XENOPHOBIA AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE: APPLYING ADLER'S SOCIAL INTEREST THEORY TO *WE KILLED MANGY DOG*

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Abstract

The African's quest for an identity that is acceptable to himself and to others has become an implosive phenomena as shown by the recent xenophobia (sometimes called Afro phobia) attacks in South Africa. This article uses Alfred Adler's theory of personality (social interest) to explore how Honwana in *We Killed Mangy Dog* (1967) pre-empts post millennium xenophobia in ways that question our understanding of identity and self-acceptance from a position of the aggressive psyche. It also reflects on Frantz Fanon's take on how violence is seen as a solution to the native's subjugation at the hands of the coloniser, and if indeed the victimised individual is able to successfully navigate the three stages of violence in order to liberate himself. Honwana's *We killed Mangy Dog* (1967) looks at xenophobia from the perspective of the victim and the aggressor, showing how empathy and violence can be nurtured from childhood to create problems of identity for the African.

Keywords: xenophobia, identity, colonialism, self-acceptance, social interest

1.0 Introduction

This section focuses on social interest theory and ends with a brief look on the attrition between xenophobia and identity formation. According to Hall and Lindzey (1970, p. 127), Alfred Adler's stand on the nature of personality "coincided with the notion that man can be the master, and not the victim of his fate." This implies that humanity can stand up and change what is wrong in the world for the better. This theory thus leans toward Humanism in which the society and not the individual is the goal for positive growth. As reported by Barlow and Tobin and Schmidt (2009, p.145), "a central concept of personality theory was Gemeinschaftsgefuhl, often translated as *social interest*. This concept referred to the capacity for social embeddedness". Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1979, p. 211), maintain that social interest wanted to emphasize the "ascending development and welfare of all mankind." It is thus not surprising that Adler (1964) saw childhood as the seedbed where social interest is nurtured. Barlow et al. (2009, p. 192), state that Adler "believed that insufficient social interest resulted in misled striving for superiority, neurosis, psychosis or suicide." Barlow et al. (2009, p. 192), further add that "It is evident that the development of social interest is related to positive mental health and constructive social interaction". For this reason it is important that social interest theory create an atmosphere where the individual is safe in the midst of turmoil. As Jung (1917, pp. 508-509), asserts "For Adler, the determining factors in behaviour are the securing of the individual's power in the face of the hostile environmental influences." In an environment that is conducive for social growth and mental health it is not only the individual that benefits but the collective as well.

According to Dolliver (1994, p. 195), Adler "emphasised that health meant being involved with others so that the enhancement of an individual also benefits others."

It is somewhat ironic that in the 21ˢᵗ century, the digital age, the African image has to appeal to aspects of nationalism in order to find itself and stem the tide of xenophobic violence that recently engulfed the 'rainbow nation'. The struggle for nationhood was first seeded on the African continent in a literary manner during the passionate drumbeats of Negritude, which was important in defining the African image from a social and cultural framework, its criticism notwithstanding. In summation of his early reservations about Negritude, Dathorne (1976, p. 219), asserts:

> Wole Soyinka is often quoted as having said that he sees no necessity for a tiger proclaiming its tigritude and Lewis Nkosi, a Black South African writer, has added that "one sees in these poems and stories the implications of a literary ideology which may be as crippling to young writers as the high-handed dictates of a cultural commissar in Communist countries".

Still, it must be admitted that Negritude and the critique of Negritude have their uses. For instance, the 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa coming so soon after those in 2008 show that the African image defines itself beyond the cultural to include economic as well as political considerations. Johnson (2014) sheds light on the Rwandan genocide by stating that the conflict between the Hutus and the Tutsis was not framed by race, language or religion but by conflict in class differences. The Tutsis were seen to have greater wealth and were cattle ranchers as opposed to Hutus who were farmers. Prior to the genocide that claimed about 800 000 lives, there were major conflicts between the two over power as far back as 1972. These and other attacks challenged indigenous philosophies of nationhood such as Ubuntu, which some critics like Kochalumchavattil (2010, p. 110), viewed as "a post-colonial prophetic illusion or utopian dream while others have depicted it as a purely Bantu philosophy not applicable to other tribes." Despite arguments for and against Negritude, nationalism and Ubuntu, the fact is that African literature has not been indifferent to the somewhat cannibalistic portrayal of the post-millennium African although it has tended to assess this condition within the turbulence of colonialism which had its own cauldron of identity and acceptance.

