that these themes serve a specific purpose in nation-building. Refugees/asylum-seekers are socially constructed as a threatening other in contrast to a national identity and this results in universally negative outcomes for people belonging to this group. Research from a variety of regions shows the universality of the themes identified and how these themes support the theoretical project of nation-building. It will be argued that refugees/asylum-seekers are universally socially constructed as threats to the nation-state: economically, politically and culturally. However, by clearly identifying the nature of the threatening claims against refugees/asylum-seekers, and how they are related to a nation's particular nation-building project we can come to gain a deeper understanding of the varied outcomes for this group and take steps to overcome this new form of racism.

Methodology

The research used to support the conclusion that refugees/asylum-seekers are universally socially constructed as threats to the nation-state includes three fields; content analysis of print media, content analysis of statements by public officials, and public opinion polls. The first, content analysis of print media, mainly newspapers, has been performed in nation-states around the world, and often by multiple researchers within those nation-states. For the purposes of this paper, research of this nature that seeks to identify the ways that refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed in media is extremely useful. It is possible to synthesize the conclusions of such research to identify common themes in this portrayal across nation-states. Research that identifies themes in media is also a valid source of information for identifying the content of national identity, an important element of the nation-state. Anthias and Yuval-Davis remind us that the media is "...the prime institutional form for ideological production in the modern liberal democratic state" (1992, p. 22). Synthesis of research that captures the underlying national ideologies present in media allows us to identify how the universal construction of refugees/asylum-seekers relates to processes of nation-building.

The second type of research that will be reviewed over the course of this paper is the type that performed a content analysis of statements made by public officials, such as politicians or police officers. Research with this focus frequently incorporates a media analysis as well. According to Billig (1995), "Because politicians have become celebrities in the contemporary age, their words, which

typically reproduce the clichés of nationhood, are continually reported in mass media” (p. 11). Synthesizing research that sought to identify how public officials contribute to the discourse on refugees/asylum-seekers provides an alternative forum to discern common themes in the process of social construction across nation-states.

The last type of research that will be used to support the argument that refugees/asylum-seekers are universally socially constructed as threats to the nation-state, utilize public opinion polls as a methodology. There is ample research across nation-states whose goal was to identify how citizens of the nation-state feel about migrants, and refugees/asylum-seekers specifically. While content analysis of media and statements by public officials provides the content of public discourse, public opinion polls have the potential to identify how a discourse is filtered by individuals. By synthesizing the conclusions of these three types of research, it is possible to identify universal themes in the social construction of refugees/asylum-seekers as threats and the purpose these threatening claims serve in process of nation-building.

It is important to note that although the main focus of this paper is the group labeled ‘refugee/asylum-seeker’, research does not always distinguish this group from other types of migrant. The public discourse in particular nation-states may homogenize refugees/asylum-seekers with other types of migrant, and thus research will be cited that does not refer to this group specifically.

PART ONE

Definition of Terms

Refugee/Asylum-seeker & Nation-state

Before embarking on an analysis of the common themes of refugee/asylum-seeker identity, it is important to define what is meant by this term 'refugee/asylum-seeker', and more importantly what assumptions underpin our understanding of what defines a refugee and an asylum-seeker. According to the 1951 United Nations [UN] Convention, a refugee is

A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2007).

An *asylum seeker* is a person who has left their country of origin, has applied for recognition as a refugee in another country, and is awaiting a decision on their application (UNHCR, 2009).

Strong social construction theory councils us to look critically at the social science categories we employ, to view them as socially constructed and thus with no basis in the natural world (Code, 2009, p. 451). Again, our understanding of the term

'natural world' refers to something that is metaphysically prescribed (Falzon, 1998). If we adopt this perspective to critique the category of 'refugee/asylum-seeker', we see that its definition is dependent on the existence of other socially constructed ideals, most importantly for this paper, that of the country of nationality, or nation-state.

While acknowledging that there are multiple definitions for this highly dynamic term (Smith, 2001, p. 93), for the purposes of this paper, the ideal nation-state will be loosely defined as a political community that exercises sovereignty over geographic space while also sharing a collective identity amongst its population (Oxford, 2009, p.451). The definition requires deconstruction on several levels in order to highlight its importance to our understanding of refugees/asylum-seekers as a socially constructed category.

The first is that despite a nation-states claim to sovereignty over a defined geographic space, the physical boundaries of nation-states are frequently contested. "Sovereign recognition depends upon states having a territorial basis" (Biersteker & Weber, 1996, p. 13) however this territorial basis is far more dynamic than definitions of nation-states let on. The physical boundaries of nation-states are created through a variety of multilateral and domestic political processes that delineate a nation-states right to exercise sovereignty. Although they frequently follow naturally occurring physical features, such as coastlines or mountain ranges, the physical borders of a nation-state have been socially constructed over time and continue to be contested and redrawn. The long-standing conflict between Pakistan

and India over the region of Kashmir or the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine provide contemporary illustrations of this point. According to the definition provided above from the UN, a refugee/asylum-seeker does not exist until they have crossed the socially constructed physical borders of their nation-state. The important point to take away from this is that refugee/asylum-seeker is a classification whose meaning depends on the acceptance of a nation-state's physical boundaries, boundaries that are themselves socially constructed and highly dynamic.

The second part of the definition of a nation-state that is necessary to deconstruct is the idea of a collective identity. Ideal nation-states are presumed to have a collective identity, which is shared by all citizens of the nation, a national identity. It is imperative to note that nowhere in the world does an ideal nation-state exist, and this is widely accepted by scholars. There are always contestations about collective identities from different segments of a nation-state's population, a national identity is never undisputed. According to Rousseau (2006) "Although some facts are socially accepted by virtually all members of a society, many if not most social facts are contested across time, space or both" (p. 42). The ideal 'collective identity' referred to in the definition is often envisioned as one based on shared culture, however, Ting (2008) explains that less than ten percent of the member states in the United Nations are considered culturally and linguistically homogeneous. Therefore, in any nation-state, there exist multiple collective identities, some of which will seek to establish themselves as the hegemonic national ideal. As Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1992, p. 15) point out, what becomes

accepted as the hegemonic national identity is dependent on the power relations between the different collective identities that exist within a nation. Power relations between groups of varying race, gender and class, influence what elements will be superimposed over the nation-state in the form of a national identity. In her work on national identity in Britain, Doty (1996) describes how Britain conceptualized its national identity as White, because of the racialized nature of colonial power relations at that time. Those with political power in Britain were White, and thus the national identity became one that reflected this (Ibid). Certain elements of contested collective ideals become widely accepted as defining the boundaries of the collective identity of the nation – attitudes, beliefs or values become hegemonic when they are accepted by most, if not all members of a society (Rousseau, 2006, p. 6). It is this hegemonic national identity that plays a pivotal role in nation-building projects. However, national identity, no matter how hegemonic it has become requires constant reinvention and reproduction, even amongst long established nation-states (Doty, 1996). “National identity is never a finished product; it is always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed” (Doty, 1996, p. 123). Therefore, the collective identity of the population of the nation-state, should be recognized as highly contested, dependent on power relations between groups and dynamic in that its content changes over time.

Our definition of a nation-state can be restated as a political community that exercises sovereignty over dynamic geographic space while also sharing a contested and dynamic collective identity amongst its population, otherwise referred to as its national identity.

From the deconstruction of the definition of the nation-state we see that the definition of a refugee/asylum-seeker depends on the acceptance of the socially constructed notion of a nation-state. The refugee/asylum-seeker label only applies to a person who has left a physical space which has been socially constructed to represent a realm of sovereignty for a political community, who themselves are connected through a constantly changing, socially constructed discourse known as national identity. In this way the definition of a refugee/asylum-seeker must be a socially constructed category with no basis in the natural world.

Despite having no basis in the natural world, the social category of refugee/asylum-seeker has penalties for those to whom it is applied and thus cannot be simply done away with. In a similar vein, anti-racist scholar George Sefa Dei, argues that despite the lack of biological evidence for the existence of races, race continues to be a salient social category that requires further critical analysis because its application has real consequences (Dei, 1999). While it is worthwhile to acknowledge that the concept of race is socially constructed, and in no way 'natural', we cannot stop there. The saliency of the concept of race is not found in its lack of biological foundation (its non-naturalness, according to strong social construction theory), but instead in the penalties that accrue for people to whom this social label is applied. Therefore, despite acknowledging that the category of refugee/asylum-seeker is socially constructed in that its definition is wholly dependent on another socially constructed idea, that of the nation-state, a critical examination of this identity is necessary because it has tangible outcomes for those to whom it is applied.

Social Construction of Refugees/Asylum-Seekers as Threats to the Nation-State

In nation-states around the world, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed in public discourse as threatening to the nation-state. The claims made against this group can be categorized into economic, political and cultural themes. The various types of claim serve nation-building projects by constructing refugees/asylum-seekers as a threatening other in order to further social cohesion within the nation-state. This process is widespread and occurs in nation-states all over the world. Below these claims will be described and then considered as they relate to the nation-building project.

Economic Threats

Amongst the varied claims against refugees/asylum-seekers is that they pose an economic threat to the population of the country of asylum. The discourse concerning economic threat takes different forms depending on the particular nation-state in question, yet the purpose it serves is universal. Below is a review of the varied ways that refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as economic threats to their countries of asylum, followed by a discussion of how this economic threat serves the purpose of nation-building on behalf of the nation-state.

