

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES OF XENOPHOBIA, AIDS, TRADITION AND INNER –CITY STATUS IN PHASAWANE MPE’S “*WELCOME TO OUR HILLBROW*”

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Abstract

‘Welcome to our Hillbrow’ is a novel by South African novelist Phaswane Mpe which deals with issues of Xenophobia, AIDS, Tradition and Inner-City Status in the Hillbrow neighbourhood of Post-apartheid Johannesburg. It was first published in 2001. In the South African literary imagination, Hillbrow has come to represent everything frightening and promising about the new South Africa; it is at once a scene of drugs, crime and xenophobia toward immigrants. The seriousness with which Mpe handles the theme of Xenophobia in Welcome to our Hillbrow, seems to agree with the appeal by commentators such as Kolla pen (1999), for the dictionary meaning of Xenophobia should not be confined to the fear and hatred of foreigners, but to include its description as a violent practice that results in bodily harm and damage. This view may explain why Mpe puts xenophobia under a magnifying glass that elevates it above local society to national and international dimensions.

Key Words: *Xenophobia, immigrants, violent, dimensions, Post-apartheid.*

I. Introduction

People those who read for pleasure seeing Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* as a brilliant linguistic construction of the imagination will be satisfying enough. Mpe’s novel is a literary-aesthetic interpretation or refraction of both real and imagined realities of Post-Apartheid South Africa, and it should, first and foremost, be read as such. But for those who want to examine South African society critically, and who seek to understand more and to “reflect on old and new sets” of problems challenging the new south Africa. The hopes and dilemmas of Post-Apartheid in South Africa explains the struggles to transition from a bitter history of apartheid to a democratic, unified, and stable multicultural and multiracial society. Mpe’s novel also opens up an opportunity to raise questions and to think through South Africa’s positioning within Africa, particularly in its treatment of African migrants, equally pertinent are questions regarding the status of African languages and their future.

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The novel's attention to problems of Euphemism, Linguicism, and Xenophobia, which were at the height of their crisis when Mpe wrote this book about a decade ago and which continue today with differing intensities-it is also a vital to step back and to remember that South African society as is dynamic and resilient society with a distinctive historical capacity for transformation, as attested by the struggle of its people against apartheid and by the undaunted spirit of resistance of its principal leaders, such as Nelson Mandela.

The violence is very much present and creates the conflict between Makwerekwere and Lakwerekwere and South African. There were many people protesting against "xenophobia violence, where South African people do not accept their rights and do not permit if any foreigner come and grab the job or do any business. Many foreigners come to South Africa and marry with native women then get settled over there. Due to this, South African think that these foreigners are taking their place and creating many issues for their living. The form of violence is the past into the present-day.

Welcome to our Hillbrow highlights to two major themes as HIV and xenophobia. "The HIV Aids Denial, the continuing high crime rate, the corruption crisis, and waste of public funds in the controversial arms deals, re-racialization through black economic empowerment (BEE), and the African National Congress's passivity towards the Mugabe regime" (Adam and Moodley 15-6).

The disease is not restricted to rural or urban areas according to Mpe's point, but rather cuts across cities, regions, race, gender and professions; the AIDS pandemic eventually harms everyone in its way. The issue of xenophobia and the discussion of AIDS is connected with each other in the novel. The real causes of AIDS are not able to accept. The Makwerekwere especially the Nigerians are the bringers of AIDS, disease and immortality. This group of African immigrants and refugees is changed with promiscuity, drug dealing and violence. Xenophobia also finds expression in other ways. As one example, Refentse's own mother denies the existence of Herson's relationship with Lerato, who is black but is considered inferior because of her impure African ethnic pedigree (39-40). A second example pertains to Refentse's death. It is clear that Refilwe's 'carefully re-written version' of his suicide is given more credit mainly because she plays upon the xenophobic beliefs of the community (43-44). In yet another example we are told that although there were exceptions, the inhabitants of the rural setting of Tiragalong celebrate when a person commits suicide or when a damaging person is eliminated violently from community- because it justifies their hatred of other Africans and urban dwellerstioning within Africa, particularly in its treatment of African migrants, equally pertinent are questions regarding the status of African languages and their future.

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economic empowerment (BEE), and the African National Congress's passivity towards the Mugabe regime" (Adam and Moodley 15-6).

Xenophobia on South African soil and further field in his interview with Attree, Mpe provides the rationale for including the issue of foreigners and xenophobia in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* as reality, "the question of African Internationals in Hillbrow" is "one glaring presence" in Post-Apartheid South Africa (in Attree 2005:141). While finding fault with society for maltreating foreigners, Mpe sees the apathy of South Africa's Department of Home Affairs towards foreigners as a major contributor, and as running "contrary to the human rights clauses detailed in the new constitution of the country"(23).

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Mpe's indication of the cause of xenophobia in South as the concerns of foreigners taking away jobs that South Africans would otherwise occupy (18), deliberately pokes fun at the perpetrators. That is why elsewhere, through the voice of a character, Mpe dismisses this job-stealing claim. Several years later, the ruling African National Congress party leader, Thabo Mbeki, used similar words in his condemnation of the 2008 attacks on foreigners, stating that some foreigners are more skilled than South Africans and they are therefore contributing positively to the South African economy.

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