Postcolonial Trauma and Identity Crisis: A Comparative Study of Racism, Ethnophobia, and Xenophobia in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mahomed's *Cheaper Than Roses*, and Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*"

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Abstract

This paper examines racism, ethnophobia, and xenophobia as interconnected manifestations of postcolonial trauma and socio-political identity crises, through a comparative analysis of three literary texts from different cultural contexts: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (United States), *Cheaper Than Roses* by Ismail Mahomed (South Africa), and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (England). Each of these works reveals the enduring psychological and societal repercussions of marginalization, identity fragmentation, and cultural displacement. Utilizing postcolonial, psychoanalytic, and sociocultural theoretical frameworks, the study interrogates how systemic discrimination distorts individual self-perception and disrupts societal belonging. Hansberry's portrayal of an African-American family in mid-20th-century Chicago illustrates the impact of racial injustice on aspirations and familial cohesion. Mahomed's satirical narrative captures the post-apartheid identity disorientation among South African coloureds, embodied in the character of Betty, whose existential struggles reflect broader societal disillusionment. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is reinterpreted through a racialized lens, positioning Heathcliff's outsider status as a symbol of ethnophobic exclusion and class-based prejudice in 19th-century England. The paper contends that these forms of discrimination are not isolated social issues but deeply entrenched instruments of historical domination and cultural suppression. By juxtaposing these texts, the study highlights literature's role as a critical mirror of colonial legacies and structural inequalities that persist across time and geography.

Keywords: Postcolonial trauma, Racism, Ethnophobia, Xenophobia, Cultural identity, Systemic discrimination.

What has been lost is the continuity of the past...What you then are left with is still the past, but a fragmented past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation. (Hannah Arendt)

It is memory that counts, that controls the rich mastery of the story, impels it along...   (Jorge Semprun)

Introduction

Colonial regimes subjected various African societies to repression, marginalization, and systemic exploitation. Under the guise of civilization and friendship, European powers imposed destructive policies that led to the erosion of indigenous cultures and identities. This encounter produced widespread bitterness and a reactionary rejection of colonial domination, expressed through literature, political resistance, and cultural assertion.

This paper explores how racism, ethnophobia, and xenophobia terms often used in discussions of social stratification and systemic discrimination manifest as consequences of colonial histories and migration-induced identity crises. These interwoven phenomena are examined through literary texts that reflect the psychological scars and social disruptions caused by exclusion, marginalization, and the loss of cultural rootedness.

The traumatic aftermath of colonialism, especially in regions like South Africa, gave rise to what many scholars identify as collective postcolonial trauma. The writings of playwrights such as Athol Fugard, Barney Simon, Reza De Wet, and Brett Bailey depict internalized suffering, alienation, and the lingering mental disarray of apartheid and post-apartheid experiences. These experiences, which fostered feelings of inferiority and resentment, find resonant expression in fictional characters who grapple with fractured identities and existential crises.

Defining Racism, Ethnophobia, and Xenophobia

Rather than viewing these terms in isolation, this study integrates them into its literary analysis, showing how they are dramatized in the texts under review.

Racism, as theorized in the works of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, extends beyond institutional structures to subtle interpersonal rejections, ideological constructions, and cultural erasures. It is an ideological framework that links race to inherent qualities and establishes hierarchies of value, power, and belonging. Racism functions both as a justification for historical domination and a mechanism for contemporary exclusion. In literature, it surfaces not only in explicit acts of discrimination but also in the internalized struggles of characters attempting to assert their identities within hostile social landscapes.

Ethnophobia, a concept related to racism, involves the fear or hatred of people belonging to a different ethnic group. In literary contexts, it emerges through characters who either embody or resist dominant cultural norms. Ethnophobia may reflect the oppressor's fear of cultural contamination or the oppressed group's reactionary defense of its heritage. In *Cheaper Than Roses*, for example, the protagonist navigates a complex identity defined by internalized ethnophobia, shaped by the legacies of apartheid.