The probing of Honwana into aspects of mob mentality and self-loathing is remarkable given the period in which he was writing and the parallels one can draw in 21ˢᵗ century Africa. It suggests that African society has not progressed much in terms of the whole notion of identity and that it has perhaps regressed. The political realities exposed by Honwana show that the flow of African literature is anything but predictable and it has taken a new tributary where the enemy is within our own skin colour. Early writers have pointed out the need to wean ourselves from Western antidotes when it comes to addressing African issues. For instance, Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* is critical of how African scholars uphold and defend eurocentric ideologies and define their own idea of Africa. Though early works such as Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* were important in mapping out an African identity for those coming out of the colonial embrace, there was perhaps an emphasis on identities within communities rather than between them. In other words, early literary texts provided a window on how specific cultures operated, how they were held together, and ultimately how they overcame or succumbed to conflict. Writings

such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons,* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, illustrate this well. However, as a theme, xenophobia calls for a different approach particularly towards setting and using characters in an invasive role where they seep into the local culture and disrupt it.

Thoughts on nationalism as expressed by Fanon (1986) and Ngugi (1993, 1986) focused on the importance of a collective conscience, a situation where humanity could only progress if it understood that its people were all at one level economically, politically and socially. This is not to imply that Adler's social interest theory results in feelings of nationalism but the theory can help one understand the effects of xenophobia in a divided society. As Richardson and Manaster (2003, p. 124) state: "the ideal of social interest is intended to inspire a way of life that counters such disconnectedness and helplessness with a sense of wider belonging and purpose." Xenophobia creates a class hierarchy amongst the black poor which can only find outlet in violence in a way that African literature did not foresee. Foucault (1982) has attempted to describe the archaeology of subjectivity and subjection in culture and society—and the exercise of power. There is the realisation, when reading Foucault, that the study of truth cannot be divorced from the study of history, and, though xenophobia may have its setting in the streets of Durban and Johannesburg, its genesis is, at the very least, in the economic history of southern Africa. Foucault spreads the concept of identity formation to include the dynamics of power. In other words, those in power play a pivotal role in identity construction. This means that it is possible that our notion of identity changes depending on those who wield power at particular times. In Hall and Lindzey (1994, p.394), Foucault declares that "every regime of representation is a regime of power formed by fatal couplet power/knowledge." The less empowered are denied a platform for self-expression; they are crowded out from an already congested space that the poor occupy and they can either succumb to their plight or fight back.

2.0 Xenophobic Foreshadowing in *We Killed Mangy Dog*

Hegel and Fanon's views on the master slave dialectic are pertinent at this juncture. Also to the point is Honwana's text in relation to how an animal character brings out the conflict created by this dialectic within the framework of xenophobia. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* awareness of Self or discussing one's self as "I" comes at the cost of negating or destroying an—Other. Villet (2011, p. 53) asserts that "this negation and destruction of the other is the result of it becoming a mirror image of the self." The observation of what Self goes through is not that different from what Fanon espouses; only that for Fanon violence is the only alternative open to overcome injustice. In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon (1986, p. 216) observes that "man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognised by him." While Hegel's master-slave dialectic puts domination at the heart of social relationships, Fanon situates this dialectic within the framework of race. It is this framework that finds a solution through the necessary use of violence.