In nation-states around the world, it is possible to identify a discourse that portrays refugees/asylum-seekers as economic threats by constructing them as a group that will compromise the job security of the native born population. Print media and public officials claim that refugees/asylum-seekers depress the wages of

the native-born by flooding the job market with excess foreign labour, willing to work for lower wages. (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2008; Campbell, 2003). Despite widespread evidence that refugees/asylum-seekers face significant barriers to obtaining work outside of the more vulnerable sectors of the workforce (Este & Tachble, 2009; Phillimore & Goodson, 2006), reports claim that refugees/asylum-seekers steal jobs from the native born, compromising the native populations ability to pursue a reasonable livelihood. In Botswana, Campbell (2003) reported that many Batswana believed that non-citizens were responsible for unemployment, despite few personal experiences of a non-citizen being awarded a job over a Batswana. Morapedi (2007) describes how refugees/asylum-seekers from Zimbabwe in Botswana typically accept jobs that native Batswana shun yet the refugees/asylum-seekers are still accused of job stealing.

Another way in which refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as economically threatening is that this group strains the resources of the welfare state, and subsequently disadvantage the native born. Claims are made that refugees/asylum-seekers strain health and education systems to such a degree that they become inefficient and no longer useful to the native born population. Some of the resources claimed to be at risk are healthcare, education and social assistance. In a 2003 article by Campbell that reviewed the attitudes of Batswana towards immigrants, it was shown that "More than one-third of the sample was prepared to participate in any action that would prevent immigrants' children from sitting in the same classroom as their children." Schuster (2003) describes how pregnant asylum-seekers in the UK are described in media accounts as "stretching maternity

hospitals to the breaking point". Another familiar theme in the discourse is that refugees/asylum-seekers are carriers of disease that will not only strain health care systems, but also compromise the health of the nation-state by potentially infecting a presumed healthy population. The strain that refugees/asylum-seekers are claimed to be on the welfare resources of the state is a version of economic threat discourse because it implies the dependence of this group on the state. Curiously enough, in many countries refugees/asylum-seekers see their rights to work restricted and are thus often forcibly dependent on the welfare of the state. In the United Kingdom, Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil and Baker (2008) discuss how refugees/asylum-seekers are constructed as economic burdens on the state, and subsequently as a group that is 'using up' the finite resources of the state that are normally the privilege of its citizens. Media rarely reports that refugees/asylum-seekers are refused the right to pursue a livelihood in the United Kingdom, but focuses exclusively on the drain on resources that this group represents (Ibid). In other nation-states such as Canada, the discourse of dependence uses references to human capital deficiencies to explain this groups dependence on state resources (Dyck & McLaren, 2004). Here, this group is portrayed as lacking qualities that allow them to be fiscally responsible, something the members of the nation-state inherently possess.

In the portrayal of refugees/asylum-seekers as economic threats, we see a contradiction; on one hand they are portrayed as threatening the livelihoods of the native-born by taking their jobs, while on the other hand they are constructed as economic burdens using up the finite resources of the state. From one perspective

they are seen as greedy and unappreciative of the native-populations extension of asylum (Lynn & Lea, 2003), while on the other they are portrayed as pitiful victims in need of support.

How do these varied claims of economic threat against refugees/asylum-seekers serve the project of nation-building? 'Job-stealing' threatens the ability of citizens to pursue their own livelihood, something to which they are theoretically entitled as members of the nation-state. The claim of job-stealing is widely used yet is only a concern for the segment of the population already at a disadvantage because of low socio-economic status, whose poor paying and precarious jobs refugees/asylum-seekers are accused of taking. According to Green (2009) "Sensitivity to threat then hinges upon individuals position in the social hierarchy." A discourse that portrays refugees/asylum-seekers as economically threatening is only relevant to the lower economic classes of a nation-state because it is their livelihoods that are supposedly being threatened. The livelihoods of a nation-states' elite are not being threatened by the simple presence of refugees/asylum-seekers, and neither is their access to services such as health and education. In the context of the European Union, Green (2009) explains that a perception that there is competition for resources is presented as a zero-sum game where refugees/asylum-seekers gains are seen to be losses on behalf of those members of the nation-state. Refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as economic threats that disadvantage a marginalized group within the nation-state (Lynn & Lea, 2003). The purpose this serves in nation-building is that refugees/asylum-seekers represent a threatening other on which failures of state policy can be blamed, further dividing the lower

economic classes of a nation-state and maintaining hierarchies of power that disadvantage this group. In Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992, p. 67), Castles is noted for applying the term 'class fraction' to this phenomenon. Refugees/asylum-seekers as a group are such an effective scapegoat because they have little ability to defend themselves in the public arena because of their precarious status. Scapegoating refugees/asylum-seekers divides the lower economic classes, preventing organization and in this way absolves the elite of the nation-state from taking responsibility for unemployment levels and possible crises in the welfare model. This deference allows the nation-state to maintain its image of competency, maintaining the validity of state institutions and systems. In nation-states around the world, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as economic threats because they steal jobs from those less fortunate segments of the population or because they use up finite resources of the state. This can serve nation-building projects by deferring failures of state public policy to the presence of a threatening other, transposing blame from the nation-state to something foreign. While the particularities of this argument are unique to the nation-state in which they are employed, the aim is universal.

Political Threats

In the imposed identity constructed for them through media and public discourse, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as political threats to their countries of asylum. Similar to the varied economic threats that they are constructed to be, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as politically threatening

in a variety of ways. What follows is a description of the particular political claims that are made against refugees/asylum-seekers and how this diverse group of claims, share a particular purpose in the nation-building projects of all nation-states.

When a refugee/asylum-seeker is portrayed as politically threatening to the nation-state, they are portrayed as posing a threat to its sovereignty. Sovereignty is fundamental to our definition of a nation-state as it is the nation-states "... externally recognized right to exercise final authority over its affairs" (Biersteker and Weber, 1996, p. 12). The claims below against refugees/asylum-seekers seek to construct them as threats to sovereignty, and thus a threat to the nation-state itself.

In Campbell's 2003 survey of public opinion in Botswana, it was shown that Batswana were concerned that non-Batswana entering the country would not respect the country's constitution, and would jeopardize the country's success with peace and democracy. In the case of South Africa, the HSRC (2008) found that some South Africans felt threatened by outsiders because the newcomers had little emotional connection with the political struggle that ended apartheid. By having not been present and active in past political achievements, refugees/asylum-seekers are assumed to not share values on which such achievements were based. It is assumed that these perceived value differences will compromise the political achievements of the past, and the ability to decide the course of political developments in the future. In Australia, Vas Dev (2009) found that refugees/asylum-seekers were frequently portrayed in media as lacking commitment to democracy.

In Malaysia, Vas Dev (2009) found that the recognition and acceptance of refugees/asylum-seekers were portrayed as threatening the nation-state via wider geopolitical concerns. The recognition of claims for asylum would be interpreted as an act of hostility towards a neighbouring nation-state and potentially lead to inter-state conflict (Ibid), which has the potential to compromise sovereignty. The situation in Malaysia is common in regions with large refugee/asylum-seeker movements, such as the Great Lakes region of Africa. Following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, neighbouring states frequently employed geopolitical arguments to justify their support or condemnation of various groups of refugees (Mamdani, 2001). The granting of asylum to groups of Hutu genocidaires in Zaire in 1994 reflected support for their political beliefs and set the stage for future conflict in the region (Ibid). In these examples, refugees/asylum-seekers are used as tools by nation-states to pursue their wider geopolitical agenda, while at the same time protecting the sovereignty claims of the nation-state.

Another way that refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as politically threatening to the nation-state is the articulation of a fear that refugees/asylum-seekers will bring the conflict from which they are fleeing to their country of asylum. The discourse portrays refugees/asylum-seekers as a group that will compromise the nation-states sovereignty by engaging in conflict through transnational activities from its territory. Examples of this discourse can be found concerning the politically active Tamil community in Canada today as well as the widespread belief rooted in Islamophobia that Muslims in the West continue to fund terrorist organizations such Al Qaeda (Owens, 2004). This compromises the sovereignty of the nation-

state, potentially involving it in a conflict in which it is not officially involved.

According to Lynn and Lea (2003) being an asylum-seeker in the UK "carries with it an expectation of compliance and a non-critical acceptance of the rules and procedures of the state." When refugees/asylum-seekers remain engaged in the politics and conflict of their countries of origin, they are portrayed as threatening the nation-state by bringing the conflict to the doorstep of the country of asylum. In a sense they are portrayed as ungrateful for the extension of asylum, by remaining engaged in the conflict that forced them to flee.