Xenophobia, the fear or distrust of outsiders, often intersects with ethnophobia in postcolonial societies. It manifests as hostility toward migrants, foreigners, or anyone perceived as "other." In post-apartheid South Africa and elsewhere, this hostility is rooted in historical grievances, economic

insecurity, and unresolved traumas. Literature captures this tension through characters who become scapegoats or symbols of a larger social anxiety.

These concepts are not merely theoretical they are embodied in the lived realities of literary characters whose experiences reflect broader sociopolitical dynamics. In the pages that follow, the study investigates how Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Ismail Mahomed's *Cheaper Than Roses*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* articulate these themes across different cultural contexts, revealing the deep-seated impact of historical exclusion and the enduring quest for identity and dignity.

Xenophobia is the fear of strangers, foreigners, or the unusual, which displays itself in exclusionary attitudes, acts of violence, and intolerance of other people and their cultures. In another sense, xenophobia is defined as "dislike of or prejudice against people from different countries" (Oxford Languages.com). Xenophobia, according to psychoanalysis, is one of the methods by which criminals project their frustrations and suppressed emotions onto persons who are believed to be different. Xenophobia is also defined by Wikipedia as

> the fear of hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. It is an expression of perceived conflict between an ingroup and an outgroup and may manifest in suspicion by one of the other's activities, a desire to eliminate their presence, and fear of losing national, ethnic, or racial identity (Wikipedia.com)

Xenophobic feeling can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, who referred to foreigners as "barbarians." According to the Greeks, this people group is destined to be slaves. There was also a separation of Jews and Gentiles, as well as Jews and Samaritans, in early Christianity. Xenophobic attitudes are sometimes exhibited more violently among organizations, tribes, communities, and so on. In more recent history, the German against Jewish experience, as well as the experiences in post-apartheid South Africa, where war was proclaimed on other Africans, particularly Nigerians living in South Africa are well recorded.

Mogekwu (2005) succinctly summarize xenophobia as the fear or hatred of outsiders or strangers; it manifests itself in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour and frequently leads to violence, abuses of all kinds, and displays of hatred. It is the "Thought of losing social status and identity; a threat, perceived or real, to citizens' economic success; a way of reassuring the national self and its boundaries in times of national crisis" (Harris 2001). On another hand, it could be seen as "a feeling of superiority; and a lack of intercultural information" according to studies on xenophobia (Mogekwu 2005).

Xenophobia is categorized as a dread of non-citizens considered a risk to the recipients' identity or individual rights. It is also closely linked to the concept of nationalism, which itself is described as an individual's feeling of connection to a political nation as an essential component of his or her sense of identity. To this end, when it becomes clear that the government does not guarantee the safe guarding of individual rights, citizenship can lead to xenophobia. This is especially true with regard where unemployment and poverty are prevalent.

Although xenophobia has been regarded as a global phenomenon which is strongly connected to the globalization process, it has been observed that it is especially prevalent in countries in transition. This is because, according to Neocosmos (2006), xenophobia is a post-colonial phenomenon, one that is connected to the ideologies of the dominant groups in the post-independence era. This is due to a feeling of superiority, but it could also be part of the scapegoating process described by Harris (2001), in which unmet hopes of a new democracy lead to the foreigner being a symbol of unemployment, poverty, and hardship.

Xenophobic sentiments can transcend beyond racial and cultural stereotypes; it can also be religious, as seen by prior crusades and jihads targeted at religious conversion. In fact, whatever Nigeria has been going through recently can be linked to xenophobia. The Niger Delta issue, the desire for Biafra Nation, the Fulani Cattle Rearers/Boko Haram battle against Western Education, and even the recent violent protest at OAU Ile-Ife in support of an Indigene as Vice Chancellor of a Federal University are vivid examples of xenophobic sentiments and attacks. Racism, ethnophobia, and xenophobia are also practiced and experienced throughout the world. However, for the purposes of this study, allusions to literary works from America, Europe, and Africa are sought.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

