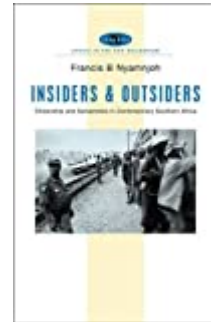




**Francis B. Nyamnjoh.** *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa.* Dakar: Codesria Books and Zed Books, 2006. x + 273 pp. No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-1-84277-677-3.



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### Not Seeing the Evil in Southern Africa

Focusing on two of southern Africa's upper-middle income countries, Francis Nyamnjoh declares at the start that he "gives subalterns their voice" and "highlights the increasing xenophobia that both exploits and excludes them" (dustjacket). There are separate chapters on mobility, citizenship, and xenophobia in South Africa and Botswana, another on gender and domesticity, and two more on "madams and maids," chiefly concerned with Zimbabwean domestic servants in Botswana. A "Requiem for Bounded Citizenship" constitutes the conclusion. The book is succinct, and its subjects are of great importance and deserving of close attention. But there are problems of both focus and depth.

While the cover photo depicts a line of seemingly Zimbabwean illegal immigrants under South African police guard boarding a train, some of Nyamnjoh's "outsiders" are also "insiders" and are ethnically, not nationally, defined in the case of Botswana. The Botswana government does not collect census data on ethnicity, and refuses to do so against calls for their collection from the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Dis-

crimination (CERD), and from domestic groups such as the multicultural Reteng and the Botswana human rights center, Ditshwanelo. The majority, Setswana-speaking groups are, however, usually understood to number at most 80 percent of the total population (though Reteng's estimates are much lower).

Among the minority communities, Nyamnjoh identifies the Kalanga as most successful in the acquisition of education and professional status, and refers to them as "*Makwerekwere* with citizenship" (p. 94). Since *makwerekwere* is a popular xenophobic term in Botswana and South Africa for people from ill-governed countries to the north, the author conflates ethnic and national identity, and ignores the decidedly insider status of the Kalanga elite in Botswana—these include, for instance, in 2007, the chief justice, the attorney general, and the minister for justice, defense and security. While educated Kalanga acquired the political resources to challenge the prevailing Tswanadom in the early 1990s, the indigenous San/Basarwa, perhaps some 7 percent of the population, at the very bottom of the social pyramid are still striving to acquire basic land rights. Remorselessly dispos-

essed over decades, serfs into the 1930s and beyond, deeply subordinated today, they are at once the most despised people in the eyes of the country's rulers and the most impoverished.[1] Nyamnjoh's outsider-insider dichotomy cannot accommodate their situation.

Nyamnjoh also has difficulty in defining the political economy in which ethnicity is contained. He believes that the press enjoys a comparatively high degree of tolerance from government (p. 84), that liberal democracy has succeeded more in Botswana than elsewhere in Africa, and that it is "the only country in Africa where diamonds have not yet attracted warlords" (pp. 86-87).[2] But he also acknowledges that liberal democracy is "able to provide only for a few" and that the government (quoting the *Botswana Guardian*) has a "casual approach to poverty eradication" (p. 95). Yet he seems not to accept the ruling elite's hostility to the poor in general regardless of their ethnicity, as manifested in the existence of a Gini coefficient of 63 and a ratio between top and bottom deciles of income-earners of 77:6; exceptional figures in world terms, especially so for an upper-middle income country.

Francis Nyamnjoh talks of citizenship and democracy, but almost exclusively in terms of ethnicity, and he does not note the novelty and frailty of its political expression. As John Holm and others have recognized, citizenship in Botswana dates only from the 1990s when, for the very first time, people protested against elite corruption, ruling party predominance, and old hierarchies. This active citizenship was expressed most concretely in the turnout of eligible voters at parliamentary elections and the percentage of the popular vote accorded to the parties; in 2004 the gap between the ruling Botswana Democratic Party and the two main opposition parties was just 4 percent.[3] This citizenship is bounded not by ethnicity but by the existence or otherwise of organizations responsive to popular needs, and the due requiem today is for their absence.

