

The Indian Ocean in Imaginings of Transnational Belonging in South Africa after Apartheid

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Whereas contestations between ‘ethnic’ and ‘secular’ nationalism were prominent in the efforts to break down segregationist multiculturalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, post-apartheid South Africa has seen such discursive differences embedded and subdued within the broad appeal of the dominant African National Congress party. By contrast, new formations of understanding and politics have come to the fore, contrasting national belonging with alien-ness, as e. g. in the ‘xenophobic’ violence and attacks on immigrants that came to public attention in May 2008. But post-apartheid South Africa has also been home to alternative new imaginings of the relationship between the national and the transnational – often centering on the Indian Ocean and related to histories of the slave trade – as e. g. in the emergence of new notions of ‘Malay’ identity in the Cape, linking up South Africans with Malaysia and Indonesia. Another example is the mobilisation of narratives of ‘Amakhuwa’ belonging among African Muslims in KwaZulu-Natal, seeking recognition as both South African citizens and members of a Mozambican diaspora.

The paper will examine examples of such new narratives, bringing together the national and the transnational in new ways. It will discuss more particularly the importance of Islam in the construction of new identity strategies, and the reactivation of patterns of Black Consciousness discourse within them. Finally, the paper will outline some of the new elements of understanding citizenship that are coming to the fore within local-global projects of this nature, and their possible implications for the development of relations between ‘residents’ and immigrants’.