The play is set in Chicago's South Side and is an American performance. The drama depicts the life of the Youngers, a Black family who lived in Chicago's South Side in the 1950s. The drama begins with the family awaiting a $10,000 insurance check from the life insurance policy of the deceased Mr Younger. Each of the family's adult members had different intentions for the money. Mama, the family's mother, first desired to purchase a larger home in order to realize her goals. Walter Lee, her son, desired to purchase a liquor store, believing that it would alleviate the family's financial issues. Walter's sister, Beneatha, needed the money for her medical school tuition. She wonders that her relatives were less enamoured of white things and were more captivated of African things.

Mama put down the deposit on the new house in Clybourne Park, an all-White neighbourhood, as the play progressed. Walter put the rest of the money into his White friend Willy Harris, who then took off with it. When the Youngers' future neighbours learn that they will be Blacks, they send Mr. Linda to come and urge them to stay away from the White neighbourhood with a monetary offer. This is a classic case of racial prejudice and ethnophobia. Beneatha, for the most part, rejects her White admirer, George Murchison, whom she says is too ignorant to comprehend race issues. She does, however, receive a wedding proposal from her Nigerian boyfriend, Joseph Asagai, who wants her to pursue a medical degree and migrate to Africa with him. Against so many odds, the Youngers eventually move out of the flat, realizing the family's long-held desire of moving to the White neighbourhood. Not only did they move, Walter also collected the money offered by the White neighbours to dissuade the family from moving to the White neighbourhood. They do so with a determination to stay together as a family and to pursue their dreams. This action of theirs is a firm determination to reject racism and ethnophobia and become xenophobic without being violent.

The drama depicts the hardships of African-Americans in America, which is supposed to be a nation of freedom. It's important to note that the "Ku Klux Klan" movement is intended at attempting to assassinate Black people in America by White supremacists. This is an excellent illustration of xenophobia as a victim of discrimination and ethnophobia. This connects us to people in different parts of the world's experiences.

Ismail Mahomed – *Cheaper than Roses*

Cheaper that roses is a post-apartheid South Africa play related to how most women live in illusions, especially, half of completion, always crave white people. These women include Betty who represents most of South African women post-apartheid.

Betty arrives at a barren train station late at night in the one-act play Cheaper than Roses. She is, without a doubt, a passenger waiting for a train to return her to Johannesburg. From her remark, we understand that Betty is just returning from her father's burial, but fear and humiliation did not allow her to offer her father the last respect he deserved, as the wreath which should have been laid on his coffin is still with her. She observes a poster of President Nelson Mandela promoting one of his programs and conveys her apprehensions about the new government. This is the beginning of the play's conflict, which is about acceptance and how it affects the coloureds that had had high positions and treatment during the apartheid system.

When Betty criticizes her siblings' way of dress at the funeral ritual in the church, she reveals the incongruity, imbalanced, and imperfect nature of people: "Huh!Blerrie Moslem junk in a blerrie Christian church crying for my father in a blerrie Christian church" (p.58). This phrase implies that there are some underlying issues in the community. There's a chance of a religious crisis as well as other family issues. As a result, Betty was not invited to her brother's wedding, which took place nine years prior. Betty claims that her family member's burial attire was inappropriate.

Betty also chastises Mandela for spending too much time in prison away from his young hot wife. This statement is most likely used to defend Winnie Mandela's well-publicized infidelity while her husband was in prison. She then talks about her friendship with Tant Sennah, who is the only one who maintains in touch with her and also homes her throughout her father's final days on earth. She describes the church service and the appearance of her mother at the funeral in great detail.

Betty's recollections of her upbringing are dominated by poverty, so her siblings are already planning what they'll do after the funeral. Betty admits that her parents' lives were full with difficulty, much as life itself. The mother was unable to cope with the daily battles and quarrels with her father, so she took her own life. Her father has now joined her mother in death, and the two are buried together.