According to Fairchild (1994, p. 193), "Fanon incorporates a hydraulic metaphor in his analysis: The colonized exist in a state of tension created by their poor material and political status in relationship to the coloniser. This tension is released in violence and aggression that is initially directed within." Economic conditions or poor social welfare

trigger acts of xenophobia especially in societies where there is a sharp difference in wealth distribution. However, as Fanon points out, this road to violence is not a sudden explosion of hatred but takes time to be channelled in a particular path.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon maintains that violence goes through three stages. In the first stage, the native succumbs to the oppression of the European and is unable to stand up and challenge this individual. In the second stage, the native begins to develop self-awareness about his plight but turns and victimises his own brother and sister instead of dealing with the coloniser. In the third stage, the native realises that the enemy is the coloniser and that only violence can lead to a better state of being. Xenophobia would thus put societies at Fanon's second stage. The native is aware that he is living a harsh existence but instead of focusing his attention on the multinationals (who have taken the place of the coloniser), they turn on each other and accuse one another of being responsible for their poor state of affairs. This displaced aggression is central to understanding xenophobic attacks in that one's fellow brother or sister is simply a symptom of a larger problem which is economic in nature.

For the Hegelian slave, labour is the key to unlocking the master-slave dialectic. However, for Fanon, violence is the only way through which this can occur. Fanon (1986, p. 218) asserts, "human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies." For Mangy Dog the odds are stacked against him and he has not yet developed the concept that violence is the only means with which to move from being an object to being a subject. So, if the native is able through violence to make this transition from being an object to being a subject, inverting the status quo, this threatens the identity of the master. As Fanon (1986, p. 217) notes, "The former slave wants to make himself recognised." Despite Mangy Dog's attempt to fit in with society, this is unsuccessful because of his inability or unwillingness to challenge the oppressor. The killing of Mangy Dog as well as the coercion of Ginho in the violent act underpins the coloniser's need to maintain and uphold the master-slave dialectic.

Luis Honwana's story is a cleverly disguised message of intolerance, indifference and impotence. It is told through the eyes of a young boy, Toucinho, who essentially vacillates between participatory and non-participatory condemnation of the titular character, Mangy Dog. The narrative technique is itself a motif for shattered innocence—a new awakening into the harsh realities of life symbolised by the gang's harsh treatment of the despised dog. Though there is a lot of empathy from the narrator, there is also a feeling of hopelessness that clouds his soul.

Honwana's story is not the only one of its kind in southern Africa that chronicles the killing of animals in a symbolic sense. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* chronicles the cattle killing spree of the 1850s from a dual perspective, as a spiritual ritual in light of the colonial land- grabbing issue and as a practical answer to the lung disease epidemic which incidentally is blamed on the colonial herd. Mda in fact had an earlier narrative, *The White Collar*, which focuses on the killing of a whale. A baboon named Piet is also killed in Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning*. Wame Molefhe's *Sethunya Likes Girls Better*, from her collection of stories *Go Tell the Sun*, parallels the plight of an escaping chimpanzee named Johnny with the narrator's own sense of sexual freedom in a conservative heterosexual culture. Other stories such as J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace* also feature the killing

of dogs. The use of animals in narratives is thus not new to issues of existentialist discourse.

We Killed Mangy Dog is an allegory and the use of the dog in a dual sense as canine and human being makes the story deceptively simple yet provocative in the way humanity treats one another. It becomes excusable that because the dog is "different" in a physical sense to us one needs not bother with emotional attachments. This dog's eyes are blue, its name is in capital letters, and we are told that at times it says nothing (it does not bark). The physical description of this dog is instructive. This is the complexity of the human condition in which the Other is different first at a physical level and then at an ideological level where he/she is found wanting in terms of the locals' shared aspirations and hopes. In such instances the dichotomy between citizen and foreigner becomes polemical as is the case in this story, and Mangy Dog operates at the periphery of society. The dog is a major irony in itself in that it is despised even though physically it does not pose a threat to anyone or anything. The narrative reveals that "The chickens didn't even run away, because he left them alone, always walking slowly and looking for a dust bed that wasn't taken" (Honwana, 1968, p. 75). Honwana shows how being around people who are different from you creates an irrational sense of fear that can breed intolerance. Fanon shows that race becomes a source of conflict and labelling that is used to justify one's superiority and domination over the other. Mangy Dog's eyes are described in this manner: "they frightened me, those eyes, so big, and looking at me like someone asking for something without wanting to say it" (Honwana, 1968, p. 75).