Another way in which refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as politically threatening is that they compromise sovereignty by circumventing the 'normal' immigration system, whose existence is held to be a key right of every sovereign nation-state. Migration policy has been frequently touted as the 'last bastion of sovereignty' in an ever increasingly globalizing world (Kofman, 2005). According to Schuster, (2003), asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK are portrayed as willing to use any means necessary to gain entry to the country of asylum. Because this group does not wait for permission to enter, it is constructed as violators of nation-state sovereignty (Ibid). Nation-states, as sovereigns, have the right (and many will argue, responsibility) to regulate and control who does or does not enter the physical territory of the nation-state. It is a fundamental violation of a nation-states sovereignty to have people enter without asking permission. Gale (2004) quoted Australian Prime Minister at the time John Howard, "We cannot surrender our right as a sovereign country to control our borders, and we cannot have a situation where people can come to this country when they choose." Control of borders and the

portrayal of refugees/asylum-seekers as political threats reinforces the nation-states image as one capable of control. In Australia, Nickerson and Louis (2008) note that, when arriving on boats, asylum-seekers are portrayed as threats to national sovereignty in media and by government officials. In Canada, Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson and Mihic (2008) describe how media portrayals of refugees/asylum-seekers as cheaters of a fair immigration system contribute to negative attitudes towards them. The construction of refugees/asylum-seekers as political threats legitimizes the nation-states policies towards them with this discourse about sovereignty. This particular line of argument is closely linked to portrayals of refugees/asylum-seekers as violators of other laws, outside of the realm of immigration. The public discourse on refugees/asylum-seekers often portrays them as criminals or prone to lives of crime. With their unsanctioned arrival in the country, they violate the nation-states immigration laws, and are thus criminals. Their criminal actions are portrayed as likely to continue, as there are countless examples of refugees/asylum-seekers being accused of criminal activities in media, and in statements made by public officials. Jacobsen (2002) found that refugees are often suspected to be criminals in Kenya, and especially in large urban centers like Nairobi. Police officers charged with rounding up refugees illegally outside of camps in Kenya believe that refugees must be criminals, stealing as a survival strategy as they are not permitted to work by the Kenyan government (Ibid). Using the UK as the background of their research, Leudar et al., (2008) link the initial violation of sovereignty by entering the nation-state to later claims that refugees/asylum-seekers are prone to criminal activity due to their general lack of

respect for the law. In Australia, Gale (2004) found frequent insinuations in media that linked asylum-seekers with drug-crime and gun smuggling.

How do these varied claims of political threat against refugees/asylum-seekers serve the nation-building project of a nation-state? According to Bauman (2003, p. 63) refugees/asylum-seekers "are enlisted to help in the efforts of state governments to reassert their impaired and weakening authority." Presenting refugees/asylum-seekers as a group lacking in values compatible with a liberal democracy works to reinforce national identity as one which is naturally liberal and democratic. Representations of refugees/asylum-seekers as disrespectful of the political processes of the nation-state, whether that includes the constitution, democratic elections, immigration law or criminal law, insinuates that the nation-state in question is populated only by those who respect these political processes and institutions. The national identity here is seen to extend to include the processes and institutions of the state apparatus, and refugees/asylum-seekers who violate these, commit an offense against the sovereignty and identity of the nation-state. In refugees/asylum-seekers the nation-state finds a threatening political other that draws those members inside more tightly together, increasing social cohesion in order to fight this imposing outside force. Focusing energy outwards, on the threatening political other, maintains internal power structures within the nation-state. Refugees/asylum-seekers make such ideal threatening political others because they are fundamentally outside the national identity parameters of the nation-state, while being physically present and with limited rights. They are the enemy in our midst (Lynn & Lea, 2003). Constructing refugees/asylum-seekers as

political threats to the nation-state seeks to maintain the political status-quo by limiting their rights as a group to make political demands on the state (Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2002). In constructing refugees/asylum-seekers as violators of a nation-state's sovereignty, their political claims are justifiably ignored, in the same way that certain rights are denied to those found guilty of a criminal offense and remanded to prison. Refugees/asylum-seekers circumvent the nation-states formal policies to enter the country and thus disrespect the laws of the nation-state. The way they are portrayed as violating the sovereignty of the nation-state legitimizes the nation-state's claim in regards to control of its borders. By portraying this group as having little respect for fundamental elements of the state such as its political system or constitution, the refugees/asylum-seekers are constructed as undesirable and a threat to the political stability of the country of asylum.

Cultural Threats

Around the world, refugees/asylum-seekers are socially constructed as cultural threats to nation-states that provide asylum. Refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed in media and in statements made by public officials as threats to a nation-state's national identity, independent of what the national identity consists of. While the cultural content of nationhood varies from country to country, the representation of refugees/asylum-seekers as threats to this element show striking similarities in theme and aim. Refugees/asylum-seekers are almost always portrayed as having a different culture than those members of a nation-state and as

having a purposeful intent to import these cultural differences to their new home, diluting the content of national identity. Under the rubric of 'culture' are things such as language, ethnicity, religion, gender roles, and beliefs about systems of education and justice. Refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as having a culture that is threatening to established but contested, notions of national identity. As described by Schuster (2003)

Implicit in arguments that focus on identity is a sense that national identity is an expression of certain values and norms, customs and traditions, and that the arrival of large numbers of Others who bring with them different values, norms and customs and habits will change national identity.

According to Owens (2004), immigration scares in the United States have always been rationalized as protecting 'something essentially American'. Gale (2004) describes how refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed in public discourse as being a threat to the 'Australian way of life'. In the Australian context, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as having a culture that is threatening to the national Australian identity, portrayed in media as White, Western and democratic (Ibid). Refugees/asylum-seekers in Australia are also represented as being a religious threat to conceptions of Australian national identity because they are portrayed as essentially non-Christian in media (Ibid). Vas Dev (2009) describes how refugees/asylum-seekers in Malaysia are portrayed as having little conception of human rights and lacking in commitment to principals of tolerance.

The discourse of cultural threat frequently uses such terms as 'threshold of tolerance', whereby there is a supposed tipping point as per the number of refugees/asylum-seekers the nation-state can potentially accept, without disrupting national identity (Kofman, 2005). In this view, according to Essed (1991) the existence of a hierarchy of power is referred to where refugees/asylum-seekers are expected to be 'dependent on the goodwill' of the population of the country of asylum, who in turn exercise a kind of 'cultural control' over this group through their 'tolerance' (as cited in Kofman, 2005). Across nation-states, refugees/asylum-seekers are a group that is tolerated by members of the nation-state (who are essentially tolerant, as a part of their national identity) and as lacking in tolerance themselves. Scholars have made claims that underlying this discourse on tolerance of cultural difference is an implicit reference to race, where new variables have been substituted to discriminate against people of colour. Leudar et al. (2008) describe how refugees/asylum-seekers are "characterized as visually distinct" in media portrayals, a poorly disguised racial reference. According to Dyck and McLaren (2004), race is a category generally associated with migrants in public discourse. While blatantly racist immigration policies have mostly been eliminated, insinuations in media and public discourse about the race of refugees/asylum-seekers as problematic, still occurs. In Australia (Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2002), the European Union, the UK and in North America, refugees/asylum-seekers are most frequently portrayed in media as Black, which threatens conceptions of national identity as essentially White. While the Black-White dichotomy is most common in the discourse, in post-colonial states in Africa, skin colour has been

recognized, along with other phenotypic characteristics, as a way to distinguish between those members of the nation-state and foreigners. In South Africa and Botswana, foreigners (many of whom are believed to be refugees/asylum-seekers) are distinguished visually from citizens by their darker skin (Morapedi, 2007), (Morris, 1998).

In returning to our earlier definition of the nation-state, there is a sense that refugees/asylum-seekers have the ability to unsettle a collective identity (Kofman, 2005), ignoring the fact that nowhere in the world does such an uncontested collective identity exist. Claims of cultural threat against refugees/asylum-seekers are likely to gain credibility in situations where the dominant group feels threatened. According to Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller and Lalonde (2007), when the advantaged group senses instability to the status-quo, they are more likely to implement restrictive actions.

Portraying refugees/asylum-seekers as cultural threats to the nation-state serves to reinforce hegemonic notions of national identity. Refugees/asylum-seekers are presented as having different languages, ethnic traditions, religious beliefs and generally different values, at odds with those of the nation-state. The perception of cultural threat creates an outside threat, in order to increase social cohesion. Refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed as having inherently different cultural traditions from that of the nation-state and as intending to import such differences to the country of asylum, challenging hegemonic conceptions of national identity.

Refugees/Asylum-seekers and the Nation-State

Positioning refugees/asylum-seekers as threats to the nation-state, whether it be economically, politically or culturally serves the purpose of “creating a strong enemy image” in order to build a sense of internal cohesiveness (Oxford, 2009).

Here we return to our previous discussion on the contested collective identity of a nation-state as we see that part of the struggle to articulate a particular form of nationhood involves identifying a tangible ‘other’ that can be used to unite otherwise contested notions of national identity. According to Vas Dev (2009) “each government has used trajectories specific to their own nation-building process to make their arguments more relevant and appealing to their constituents.”

Therefore, there are universal themes employed to socially construct the identity of refugees/asylum-seekers as a threatening ‘other’. This is pursued to achieve aims related to processes of nationhood. However this requires further examination, because despite universal themes and processes, the outcomes of this process vary over geographic space. In order to understand why this occurs, one must critically examine the ways in which processes of nationhood intersect with considerations of race, class and gender within particular historical conditions and discourses. The following section seeks to explore the varied outcomes of the social construction of refugee/asylum-seeker identity across geographic space by employing the use of a case study.