Betty goes into great depth about her transformation from a color to a white woman in order to live a comfortable life. Betty demonstrates the absurdity of the exercise when she recounts the "poephol" test, which required the color of the buttocks to be checked in order to pass. She succeeds in this, and in addition to landing a good position as a nurse, she also begins a relationship with a man named Philip, who is later discovered to be a refined coloured like her. The relationship comes to an end as a result of her revelation. After a long and illustrious life as a white lady, President Nelson Mandela's victory has rendered Betty's reconstruction effort obsolete, as Blacks and Whites are now on an equal footing.

Betty's anxiety is the same anxiety that all coloureds in post-apartheid south Africa, young and old, male and female, have Betty overcomes her dilemma by resolving to meet the new task as a human being, regardless of race or gender. That is why she discards her current identification card and promises to apply for a new one that is not racially discriminatory.

Mahomed Ismail's play *Cheaper Than Roses* (1995) uses comedy and satire rather than direct accusation to address the problematic social evil and predicament of coloured people, particularly ladies who previously tried to pass for white and now face an uncertain future. The title's significance is seen in the uneasiness of coloured and black people in apartheid South Africa, who are unsure if the post-apartheid South Africa has any promise for them. To them, the future's bleakness is "cheaper than Roses," which are planted everywhere and may be plucked at any time.

The silence at the train station, which is usually bustling with activity, emphasizes Betty's loneliness and provides the appearance of a cemetery. This is precisely the position of mixed-marital children in post-apartheid South Africa. She seemed to have exited the normal world and entered a parallel one. *Cheaper Than Roses* criticizes apartheid regulations that prevent coloureds from being acknowledged as whites or even blacks, despite the fact that they are the result of mixed marriages with blacks. In other words, they create issues for black people and then leave them to deal with the consequences on their own. Betty is not fully accepted as a white lady at work, she is uncertain in her personal life, and she does not feel like she belongs in her original family.

The psychological agony of such dehumanization and rejection as a result of apartheid policies might then be imagined. This play makes a forceful statement about the problem of acceptability that many people of color experience in the new post-apartheid South Africa, and it asks for action to address the issue. This is another xenophobic incident that occurs in Betty's life. Her inability to be accepted at work has resulted in her being segregated. This could be linked to the issue of racism, particularly when looking at the non-acceptability of black people in the Western world, which was one of the reasons why Betty had to bleach her skin to look more like white people.

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

Heathcliff's renter Lockwood pays a visit to his landlord's house in Wuthering Heights. Lockwood's curiosity is piqued after a return visit to Wuthering Heights, which results in an accident and a strange supernatural experience. Lockwood, now recovering from his illness in Thrushcross Grange, begs Nelly Dean, a servant who grew up in Wuthering Heights and now looks after

Thrushcross Grange, to tell him about Heathcliff's past. The major plot line of Wuthering Heights is narrated by Nelly.

Mr. Earnshaw, the owner of Wuthering Heights and a Yorkshire farmer, brings an orphan from Liverpool home. Heathcliff is the boy's name, and he is reared by Hindley and Catherine Earnshaw. Catherine adores Heathcliff, but Hindley despises him since Heathcliff has taken Mr. Earnshaw's attention away from Hindley. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley does everything he can to harm Heathcliff, but Catherine and Heathcliff grow up on the moors, ignorant to everything and everyone — until they meet the Lintons.

At Thrushcross Grange, Edgar and Isabella Linton are the polar opposites of Heathcliff and Catherine. Catherine is welcomed into the Lintons' home, but Heathcliff is shunned. Heathcliff considers vengeance after being treated as an outsider once more. Catherine divides her time between Heathcliff and Edgar at first, but as time passes, she spends more time with Edgar, making Heathcliff jealous. Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights and is gone for three years after overhearing Catherine tell Nelly that she can never marry him (Heathcliff).