Social interest points out that society can have conflicting social values. For instance, on the one hand you may have actions or qualities that elicit confidence in others while on the other hand these may cause distrust and suspicion. Mangy Dog fits well into the manner in which society creates these conflicting social values. The eyes haunt Toucinho because they are human eyes asking for acceptance into a society that the boy has little power over. The dog's silence is unnerving for it engages the world in a silent, unobtrusive manner. However, as this is a story of symbols, the dog's silence is countered sharply by its condition which screams its presence as an unwanted feature of the community. Its skin is "full of white hairs, scars and lots of sores ... he was always trembling all over even though it wasn't cold" (Honwana, 1968, p.75). This dog has a unique description which sets it apart from even its own kind. It is shunned at both the animal level and human level. It is doubly ostracised.

Toucinho is no more liberated than Mangy Dog. They are one and the same; both are on the periphery of their community, and are never truly welcome. Both have a physical characteristic that sets them apart: Mangy Dog with his bad skin and Toucinho with his overweight frame. Their names are used not as endearment but as abuse. Toucinho is denied the power to define himself. His identity is given to us, transplanted through the gaze of his Portuguese companion Quim. Fanon maintains that unless the native sees himself as downtrodden, then there is little progress in terms of liberation from the oppressor. Both Mangy Dog and Toucinho appear resigned to the domination of Quim and his gang on their lives. Adler (1964) posits that feelings of inferiority create a state of neurosis in the character where one becomes timid or even submissive. Like Mangy Dog, Toucinho does not describe himself to us. The name itself identifies him as "porky", alternatively he is referred to as a nigger. The boy and the dog have no concept of Self.

They are perpetually seen as the Other. As Amilcar Cabral states in Boehmer (1995, p. 185), "the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of the people, it is their return to history." The rope that Toucinho struggles with in order to free Mangy Dog is an extension of his own imprisonment. He can no more leave the malevolent group than can Mangy Dog escape his fate. Mangy Dog is unwelcome in this society for aesthetic (and reverse psychological) reasons. Like Toucinho, he is physically different from the other dogs. He is a foreigner, weak and diseased. Just as xenophobia underlies the community's refusal to permit the outsider space and association, Mangy Dog faces the same from the dogs and humans.

The death of Mangy Dog is as inevitable as it is senseless. The gang cannot be pleaded with to postpone the killing let alone to entrust the welfare of the dog to Toucinho, the least influential member of the group. The situation becomes increasingly volatile. The downtrodden cannot get any assistance from their own kind. Mangy Dog has in his corner the lowliest member of the gang and a girl who is mad. He is doomed. Xenophobia is power politics mixed with a sense of entitlement, and it is psycho-social. Death, when it comes, is not clean. It is gratuitous, an orgy of pent-up violence.

3.0 Conclusion

Violence and intolerance still plague the African personality in much the same way that Honwana's text depicts it. Adler's personality theory calls on an individual to connect with those around him/her in a manner that benefits all parties involved. It posits that an individual has the power to fashion surroundings in a manner that depicts a selfless attitude.

Xenophobia, however, goes against social interest and puts the individual above aspects of empathy or compassion. A major cause of xenophobic attacks is economic; in this regard, the victim is seen as a competitor by the locals. This kind of ideology washes away all concepts of *Ubuntu*. Though xenophobia is violent in nature, *We Killed Mangy Dog* illustrates that xenophobia can be used in order to seek acceptance into a group. Toucinho is a member of a group but just like the dog, he operates on the periphery. The value that Mangy Dog has to society is directly influenced by his perceived contribution to society. The absence of any value addition by a character to the community is grounds for extermination. The attacks on this dog underpin more disturbing concepts of what it means to exist. It is not enough to simply be, one must be *seen* to be useful in some way to the dominant group of the day. Xenophobia has many causes but it can be argued that, as Honwana demonstrates, those in power have a role to play in inciting violence. Violence feeds on weakness. Mangy Dog's position is no different from Toucinho's whose usefulness to Quim is based entirely on his ability to allow Quim and the others to copy from him. The boy is just as expendable as Mangy Dog and can also be done away with, even if only figuratively.

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