Weak social construction theory councils us that “individuals cannot be adequately understood without also looking at the social, historical and cultural

contexts within which they are embedded" (Code, 2000; 451). If we use a case study to explore the construction of refugee/asylum-seeker identity, we can see how the universal themes identified in the previous section are applied in a particular context. And more specifically how the context influences the outcomes of this identity construction. Despite universal themes and processes, outcomes of the identity construction are different. This is because these universal themes need to be interpreted in context, considering how ideals of nationhood intersect with conceptions about race, gender, class and historical conditions and discourses.

PART TWO

CASE STUDY: South Africa

Why South Africa?

South Africa is an ideal case study to explore the social construction of refugee/asylum-seeker identity for several reasons. First, with the relatively recent fall of apartheid in 1994, South Africa is a young nation attempting to carve out a new national identity. According to Inés Cajas (2007) "The dismantling of apartheid put in motion a new process of nation-building whereby, although in a provisional way, the discursive authority of the state fixed the borders and meaning of the nation." In her highly relevant paper entitled *South Africa's Illegal Aliens: Constructing National Boundaries in a Post-Apartheid State*, Sheila Croucher (1998) provides a detailed picture of the challenge facing South Africa in regards to the building of its new national identity. According to Croucher (1998) "One of the many challenges facing the new South Africa is the need to build a national identity and community distinct from the racial, ethnic and cultural cleavages of its apartheid past." The building blocks of this new national identity are aggressively promoted by the state with the goal of increasing social cohesion amongst segments of the South African population. Beginning in 1994, South Africa embarked on an aggressive nation-building project (Crush and Pendleton, 2004), and thus provides a laboratory in which to examine how the social construction of refugee/asylum-seeker identity relates to nation-building.

The second reason that South Africa acts as an ideal case study is that it receives a significant amount of migrants and there is a widespread perception that it receives extremely large numbers. Whether true or not, South Africans believe there is an immigration crisis. Statistics reported by the HSRC are frequently referred to that estimated there were between 2.5-4.1 million undocumented migrants living in South Africa. This 'fact' has been questioned by many in academia (Danso and McDonald, 2001) and has since been reviewed by the HSRC, however it continues to be reproduced in public discourse. Whether true, false or somewhere in between, South Africans believe the country receives a high number of migrants, most of whom are believed to fall under the category of 'illegal'. A variety of reasons have been presented as to why South Africa is seeing this supposed rise in immigration levels. As the economic powerhouse of Africa, the promise of jobs and a higher standard of living are widely believed to act as major pulls for people all over Africa. South Africa's rights-based constitution acts as another pull factor, as it has been widely praised as one of the most liberal and inclusive in the world. The constitution of South Africa professes to assure certain liberties and this promise attracts those fleeing persecution on the continent, and seeking asylum from conflict, such as those fleeing civil wars, in places like Angola or Mozambique. People from a wide variety of backgrounds seek a better life by migrating to South Africa. With the opening of the borders in 1994, migration to South Africa became a possibility and the issue has been a matter of concern both for the state and general public for some time. South Africa acts as a good case study for the application of this framework on the social construction of

refugee/asylum-seeker identity because it receives a significant number of migrants, or at the very least, it *believes* it receives a significant number of migrants.

Lastly, there has been a great deal of scholarship on the discourse about migrants in South Africa. Critical analyses of media portrayals of migrants and public statements about them are extensive and complimented by research on public opinion. It is possible to synthesize these existing literatures to show how refugees/asylum-seekers in South Africa are portrayed as economically, politically and culturally threatening to the nation-state. The ample research available provides us with adequate data to apply this framework.

South Africa is a good case study because it is a new nation aggressively trying to construct a national identity; it receives large numbers of migrants, many of whom are refugees/asylum-seekers and there is ample research on the construction of their threatening identity. Finally, South Africa presents a unique context to consider the outcomes of these processes on this group and on the nation-state. The May 2008 assaults that were widely labeled as xenophobic in nature require a critical review to determine what roll, if any these processes had to play in the creation of a supportive environment for such an expression to take place.

It is important to keep in mind that there is a blurring of migration categories in the migration discourse of South Africa, despite laws and policies that make these distinctions. Refugees and asylum-seekers are not often distinguished from other types of migrants in public discourse and there is evidence from opinion polls that

individual South Africans do not make this distinction either (Danso and McDonald, 2001), (Crush, 2001). Migrants from various categories are broadly referred to as 'illegal aliens' or 'illegal migrants', which includes refugees/asylum-seekers (Crush, 2001). In a discourse analysis of newspaper articles reporting on migration issues by Danso and McDonald in 2001, it was found that 30% of the articles in the sample conflated migration categories, homogenizing a very diverse group. Although there is frequent reference to the specific plight of refugees/asylum-seekers in research from South Africa, there is little that has been done where they are the main focus of the investigation. This conflation of categories in the public discourse justifies the use below of research that assumes a homogeneity between different groups of migrants, despite the framework being ideally applied to the more specific category of refugees/asylum-seekers.

Brief History of South Africa

One of the most salient contextual details in contemporary South Africa is an acknowledgement of how its history has been shaped by colonialism and apartheid. As stated by Brennan and Barnes (2006), although colonialism should not be thought of as the defining moment in any African history, its importance and influence cannot be ignored. The history of South Africa is unique and framed by a racist ideology that pervaded for over three hundred years. Below, key historical facts that inform the interpretation of current events will be highlighted, to provide context to our eventual discussion of how these events shaped the nation-state of South Africa today.

South Africa's history is a complex one going back at least thousands of years. The Khoisan people, a migratory people, lived, hunted and gathered across South Africa for over a thousand years. Evidence of their rock paintings and their habitat are found across the southern tip of Africa. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company sent Jan van Riebeeck to establish the first fort in Table Bay, close to the highly coveted ocean passage around the Cape of Good Hope (Thompson, 2001, p. 32-33). The subsequent expansion of this settlement resulted in the establishment of a racial hierarchy that would dominate relations in this region for hundreds of years (Ibid). Dutch and German settlers to the region were given land to cultivate and became dependent on slave labour, most of which came from Southeast Asia (Thompson, 2001, p. 36). As a result of the Dutch settlement, there emerged a White settler society that controlled land and cultivation, with a large, mainly Asian slave population and an ostracized indigenous Black population, known as Bantu. These racial classifications would only become more entrenched over time.

Dutch and English settlers competed for control of the region, but were able to unite under the racist ideology that placed Whites at the top of a hierarchy with divine rights to rule over those supposed inferior races of the region (Thompson, 2001, p. 122). Blacks occupied the lowest spot in the racial hierarchy, which meant they were exploited as cheap, dispensable labour by White settlers (Ibid). Whites owned land while Asians, Coloureds and Blacks were forced to work as wage labourers. In 1913, the Natives Land Act was created that limited Blacks to specific homelands, which increasingly became destitute as a result of state focused development on regions and areas that served Whites (Thompson, 2001, p. 163-

164). The homelands became a source of poor, exploitable labour for Whites and virtually all Black men of working age migrated as wage labour to farms or mines (Ibid). Blacks were not permitted to leave their homelands without pass cards that allowed them to work temporarily for White enterprises, such as the mines (Thompson, 2001, p. 193). Mining labour was racially divided so that Whites held supervisory roles with decent pay, while Blacks worked under precarious circumstances (Thompson, 2001, p. 112). While White mine workers were permitted to live with their families, Black workers were required to live in all-male dormitories run by the mines for the duration of their contract (Thompson, 2001, p. 118). This system of racial segregation was prevalent in both the diamond and gold mines of South Africa.

Indians and Coloureds were segregated within urban centers, where the government designated particular areas for particular racial categories (Thompson, 2001, p. 118). Indians and Coloureds were evicted from areas that they had long inhabited and moved to less desirable areas, while prime land was rezoned to be Whites-only (Ibid). South Africa was segregated in every way possible; taxis, parks, churches and even sports (Thompson, 2001, p. 197-198). The state fostered the divisions between the different subjugated racial classes, favouring Coloureds and Indians over Blacks (Thompson, 2001, p. 201).