Heathcliff swears vengeance and doesn't care who he damages in the process. He wants to seize control of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, as well as all Edgar Linton values. Heathcliff must wait 17 years to exact his vengeance. Finally, he coerces Cathy into marrying Linton, his son. He has control of the Heights by this time, and with Edgar's death, he also has control of the Grange.

Heathcliffe, the novel's central character, is depicted as the source of the novel's antipathy. One of the signs of racism and bigotry is hatred. It is his great hatred for the Earnshaws and the Lintons that drives him to commit such acts, which finally destroys the two families and leaves heathenish ghosts to haunt the novel's central setting, Wuthering Heights.

When the young lad Heathcliff is initially brought to the family by the Old master Mr. Earnshaw, the novel's hate aspect is introduced. Mr. Earnshaw's son, Hindley, is enraged by his father's protective attitude toward Heathcliff. "...the young master had learned to regard...Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's love and privileges," writes the novel's narrator, Nelly Dean (Bronte, p. 46). Hindley's hatred for Heathcliff caused him to mistreat the boy when he inherited Wuthering Heights after his father died, and in a way transposed the passion into the heart of a boy who, as Nelly Dean puts it, "...was not insolent to his benefactor, he was simply insensible; though knowing perfectly the hold he had on his heart, and conscious he had only to speak, and all the house would be obliged to bend to his (Bronte, p. 47)

When Heathcliff's only ally and companion Catherine, Hindley's sister, decides to marry a young and rich boy named Edgar Linton, the hatred ingrained in his Moorish and heathenish character becomes even more anguished. Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights, only to return later as a wealthy man in order to exact vengeance on Catherine for her betrayal. To make matters worse, he seduces Isabella Linton, Edgar's sister, and when questioned by Edgar about it, he expresses his deep contempt for the matriarch.

Heathcliff's animosity for Edgar and tremendous affection (on the verge of love and loathing) for Catherine, exhibited during her illness: "I forgive what you have done to me." My murderer is great, but yours is even better! "How am I going to do it?" (Bronte 144). He elopes with Isabella, torn between two overwhelming desires. Heathcliff employs Isabella to harass Catherine and exact his vengeance on Edgar. "I gave him my heart, and he took it and pinched it to death, and tossed it back to me," Isabella says, "and he took it and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me." (Bronte 152).

When Catherine dies after giving birth to a baby girl named Catherine, the story takes a new direction. Heathcliff's revenge-seeking soul receives a new boost with Catherine's death. It alters his face to the point where he forces Isabella to flee Wuthering Heights, where she becomes unwell and gives birth to a fragile baby boy named Linton. The storyline tolerates the birth of two persons out of pure hatred in the instance of Heathcliff and Isabella, and out of indifference (nearly like hatred) in the case of Catherine.

Conclusion

Xenophobic alienation finds its origins in the enduring legacies of apartheid and colonial repression, where systemic exclusion and marginalization fostered deep psychological and social fractures. Over time, the repressed emotions of the oppressed have been redirected toward immigrants, who become scapegoats for unresolved historical grievances. This misdirected resentment results in layers of alienation, exploitation, and symbolic violence experiences that now affect both immigrants and some segments of the native population alike.

The literary texts examined in this study reveal how racism, ethnophobia, and xenophobia function not only as social injustices but as inherited traumas with far-reaching consequences. They expose the deeply rooted nature of discrimination and its ability to replicate itself across generations and geographies. These narratives urge a rethinking of social and political structures to address the lingering wounds of the past.

To counter the persistent impact of xenophobic marginalization, there is a pressing need for intentional social and economic reforms that promote inclusivity, justice, and cultural empathy. As shown in *A Raisin in the Sun*, such change may not come easily; it may have to be imposed through difficult conversations, structural resistance, and re-education of the dominant groups. However, fostering a society where all individuals regardless of origin, race, or culture feel a sense of belonging is not just a moral imperative but a necessary step toward national and global healing.

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