Chapter 4


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Immigration and xenophobia have been prominent in South African debates and imaginaries after apartheid. The influx of immigrants, especially from parts of Africa ridden by violence and political disasters, brought fears of borders collapsing in the aftermath of pass laws and influx control. The settlement of immigrants in urban centres that used to be regulated by the 1950 Group Areas Act appeared like an excess of diversity that would threaten the boundaries of even a rainbow nation. This was the case not least at the time of the 2008 violence in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, which led to some very useful discussions and clarifications as exemplified in the two consecutive rounds of analysis of xenophobia and violence delivered very promptly by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC 2008; Hadland 2008; cf. Coplan 2009).

Paradoxically, South African citizenship claims have historically often been legitimised precisely with reference to histories of migrations and treks. As Loren Landau pointed out in the course of the HSRC debates, understandings of xenophobia often disguised the fact that – on both sides of the frontier of locals and aliens – generations of migrants, movers and invaders existed, and that often aspirations to superior rights of belonging would be of quite recent origin (Landau 2008). Xenophobic violence therefore often represented a confrontation between different generations of claims of belonging. Consequently, debates and arguments around such claims will be flat and misleading, unless an historical perspective is brought in.

This article tries to add an historical perspective to debates around citizenship and claims-making by discussing different types of tactics used for self-representation by earlier immigrants. It does so by comparing two groups of South African Muslim citizens with different histories of arrival and struggles for integration, and examining changes in their modes of self-presentation during the 20th century. It gives special attention to the so-called Durban Zanzibaris – a community originating in freed slaves brought to Natal in the 1870s – whose cultural entrepreneurship has been particularly effective. Zanzibari endeavours are compared to the changing identity tactics of groups of Cape

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Malay and Cape Muslims during and after apartheid. The discussion is based on archival research, on secondary sources that are not easily available, as well as on the author’s recent field research on the post-1980s history of the Zanzibaris (Seedat 1973; Oosthuizen 1982; Kaarsholm 2010; Sheriff 2008; Kaarsholm 2014).

The chapter seeks to open up new perspectives on ways in which notions of diasporic identity can interact with and support claims for national citizenship within changing contexts of multiculturalism. The two historical trajectories are used to suggest continuities, but also ways in which the fixations of identity and culture at the heart of apartheid aspirations may be freed and opened up through a very different post-apartheid framework in South Africa of multiculturalism based on democracy and more flexible understandings of culture and boundaries (cf. Kymlicka [1995] 1997; Taylor 1999; Parekh [2000] 2006; Sen 2006).

**Changing Multiculturalisms, Diasporas and Tactics**

Discussions of immigrants and post-1994 xenophobia have neglected the extent to which the old South Africa was one of multiculturalism and the social engineering of diversity. In its own self-understanding, apartheid South Africa from the 1950s was a consociationalist project, aimed at building structures of governance for different “pillars” of identities and cultures to co-exist and reach “consensus” (and in this sharing Dutch roots of inspiration from Lijphart 1968, 1977, 1985).

This was matched in forms of African nationalism that went along with separate development, homelands and a federalist perspective, and which provided a traditionalist counterpoint to the unfolding of a modernist secular nationalism, as represented by the African National Congress (ANC). The Inkatha movement and later the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) are the most spectacular examples of this, which interweaved through shifts of traditionalism and modernism with the development of the ANC until the 1970s (cf. Marks 1986: 42–73; Cope 1993; Hughes 2011). But also in other contexts, the multicultural engineering of apartheid accommodated actually existing needs for self-articulation and debate on morality and identity, as can be seen in popularity both before and after 1994 of local-language radio stations (see Lekgoathi 2012a, 2012b). Thus, the ethnicisation of politics and governance central to apartheid was able to relate to actually existing, strong understandings of culture, tradition and community belonging, but was also based on a systematically graduated scale of recognition of identities and cultural rights (cf. Mamdani 1999; Kaarsholm 1999).