In 1949 the African National Congress [ANC] saw three members from its Youth League elected to its national executive that would change the course of opposition to apartheid (Thomson, 2001, p. 207). Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and

Nelson Mandela were instrumental in forming coalitions with other parties in South Africa and initiating a campaign of passive resistance against apartheid (Ibid). Despite being banned by the state as a terrorist organization, the ANC continued to operate even when some of its most influential leaders were imprisoned. Prominent members of the ANC and other affiliated organizations lived in exile in other nations in Africa and around the world, while continuing to struggle against the minority-controlled White government. Black resistance was becoming more formidable and imprisonment of leaders did little to dissuade the movement from growing (Thompson, 2001, p. 228). Throughout the 1980's restrictions were eased, allowing for increased funding to Black social services, mixed marriages and racial mixing in zones previously designating White-only areas (Thompson, 2001, p. 227). Despite this easing of restrictions, segregation was still widespread and the vast majority of Blacks lived in destitute conditions (Ibid). In August 1983 the United Democratic Front was established to coordinate opposition to apartheid amongst various groups (Ibid). Strikes and boycotts were widespread as people from all racial categories became involved with the struggle to end apartheid (Thompson, 2001, p. 229). The ANC was the most effectively lead Black political organization and White South African politicians who foresaw the demise of apartheid sought out dialogue with ANC political exiles and prisoners (Thompson, 2001, p. 244). As a result of this dialogue, consensus developed for a peacefully negotiated settlement for a democratic South Africa (Ibid). As a political prisoner, Nelson Mandela played the pivotal role in negotiating with the government for majority rule (Ibid). When Frederik Willem de Klerk became head of the ruling National party, he met the

demands made by Mandela and the ANC to legalize banned political parties, release political prisoners, and the suspension of capital punishment (Thompson, 2001, p. 247). Despite attempts to negotiate a peaceful settlement, violence continued during the negotiations between 1990-1994 where ANC supporters were kidnapped, tortured and murdered by a secret security force sponsored by the state (Thompson, 2001, p. 249). An interim constitution was eventually formed, following much political wrangling and was liberal and democratic in nature (Thompson, 2001, p. 257), and has been widely recognized as one of the most liberal in the world (Nyamjoh, 2006, p. 62). The constitution included an extremely comprehensive Bill of Rights. "The Constitutional Court approved a constitution that is, even by international standards, one of the most progressive documents of democratic governance ever promulgated" (Croucher, 1998). Democratic elections occurred in April 1994, despite refusal to participate by several parties (Thompson, 2001, p. 259). Although serious flaws were identified with the election, the results were deemed adequately free and fair and Nelson Mandela was elected president (Thompson, 2001, p. 264).

Despite the triumph of the peaceful negotiation process, the new South Africa faced a multitude of challenges, most importantly a vast divide between rich and poor founded on racial classification (Thompson, 2001, p. 266). "Most white South Africans were well-to-do, well educated, and well housed. Most Africans, like most people of tropical Africa, were poor, badly educated, and ill housed. The conditions of the Coloured and Indian members of the population were in between those of Whites and Africans" (Thompson, 2001, p. 266). Symbolic changes such

as a new flag and new national anthem were welcomed (Thompson, 2001, p. 282)

but despite improvements, progress has been slow (Thompson, 2001, p. 283).

“Educated, skilled people were in such demand that they had no difficulty finding jobs with high and rapidly rising salaries, whereas nearly half of the uneducated, unskilled people were unemployed, and the wages of those who did have jobs tended to be stagnant” (Thompson, 2001, p. 291-292).

Another challenge facing the new South Africa is the rise in immigration levels that has occurred since the democratic elections of 1994. Many migrants to South Africa come from neighbouring countries, particularly Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola (Croucher, 1998). Migrants also came from North Africa including Somalia and Ethiopia. An immigration crisis discourse emerged within less than a decade after the first democratic elections in 1994. This was accompanied by acute fears about the number of illegal immigrants entering the country. This discourse pins many of the challenges facing the new South Africa – poverty, crime, HIV/AIDS and a struggling economy – on the backs of supposedly large numbers of illegal migrants entering the country.

Social Construction of refugees/asylum-seekers in South Africa

As stated above, it is at times difficult to distinguish between refugees/asylum-seekers and other types of ‘illegal aliens’ in the discourse in South Africa. There have been efforts made to isolate this group in research however it is rarely the sole group of interest. Below research will be used that looked at the

wider group as a whole and when available, the particularities of how the discourse frames refugees/asylum-seekers specifically.

Discourse analysis of media and statements by public officials is complimented by a rich body of research on public opinion that provides us with a detailed picture of the social construction of migrants in the South African context. Themes in this research can be categorized into economic, political and cultural arguments that serve the nation-building project. How the particular context of South Africa filters these broader themes to be locally relevant will be explored below, with specific attention to issues of race, class and gender.

Overall, the portrayal of migrants in South Africa is similar to portrayals in other nation-states as a threatening 'other'. Nyamjoh (2006) claims,

The media thus play a critical role in the production, circulation and/or reproduction of prevalent attitudes and perceptions on foreigners by South Africans, who are reified as a homogeneous entity with common interests to be collectively defended against undeserving 'others' (p. 64).

According to Crush (2001) "Fear of crime, threats to jobs and the economy, and disease are the leading reasons given for opposition to immigration. These are the same arguments advanced by those who oppose immigration everywhere." Danso and McDonald (2001) found that the press in South Africa often portrayed migrants as criminals who steal jobs, ruin the economy and bring AIDS to South Africa. Crush and Pendleton (2004) clearly stated that studies of media coverage on immigration issues in South Africa showed a 'persistent negative bias'. Nyamjoh (2006, p. 37)

summarized research, noted that, "There are widespread myths that 'illegals' take jobs, commit crimes, depress wages, consume resources, spread AIDS, and smuggle arms and drugs."

Economic Themes

Crush and Pendleton (2004) found that the most popular stereotype of migrants in South Africa was one of job stealers. South Africans believed that migrants were detrimental to the economy because they stole jobs, despite over 60% of urban survey respondents having no personal experience of this 'job stealing' (Ibid). Danso and McDonald (2001) identified a prominent theme in newsprint media that described illegals or aliens as job stealers who compromised the economy of South Africa. Research carried out by the HSRC in June of 2008 claimed, "It is well documented that immigrants are prepared to work for a lower wage" (11). The report described how South Africans perceive foreigners to be taking jobs away from South African women in particular, directly compromising their livelihoods (HSRC, 2008, p. 39). The Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU] contributed to this discourse when it made demands on the state to restrict the number of migrants in order to protect jobs and wages of native South Africans (Nyamjoh, 2006, p. 41). South Africa has high levels of unemployment, 23.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2009), therefore a discourse that portrays migrants as a group that threatens employment is highly salient to a large portion of the South African population. This discourse is primarily concerned with low-skilled jobs, notably those in the informal sector, and constructs migrants as threatening

those employed in precarious positions, such as street vendors and domestics (Nyamjoh, 2006, p. 42). Claims of job stealing utilize migrants as a scapegoat for failures of state-policy, which have failed to create jobs as quickly as was thought possible since the fall of apartheid. This does not pertain to employment statistics alone; there is evidence of a great deal of frustration in South Africa amongst those segments of the population who have yet to see the real fruits that the dismantling of apartheid promised (HSRC, 2008, p. 32; Nyamjoh, 2006, p. 55). According to a recent newspaper article in the Mail & Guardian, there have been widespread protests in the townships of South Africa against continuing poverty and poor service provision (Brooks, 2009). The South African systems of health care, education and housing are widely reported to be under strain from large numbers of migrants (HSRC, 2008, p. 37). Despite participating in the struggle, large portions of the impoverished Black population are still living in destitute conditions with little prospect for improvement. As described by Nyamjoh, (2006, p. 5), "...ordinary underprivileged South Africans realise that their constitutional rights are slow at delivering the material benefits of citizenship." The slow progress in socio-economic standing for many South Africans is a source of tension. According to Coplan (2009), ordinary South Africans have become frustrated with the influx of illegal migrants because, "In their view, they had not taken the country from the white regime only to share it with economic refugees from the Dark Continent." The Golden Age that the struggle had promised is taking longer than expected to materialize and there is a need to find something outside the nation-state to blame for this failure. For Nyamjoh (2006, p. 5) "In such contexts of compounding

frustrations and uncertainties, it is easy to turn migrants and other minorities into scapegoats." According to Neocosmos, "Dividing the poor people of Africa up into 'national' entities so that 'our' poor and the 'foreign' poor are confined to separate and well-policed compartments and graded into an explicit hierarchy with in South Africa is in the interest of the elites" (as cited in Sharp, 2008). This threat discourse implies that South Africans are capable of achieving a decent livelihood and that migrants compromise this ability.

The South African context requires further critical analysis of the economic theme within the social construction of migrant identity because of the historical legacy of apartheid. While in general, claims of job stealing and resource depletion are concerns for those in the population with a lower economic standing, in South Africa class is highly segmented by race. Those most disadvantaged economically, were and continue to be, Black. In South Africa, the term 'Black' refers to Africans, Coloureds (those of mixed origin) and Asians (those who can trace their historical roots to the Asian and Indian subcontinent). When claims are made that portray migrants as stealing jobs or using up resources, the assumption is that they are stealing jobs from Blacks and they are using up resources intended for Blacks. The Black segments of the population who struggled and sacrificed to bring down apartheid, and who have laid claim to concepts of national identity, are now having the benefits of that struggle compromised by an incoming 'flood' of migrants (Nyamnjoh, 2006, p. 5). Here we see how the more generalized economic arguments that serve nation-building projects are filtered through a particular context as it pertains to race. Apartheid created a racialized labour system, which

means that the economic threat that migrants are presented as in public discourse, either as job stealers or competitors for limited resources, find its most receptive audience in the poor Black portions of the population.