Nyamnjoh is on firmer ground in considering the xenophobia toward Zimbabwean illegal immigrants recently, though it may be doubted that he gives them their full voice or properly explains the reception meted out to them. The old *makwerekwere* tag, and Nyamnjoh's rather amorphous approach focused on specific employer-employee relations, does not cope well with the exigencies as the exodus of Zimbabweans increased after 2000 and escalated around 2004; before 2000 Zimbabwe was itself a firm part of the well-governed non-*makwerekwere* world south of the Zambezi. The neglect

of the role of the state in the intensification of the abuse of Zimbabweans is perhaps the biggest absence here.

The author is aware that the threat of destitution at home forced Zimbabwean women to undertake risky journeys to Botswana and South Africa, that "the government and state" at home "had failed them," and that employers wanting cheap migrant labor "are determined to strip those they employ of personhood and dignity" (pp. 234-235). But he suggests that such dehumanizing treatment is "directly related to the problematic nation-bound conception of citizenship," and that the solution lies in a new "flexible citizenship," something which is "inherent in the very viability of South Africa" (p. 232), presumably as Nelson Mandela's Rainbow Nation and perhaps in its advanced capitalist system. His ambition is complex and comprehensive: to put "race, ethnicity, class, gender and geography into the equation of understanding globalization, mobility, citizenship and xenophobia" (p. 232).

But these ideas and long-term proposals have been neutralized by events which have seen human rights abuses added to state-inflicted destitution and the compounding of both. By 2004, 2.4 million Zimbabweans, some 60 to 70 percent of productive adults, had fled the country.[4] Operation Murambatsvina was unleashed by the government in May 2005 and saw some 700,000 people in many cities losing their homes and livelihoods, and with a further 2.4 million people affected in varying degrees.[5] From this, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) in Geneva and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights in Harare, concluded that Operation Murambatsvina constituted a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute,[6] and some observers have begun to speak of genocide; since the farm seizures and subsequent rigged elections, Robert Mugabe, according to a rather broadly brushed if sharply focused claim by R. W. Johnson and Norman Reynolds, has engineered the largest genocide for decades worldwide.[7] The existing problem is not shabby treatment at borders and exploitation by employers, but the huge scale of the refugee outflow and the failure of the Botswana and South African governments to assist these people and end the destruction. Police and immigration officials in the former continue to see their task as keeping "undesirable people" out of the country, and stress their success in deporting more than 56,000 Zimbabweans in 2006. These agencies accept the claim that Zimbabweans are responsible for "most of the crimes" committed in Botswana and boast that they caught more than 400 illegal immigrants in a combined stop-and-search operation on one day in Francistown in May 2007, and deported them forthwith because "keep-

ing them would have cost government a lot of money as they have to be fed awaiting deportation.”[8]

Although some parliamentarians in Gaborone responded strongly to the flagrant assaults on opposition party leaders in Harare in March, declaring that “Silence Means Consent,” when “Zimbabweans were violated and raped,” Foreign Minister Mompoti Meraphe claimed that there was “no alternative” to silent democracy, and asked rhetorically “What should we do?”[9] But Botswana president Festus Mogae had already expressed his views, not in sympathy with the suffering people, but in defense of their oppressor. He wrote in 2006 to congratulate his “Dear Brother” President Mugabe upon “the achievements that your country has made over the years,” and as official guest at the Zimbabwe Agricultural show in August, he endorsed Mugabe’s land seizures as politically necessary and declared that the country’s agricultural sector would soon rebound.[10]

Amid such official antipathy to ordinary Zimbabweans, acts of Abu Ghraib-like abuse and torture resulted. According to the Botswana press, on the night of November 24-25, 2005, soldiers of the Botswana Defence Force and a smaller number of special police constables, on patrol in Ramotswa, allegedly forced a Zimbabwean man and woman to undress and have sexual intercourse while they watched; on another count, three Zimbabwean men were believed to have been forced to masturbate in front of the same security personnel.[11]

