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Kwashuba, kwabhalwa, kwaphola?: A study of mediated perceptions of the Alexandra xenophobic riots

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Abstract

My thesis aims to analyse the print media and broadcast media, and how they communicate, mediated and crafted meaning around the May 2008 xenophobic riots. This study adopts a 'whole-age' analysis of news coverage, so as to examine the topological layout and the relationship between continuous texts, photographs, captions and most importantly latent and manifest messages in the media. It aims to broaden and deepen the social, political and historical thrust of analyses of various narratives in more intrinsic ways. The thesis is informed by the school of thought (Hanks, 1989; Briggs, 1996) that narratives have dialogic characters, extracting discourse from one setting and inserting it in a new setting so as to facilitate and foster understanding by drawing on common frames of reference and from readers' memories. Through a critical discourse and semiotic analysis, this study analyses mediations of violence and starts with perceptions, through the reportage of a multilingual sample of news: *iSolezwe* (isiZulu daily newspaper), *iLanga* (isiZulu biweekly newspaper), *Alex News* (fortnightly community newspaper), the *Daily Sun* (daily tabloid), and the *Mail and Guardian* (weekly newspaper). I examine how in a span of three weeks (11 May - 3 June 2008), these five newspapers covered the xenophobic riots – I pay particular attention to what emphases they foregrounded and how they narrated the violence. I further analyse three television news reports, two SABC news reports produced by *Special Assignment* and one eTV news report produced by *3rd Degree*. I examine how they commentated on the riots and what silences existed in their commentary. Lastly, I examine the Bona Fides civic movement as a mediating lens for the enactment of citizenship and negotiation of democracy. The interviews conducted in Alexandra uncovered respondents' understanding of citizenship and local discourse pertaining to insiders and outsiders. The interviews act as a mediation vehicle and give glimpses of local perceptions which exist in 2013 and, from my reading, also existed back in 2008. This selection of the media showed how pan-African identity, and interestingly, a Zulu Diaspora narrative were used to mediate the violence and foster a culture of integration. The various modes of the media illustrated South Africa's vibrant political economy in 2008. Moreover, this sample illustrates how a strategic usage of autochthony was employed and deployed by frustrated South Africans, and also how the negotiation of democracy was central to this media selection and selected respondents.