Neocosmos (2008) cites a 1998 Human Rights Watch report that concluded that public officials in South Africa linked illegal migrants with the spread of disease, and HIV/AIDS specifically. In the South African context, references to AIDS can be interpreted as a threat discourse about resource scarcity. According to Inés Cejas (2007), public discourse about non-South Africans confirms them as 'parasites of the state's resources'. Migrants are portrayed as carriers of disease, and specifically in the South African context, AIDS (Danso & McDonald, 2001). The implied repercussions of this discourse are two fold. Firstly, it is implied that migrants who are HIV positive will make excessive demands on the overstrained South African health care system, and consequently there will be less healthcare available for native South Africans. Secondly, a discourse that implies that migrants are infected with HIV insinuates that there is a high risk that they will infect healthy South Africans with the disease, putting the population directly at risk. Danso and McDonald's conclusions about the migration-AIDS discourse present in the South African press provides an excellent example of the resource scarcity threat that migrants pose, filtered to be locally relevant. While in other nation-states refugees/asylum-seekers are also claimed to be carriers of disease, in South Africa, the claim is more pointedly made, by making reference to a specific disease. Claims about AIDS bring a real saliency to the disease argument in this region, where rates of AIDS and HIV are high. In 2007, it was estimated that 5.6 million South Africans

where HIV positive (Treatment Action Campaign, 2008). In 2005, the HSRC estimated that 10.8% of South Africans over the age of two were HIV positive (Ibid). Similar to the legacy of apartheid, there are not many South Africans who can claim that HIV/AIDS has not touched their lives in some way. The claim that migrants are carriers of HIV/AIDS is such an effective threat discourse because of the prevalence of this disease in the region, and the accompanying stigma associated with it. The other suggestion made by this discourse is that South Africans are healthy and migrants will jeopardize the health of the nation, by compromising the limited resources of the health care system and by infecting South Africans with the disease. The implication about South African identity is that South Africans are healthy and disease free, while migrants are unhealthy and pose a risk to South African healthiness. HIV rates are highest among the Black portion of the South African population (Noble, 2009). Once again we see that the discourse portrays migrants as most threatening to the most vulnerable segments of the population, in this case poor, Black South Africans.

In line with the analytical framework described in Part One, there is a socially constructed discourse about the economic threat that migrants pose to the nation-building project of South Africa. Migrants threaten the nation-state by stealing jobs from the native-born, compromising the right of South Africans to a reasonable livelihood. Migrants also deplete resources, specifically health care resources, which should be the reserve of the native born. The racialized labour structure which remains as the legacy of apartheid and the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the region filter these broader economic threats to be locally relevant.

Political Themes

It can be difficult to distinguish to any degree of certainty what is economic vs. what is politically motivated in the nation-building project. The two are intricately tied to one another. Economic positioning is invariably tied to political rights, and specifically in the South African context, rights of citizenship. According to Coplan (2009) "To be poor in the way that most South African's are poor is to be the victim of a violence that renders one's hard-won citizenship meaningless." The discourse that socially constructs migrants in South Africa as economically threatening supports a parallel theme of political threat. Similar to the economic themes explored above, the political themes are highly salient here because of the recent political conflict that accompanied the struggle against apartheid. Public discourse constructs migrants, specifically illegals, refugees and asylum-seekers as threats to democratic liberties gained through the Struggle. According to Coplan (2009), "Oppressed locals complained they had not fought the struggle to liberate the country just to provide advantages for people who had made their own countries unliveable." Several academics have pointed to the widespread promotion of South African exceptionalism as a belief that inadvertently fosters animosity towards migrants. This exceptionalism is founded on the relatively peaceful transition from apartheid. Pride over this peaceful transition to democracy is an essential part of the South African national identity and is widely and rightfully promoted. While this in and of itself is not problematic, it has been used to imply that non-South Africans are lacking in democratic qualities and thus jeopardize hard won political gains by being present in the country. South Africans are peaceful,

liberal and democratic, which implies that non-South Africans are predisposed to conflict, and do not support democracy. There is evidence that South Africans believe that foreigners in the country compromise the 'hard won gains of South African democracy' (HSRC, 2008, p. 32). These claims serve the nation-building project of the nation-state by fostering a national identity that is peaceful, liberal and democratic by socially constructing illegal migrants as the opposite.

The refusal of the government of South Africa to recognize conflict in countries to the north presents a twist on the geopolitical concerns of the nation-state (Coplan, 2009). Of late, this phenomenon has been most visible in South Africa's policy towards the situation in neighbouring Zimbabwe. According to the HSRC,

It is evident that local residents in informal settlements feel they have been left to deal unaided with the consequences of national government policy, particularly in relation to migration and the political conflict in Zimbabwe (2008, p. 46).

South Africa has received international criticism for its stance on the political conflict in Zimbabwe. If South Africa were to formally recognize Zimbabweans as refugees, then their presence in South Africa would be moved from illegal to legitimate. The prospect of accepting a large number of Zimbabwean refugees is distasteful, and thus the political situation has not been formally recognized by the state. Not recognizing Zimbabweans as refugees allows the South African Department of Home Affairs to continue deporting significant numbers of

Zimbabweans, which demonstrates that the nation-state is one capable of control of the immigration crisis. It creates a strong image of the nation-state of South Africa. Recognition of asylum claims from Zimbabweans on a large scale could also jeopardize future bilateral relations between these nation-states. The social construction of Zimbabweans as illegal migrants or bogus refugees/asylum-seekers serves South Africa's domestic nation-building project as well as its wider geopolitical agenda.

The public discourse in South Africa constructs illegal migrants as responsible for high crime levels (Neocosmos, 2008). Public statements by politicians and police officers linking illegal migrants with other illegal activities are widely reported in media (Ibid). This link has seemingly been adopted by swaths of the South African population, as reported by the HSRC in 2008. The outcomes of the focus groups conducted by the HSRC demonstrated that at least some South Africans living in townships linked illegal migrants with crime, with specific references to Nigerians as particularly prone to being involved in drug-crime and weapon smuggling (HSRC, 2008, p. 7). Morris (1998) found police officers frequently associating Nigerians with drug crime in Johannesburg. What is particularly interesting in the South African context in regards to public officials and police officers linking crime to illegal migrants, as noted by Crush (2001), is that these claims have many parallels to claims made against Blacks during apartheid by politicians and police. Danso and McDonald (2001) found that the media in South Africa portrayed illegal migrants as thieves and drug dealers. Danso and McDonald make a valid critique of the widespread application of the term 'illegal' by media as

it "defined thousands of otherwise law abiding migrants as law breakers and described their very presence in the country as a crime". According to Crush and Pendleton (2004) the assumption that migrants engage in illegal activities also extends to the claims on behalf of asylum-seekers and refugees. There is a sense amongst South Africans that claims for asylum are bogus, which further reinforces the portrayal of this group as one of illegality (Ibid). The connection between offenses that violate the immigration laws of a nation-state and other criminal activity is strong in the public discourse about migrants in South Africa. In particular this discourse targets foreign-born men, and has specific claims depending on the nationality of those in question. These claims serve to reinforce a national identity that is law-abiding. High rates of crime in South Africa, over 19,000 murders recorded in 2003/2004 (Crime Information Analysis Center, 2006), are alluded to be a result of the presence of gross number of illegal migrants, who enter the nation-state of South Africa as criminals (implied in the use of the term 'illegal') and who continue their lives of crime upon arrival. This argument absolves state institutions such as the South African Police Force, from responsibility for high crime rates. It is not their inability to adequately police the nation-state, it is the fault of the presence of indiscriminate numbers of illegal migrants engaging in illegal activities.

Cultural Themes

The public discourse on the cultural threat that refugees/asylum-seekers present in post-colonial nation-states in Africa frequently draws on arguments that

promote the value of indigeneity. According to Nyamjoh (2006, p. 61) "...blacks, who are presented as the most indigenous, yet most exploited of the constituent colours - black, coloured, Indian, white - of the rainbow nation." According to Neocosmos (2008) "Indigeneity is never a historical fact nor a natural one. It is always politically defined by those with power." In South Africa, Neocosmos (2008) describes how indigeneity has been used as a basis for South African national identity, valorizing certain segments of the South African population more than others. The image of a poor, Black South African man, indigenous to the country has become the face of the nation, in the same way that the essence of Britishness was envisioned to be White and middle-class (Doty, 1996). It is this version of national identity that is promoted and reproduced in public discourse. In public discourse, illegal migrants in South Africa are socially constructed as posing a cultural threat to poor, Black South African men, first and foremost.

One element that has been noted is that there seems to be no stereotypical profile for a xenophobic South African (Morapedi, 2007), (Crush & Pendleton, 2004). According to a survey performed in 2001-2002 of urban South Africans entitled the National Immigration Policy Survey [NIPS],

Negative attitudes... are so pervasive and widespread that it is actually impossible to identify any kind of "xenophobe profile." In other words, the poor and the rich, the employed and the unemployed, the male and the female, the black and the white, the conservative and the radical, all express remarkably similar attitudes (Crush & Pendleton, 2004; 1-2).

It would appear that, in general, South Africans are a xenophobic group, while acknowledging the heterogeneity of opinions that must invariably exist within this group. South Africa is a diverse nation-state, and it would appear that all segment of its diverse population feel threatened by the migration crisis discourse. This presents an interesting outcome because research typically finds one element of a population, typically those most disadvantaged groups, to be more xenophobic than others, whose positions are not in jeopardy (Crush and Pendleton, 2004). However, analysis of assaults which were labeled 'xenophobic' reveals commonalities in the race, gender and class of the perpetrators of such violence. Assaults against people perceived to be foreigners have been carried out mainly by poor, Black men (HSRC, 2008). Therefore despite public opinion polls that reveal that in general all South Africans display a high degree of xenophobia, regardless of which class, race or gender groups they identify with, those compelled to act on this xenophobia are poor, Black South African men. Using murder as the ultimate expression of xenophobic attitudes, those identifying as poor, Black South African men are most likely to act.