The Zimbabwean problem is far more specific, political, and regional than Nyamnjoh recognizes; a matter no longer of ethnicity but of human rights. The regional leaders, witnessing the worsening catastrophe since 2000, consistently aligned themselves, not with the suffering of the people and their efforts to end it, but with the leader instigating the destruction.[12] Given the size and diversity of its economy, South Africa was of course more prominently placed on the issue than Botswana; at the beginning of August 2007, the country was receiving some 5,000 illegal immigrants a day, and the government had deported 100,000 in the past six months. President Thabo Mbeki, the progenitor of silent diplomacy, remained supportive of Mugabe and opposed to helping Zimbabwean escapees. Establishing refugee camps near the border was one suggested measure, rejected because it carried the apparent corollary that the camp inhabitants would be officially recognized victims of Mugabe’s actions, not cross-border shoppers. Reynolds backed this suggestion with the proposal that all refugees should be offered three-year working visas, and that Pretoria

should declare, in association with the UN, that Zimbabwe was a failed and genocidal state.[13] But Mbeki was moving in the opposite direction, insisting in echo of Mugabe that Britain was to blame for Zimbabwe’s collapse.

However, new and anti-elitist thinking was apparent in some quarters. Shame at the complicity of black South Africans in the Zimbabwean tragedy was expressed by Xolela Mangcu in July 2007, who noted that “we provided this monstrous dictator with psychological aid and comfort” and that “our leaders and intellectuals swallowed [Mugabe’s] lie that Zimbabwe’s problems were a creation of the Western world.”[14]

The issue today is not, as Nyamnjoh argues, the *makwerekwere*, but solidarity among the cabal of regional leaders, and their complacency at the plight of the poor in general, whether at home in Botswana and South Africa or flooding out of ravaged Zimbabwe. Elitism and class trumps ethnicity now.

#### Notes

[1]. See the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, *Report of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities in Africa: Mission to the Republic of Botswana, 15-23 June 2005* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2007).

[2]. These judgments ignore the fully functional liberal democracy of upper-middle income Mauritius, the heavy restrictions on the media, and the realities of corporate, capital-intensive kimberlite diamond mining in Botswana. See Kenneth Good, *Diamonds, Dispossession and Democracy: Power and Weakness in Botswana* (Oxford: James Currey, forthcoming).

[3]. John D. Holm, Patrick P. Molutsi, and Gloria Somolekae, “The Development of Civil Society in a Democratic State: The Botswana Model,” *African Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (1996): 43-69. Electoral victory is achieved against big barriers: the president is not popularly elected and has no popular constituency, and the first-past-the post electoral system tends to favor the ruling party: in 2004 the ruling Botswana Democratic Party with 52 percent of the votes obtained 77 percent of parliamentary seats.

[4]. Figures of the South African church group, Solidarity Peace Trust, quoted in Christina Lamb, *House of Stone: The True Story of a Family Divided in War-Torn Zimbabwe* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 236.

- [5]. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina* (New York: United Nations, 2005), 7.
- [6]. COHRE, *Operation Murambatsvina: A Crime against Humanity* (Geneva: COHRE, 2007).
- [7]. R. W. Johnson in *Sunday Times* (London), January 7, 2007; and Norman Reynolds in *Business Day*, August 15, 2007.
- [8]. *Mail and Guardian* March 20, 2007; and *Mmegi*, June 1, 2007.
- [9]. *Mmegi*, March 14 and 19, 2007.
- [10]. *Mmegi*, April 20, 2006; and Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, *Regional Roundup*, August 29, 2006.
- [11]. *Mmegi*, June 14 and 18, 2007.
- [12]. See for example Kenneth Good, "Dealing with Despotism: The People and the Presidents," in *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002*, ed. Henning Melber (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002), 7-30.
- [13]. *Mail and Guardian*, August 10, 2007; and *Business Day*, August 15, 2007.
- [14]. Xolela Mangcu is executive chairman of the Platform for Public Deliberation and visiting scholar at the University of Witwatersrand. *Business Day*, July 13, 2007. Numerous supportive letters followed his statement, one adding that *we owe the people of Zimbabwe all the assistance we can give them*.

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