The idea that it is poor, Black South African men who feel most threatened by the presence of illegal migrants is explored further by the HSRC who attempted to describe how this group feels reproductively threatened when South African women have foreign partners. From the HSRC (2008) report, South African women view foreign-born men as more resourceful and competent providers, making them more desirable as partners than South African men. Men expressed frustration and a belief that foreign men were stealing *their* South African women (HSRC, 2008).

Employing the assertion of Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992, p. 7) that women act as reproducers of nationalist ideology and cultural capital, women who do not partner with South African men and raise children with them are theorized to not participate in the nation-building project in the desired way. As described by Mamdani (2001, p. 53), the strength is believed to be in the seed (male), and not in the field (female). Women are portrayed as incapable of reproducing the desired nationalist ideology and cultural capital without the guidance of a native male. Women act as producers of the next generation and are responsible for reproduction of national identity. The HSCR reports draws on beliefs about gender roles in South Africa and how these are related to the nation-building project. While men are portrayed as the losers in this scenario, in that they loose out on opportunities to marry South African women and have purely South African families, the nation itself is also at risk, because its national identity is being compromised by the appropriation of women by foreigners. Despite women being the subject of this particular cultural claim, the threat is to poor, Black South African men, who are envisioned as the hegemonic identity of the nation-state, with reproductive rights.

Another way in which migrants are portrayed as culturally threatening to the national identity is that they are visually distinct and do not speak one of the native African languages (Morris, 1998). Nyamjoh (2006, p. 39) notes the widespread use in South Africa of the derogatory term '*Makwerekwere*', which designates "...a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages but also one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward

in relation to South Africa." The term *Makwerekwere* is meant to mimic and ridicule the foreign languages of migrants in South Africa (Ibid). People labeled as *Makwerekwere* are assumed to be the darkest of the dark skinned (Ibid) because according to Coplan (2009), Black South Africans are not as Black as those that come from other sub-Saharan nation-states. This language barrier coupled with darker skin colour act as markers for non-indigeneity, and as essentially opposed to the national identity. During the violence of May 2008, many victims were South Africans who were mistaken for foreigners, due to their dark skin colour (Coplan, 2009).

Many scholars have noted that despite being the economic powerhouse of the African continent, South Africa operates from a different cultural frame of reference than the rest of Africa (Nyamjoh, 2006, p. 39). References to language ability and skin colour are related to a neo-colonial the belief that migrants to South Africa from other African nation-states are backwards and primitive in comparison with South Africans (Ibid). Neocosmos (2008) notes that the cultural and intellectual frame of reference for South Africa is believed to be found in either the US or Western Europe and not in Africa, making it exceptional in comparison with other nation-states on the continent. The rest of Africa is seen as a place of the other, separate from South Africa and this dominant neo-colonial discourse is reproduced in media (Ibid).

Illegal migrants are socially constructed as cultural threats to the nation-state of South Africa. This discourse targets poor, Black South African men as the

population most at risk due to illegal migrants. The hegemonic national identity is one of an exceptional and indigenous Black man, and illegal migrants are constructed as threatening that identity by appropriating South African women and importing foreign languages. Summarized by Nyamjoh (2006, p. 65) "They produce and/or reproduce certain ideologies and discourses that support specific relations of power in accordance with hierarchies of race, nationality, culture, class and gender."

XENOPHOBIA

There is little doubt that the public discourse in South Africa socially constructs migrants as posing a threat to the nation-state. But what is the relationship between this threatening discourse and the xenophobic violence of May 2008 in South Africa?

What Happened?

Xenophobia, as defined by Morapedi (2007) is "attitudes, prejudices, and behaviours that reject, exclude and often vilify persons on the perceptions that those persons are outsiders or foreign to the community, society or national identity." (Morapedi, 2007). What has come to be known in South Africa as the xenophobic violence of May 2008 is concisely described by Coplan (2009),

For fourteen days at the end of May 2008, roving mobs composed of the (mostly youngish and male) residents of South Africa's poorest and most marginalized "communities" and settlements attacked African neighbours,

based on their foreign or thought to be or even wrongly imposed foreign identity.

Coplan goes on to quantify the violence, with 342 shops looted, 213 shops burnt, 143 shacks burnt, 30 000 people displaced and 65 people murdered (2009). The violence began in the township of Alexandra where mobs targeted Black foreigners living in their midst (Mail & Guardian, 2009). After the deaths of three migrants in those attacks, others fearing further violence began to seek shelter at police stations (Ibid). In the weeks following the initial outbreak of violence in Alexandra, incidents of xenophobic violence were reported across the country in several poor townships (Ibid). Angry mobs looted and burned the homes of migrants and violently attacked individuals believed to be from outside of South Africa (Ibid). The world was shocked to see photos of a man being burned alive during anti-foreigner attacks on May 18th, just east of Johannesburg (Ibid). As described by the HSRC

The violence and unrest accompanying these attacks, which took place in May 2008, left more than 50 people dead and thousands displaced in locales across South Africa (2008, p. 14).

While the media reported that the attacks targeted foreigners in general, victims were singled out as legitimate targets of violence based on the dark colour of their skin, a visual marker of foreignness. As noted above, South Africans are thought to have lighter skin than people from other sub-Saharan countries. Foreigners are believed to have darker skin than South Africans, and thus those foreigners who were attacked, as well as many of the South Africans who were victims of the

violence, had dark skin. The racialized nature of the xenophobic violence in South Africa adds a complex contextual detail to the belief that the discrimination suffered by migrants as an inherently different group, has been visually demarcated by skin colour. The xenophobia in South Africa cannot be understood without this consideration.

There have been several attempts to describe why xenophobia took on such a violent expression in South Africa while its presence in other countries in southern Africa, like Botswana remained at the level of negative attitudes. Some have suggested that South Africa has a history of violence from which it has not yet escaped. The HSRC report generated during the height of the violence in May 2008, pointed to the legacy of apartheid as a historical condition that in a sense prescribed the violent expression of xenophobic attitudes, through grassroots organization of vigilante mobs. The report declared that Black South Africans had developed a superiority complex over other Africans as a result of their triumph over apartheid (HSRC, 2008, p. 15), and felt it their right to seek justice they believed the government was not willing to pursue. While such conclusions about why xenophobia became violent in South Africa are little more than conjecture, alternative explanations have yet to be presented.

Main Discourse

Public officials and media were quick to label the outbreaks of violence in the townships as xenophobic, however there has been much scholarly debate about whether that was appropriate (Coplan, 2009), (Sharp, 2008). A fact that was

hidden in the labeling of the attacks as 'xenophobic' was that twenty-one of the sixty-five deaths that occurred during this period were of native South Africans (Coplan, 2009). Newspapers such as the Mail & Guardian reported that the motivation for the attacks was xenophobia, reporting that foreigners living in Alexandra were not welcome by other residents (2009). The labeling of the attacks as xenophobic was not questioned in public discourse; any analysis focused on the possible reasons for the xenophobic violence, not the definition itself. The quickly compiled HSRC report never questioned the xenophobic definition and has been criticized on the validity of their conclusions as a result (Sharp, 2008). Once again we employ the assertions of social construction theory, that whether these attacks were xenophobic or not, they were constructed to be and have since become filled with meaning based on this label. It is not so important whether the attacks of May 2008 were motivated by feelings of xenophobia. What is important is that they are widely believed to be so.

Although it is rather impossible to prove a causal relationship between public discourse and actions by individuals in groups, questions were raised about the relationship between the way migrants are portrayed as threatening in public discourse and the actions taken against them in May 2008. According to Neocosmos (2008), state institutions in South Africa helped to create an environment that encouraged the xenophobic violence. A useful quote from Smith (2001) provides a possible extension of Neocosmos' claim,

What matters most for an explanation of the power and durability of nations and nationalism is that the narratives and images of the nation strike a chord with the people to whom they are designed to appeal; and that 'the people' and their cultures can, in turn, contribute to the process of reconstructing the nation. Only when they can 're-present' to the mass of the population an acceptable and inspiring image or narrative of the nation can elites exert any influence and provide some leadership (p.82).

Here, the public discourse of threatening migrants can be seen to represent one of many 'narratives and images of the nation', one that strikes a chord with poor, Black, South African men, who are 'the people to whom they are designed to appeal'. This groups 'contribution to the process of reconstructing the nation' was the translation of this discourse into violent assaults against foreigners. South African elites, such as public officials, were able to exert influence and provide leadership over the nation, when they addressed the attacks as unacceptable.

There is a commonality between the claims in the discourse about migrants and the motivations for these violent acts, as reported in media and by public officials, such as the HSRC. The economic, political and cultural themes outlined in the framework above were pointed to as the motivation behind the attacks, in a sense legitimizing these claims against migrants. According to the conclusions of the HSRC, foreigners were attacked because they steal jobs, strain the resources of the state, compromise political achievements and threaten the cultural identity of the nation of South Africa (2008). One could argue that describing these attacks as

motivated by xenophobia and seeking out reasons for this xenophobia, contributes to the public discourse that portrays migrants as threatening. The motivation behind the attacks was deemed to be xenophobia and thus the answers sought were only looked for within this ideological milieu. The discourse that portrays migrants as threatening was reproduced by social scientists who, sought out reasons for attacks against foreigners, without questioning the nature of the attacks themselves. The HSRC validated the economic, political and cultural claims made against migrants in public discourse by describing the motivations for these xenophobic attacks, as based on facts. Migrants were attacked because they steal jobs, instead of migrants were attacked because they are socially constructed as job stealers. On one hand, it is possible to hypothesize that the negative discourse about migrants in South Africa contributed to the violence against them. But it is also possible that the attacks were assumed to be 'xenophobic' because of the presence of this discourse. What is not in question is that the conclusions of official research bodies such as the HSRC further contributed to the threatening discourse by finding and legitimizing motivations for these xenophobic attacks. Describing the attacks as xenophobic served to further the discourse about migrants as economically, politically and culturally threatening, reproducing claims related to the construction of a threatening other in order to further an aggressive nation-building project. Although the attacks were widely denounced as unacceptable behaviour, the assumed motivations for them were left in tact. In this way, we can see how the public discourse that constructed migrants as threatening, may have contributed to an environment in which the xenophobic attacks could take place. But we must also

consider that the violence was labeled as xenophobic because of the pervasiveness of this public discourse. Had the public discourse been different, then perhaps these attacks would have been labeled and investigated in a different way. Finally, we must consider that the discourse about the attacks contributes to the wider portrayal of migrants in South Africa as threatening.

Alternative Discourse

Similar to other nation-states, there is a strong public discourse in South Africa that portrays migrants as unwanted illegals who threaten the nation-state. The violence of May 2008 has been labeled as xenophobic and been portrayed as a result of this public discourse. However there is a need to explore the alternative discourses that invariably exist. The dominant discourse portrays migrants to South Africa as threatening, but there is also an alternative discourse present that seeks to include migrants as a valuable identity in the nation-state of South Africa. Exploring this alternative discourse in the same ways that the dominant discourse has been investigated, using discourse analysis of media and statements by public officials and public opinion polls, could illuminate themes that would be beneficial to promote in public discourse in order to diminish the discrimination that befalls this group as a result. This alternative discourse has been largely ignored and presents a potentially valuable field of scholarly investigation in South Africa especially.

One may wonder whether it is possible to pursue a nation-building project and develop a national identity that is not exclusionary to refugees/asylum-seekers, or whether these ideas are permanently fixed as opposites. I argue that it is

possible, and that evidence of its successful application can be found in South Africa, alongside the dominant discourse of threat. This alternative discourse, that constructs a national identity that is inclusive of this group, requires more scholarly investigation because there are lessons to be learned from how this process has occurred in South Africa that would apply to other nation-states around the world.

Where does one locate the alternative discourse about migrants in South Africa that portrays them as a valuable part of the nation, despite their non-indigeneity? Similar to the location of the discourse of threat, evidence of this alternative discourse can be found in speeches made by public officials, as well as in legal documents such as the South African constitution and in actions and statements made by ordinary South Africans.

In 1996, on the day of the birth of the liberal and democratic constitution of the new South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, the deputy president gave a rousing speech entitled *I am an African*, that is recognized by scholars to be a key document in the discourse on the African Renaissance (Orgeret, 2004). In the speech, Mbeki asserts that his heritage, like that of all Africans, is diverse and includes the blood of migrants from Europe, Malay slaves, labourers from India and China and the Khoi and San people of Southern Africa (Mbeki, 1996). His inclusion of people of different ethnicity, and geographical origin in the identity of 'African' affirms the identity as one that transcends national boundaries and extends to the whole of the continent.

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest

that assertion, I shall claim that - I am an African (Mbeki, 1996).

Mbeki carefully chose his words to include not just those born on African soil, but all those who find themselves within its borders, opening up the way for an identity that is inclusive of foreigners. Mbeki goes on in his speech to commend the new constitution of South Africa,

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africaness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins. It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it" (Mbeki, 1996).

Of critical importance to an alternative dialogue about the value of refugees/asylum-seekers is that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it" not just those born on its soil. This assertion has been pointed to by numerous scholars that believe that this facet of the South African constitution is the key to constructing a more inclusive national identity (Neocosmos, 2008; Crush, 2001; Croucher, 1998) something Neocosmos (2008) calls "an alternative politics of peace and equality." There is evidence here, in the political rhetoric and in legislation that there is potential in South Africa to foster and promote a national identity that is inclusive off all those living in the country, not just those born on its soil. A national identity that promotes unity through diversity is imagined in Mbeki's speech, a vision that has obvious applications in many of the multicultural nations of the world.

During the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, many ordinary South Africans volunteered their time and resources to support the victims of this violence. In an article entitled *South Africans unite against xenophobia* (Mtongana, 2008), South Africans of various racial and ethnic backgrounds are commended by charities for their overwhelming support of the victims displaced by the violence. Upon a call for support, South Africans came out in large numbers to donate goods, food, blankets and money to the victims (Ibid). Corporate entities also stepped up, with large monetary donations and one well-known hotel opening and staffing a soup kitchen to provide hot meals for the victims (Ibid). South African university students were also mentioned for efforts made in protest marches and collection drives across the nation (Ibid). In a quote from the article on the positive response from South Africans, David Stevens, from the South African Red Cross commented, "Ubuntu is not lost." Further evidence of this alternative discourse of inclusivity being embraced by ordinary South Africans can be found in a statement by Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shackdweller's movement. Released during the attacks of May 2008, the organization was praised for its Statement on the Xenophobic Attacks in Johannesburg and its comprehensive message of cooperation and solidarity. "An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they may find themselves" (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2008). The organization makes explicit connections between the struggle to end apartheid and the ongoing struggle to achieve equality of opportunity in South Africa, and makes reference to the contributions made by people born in other countries (Ibid). The organization denounces claims made against people born in other countries and

also makes repeated pleas, "Don't turn your suffering neighbours into enemies" (Ibid). Abahlali baseMjondolo (2008) lists ten action points, the last of which is, "If the need arises here we will ask all our members to defend and shelter their comrades from other countries." This statement provides concrete evidence of an alternative discourse of inclusion and support on behalf of the poorest segments of the South African population for migrants, and refugees/asylum-seekers specifically.

Despite there being ample evidence of a dominant discourse that portrays migrants as economically, politically and culturally threatening in South Africa, there also exists evidence of an alternative discourse about this group. This alternative discourse maintains many of the traits that delineate national identity, such as political organization and achievement, but does not promote indigeneity in the same way as the dominant discourse. There is a suggestion in this alternative discourse of a South African identity as one that is united in its diversity as well as compassionate and generous. The compassion and generosity that is implied to be inherent to South Africans, as evidence by their outpouring of support for the victims of the xenophobic violence, echoes the conclusions of Bauder in his review of public discourse in Canada (2008). Bauder found evidence that the Canadian identity is portrayed in public discourse as liberal, compassionate and founded on a tradition of generosity (Ibid). Despite this identity still being founded on manufactured difference, and material inequality, the threatening claims against refugees/asylum-seekers appear less severe. As traits inherent to the national identity, compassion and generosity maintain the division between natives and

foreigners. However, in this particular portrayal, this division is one that appears to result in less discriminatory outcomes.

There is evidence for an alternative discourse about migrants in South Africa that counters the dominant discourse of threat. Promotion of a national identity that is embracing of diversity, as well as compassionate and generous towards refugees/asylum-seekers is visible in public discourse, and this should be explored by academics. Scholarly investigation of this alternative discourse in South Africa has the potential to illuminate how it is related to nation-building projects and potentially how it can be promoted in South Africa and in other nation-states around the world.

Conclusion

In nation-states all over the world, refugees/asylum-seekers are portrayed in public discourse as threatening, and this has resulted in a new form of racism against people in this group. This group is claimed to inherently threaten the economic prosperity of the nation-state by stealing jobs and using up state resources. They threaten the nation-state politically by compromising its claims to sovereignty and they threaten the nation-state culturally by importing difference that could change the content of national identity. These claims make up a discourse that supports discriminatory policies against refugees/asylum-seekers in nation-states all over the world. This discourse is evident in South Africa, which experienced violence widely believed to be motivated by xenophobia in May of 2008. In South Africa migrants are believed to be economically, politically and

culturally threatening to the nation-state. This discourse supports the nation-building project of the state, by reinforcing the legitimacy of state control and national identity. The discourse has been theorized to have contributed to an environment that was supportive of violence against migrants, leading to the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. However, there is also evidence of an alternative discourse in South Africa, that promotes unity in diversity, compassion and generosity, as evidenced in actions and statements from ordinary South Africans during the height of these violent incidents. This alternative discourse requires scholarly investigation to explore how a national identity that is compassionate and generous towards refugees/asylum-seekers relates to nation-building. While still utilizing claims about difference, and control, this alternative discourse has the potential to be more inclusive of this group than the dominant discourse of threat, reducing the racism that this group experiences.

If there is evidence of this alternative discourse in South Africa, where nationals are noted for their xenophobic sentiment, then there are likely similar discourses present in other nation-states around the world. While some academics have explored this (Bauder, 2008; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Schuster, 2003), more research is required. It is a valuable academic pursuit to investigate these alternative discourses, and how they could be related to processes of nation-building, instead of just focusing on the threatening discourses that dominate public discourse.

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