Journal des anthropologues

Association française des anthropologues

114-115 | 2008

L'empathie en anthropologie

Statement from Anthropology Southern Africa regarding violent attacks on “foreigners”

Council of Anthropology Southern Africa

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jda/336>

DOI: 10.4000/jda.336

ISSN: 2114-2203

Publisher

Association française des anthropologues

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2008

Number of pages: 325-326

ISSN: 1156-0428

Electronic reference

Council of Anthropology Southern Africa, « Statement from Anthropology Southern Africa regarding violent attacks on “foreigners” », *Journal des anthropologues* [Online], 114-115 | 2008, Online since 01 December 2009, connection on 03 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jda/336> ; DOI : 10.4000/jda.336

This text was automatically generated on 3 May 2019.

Journal des anthropologues

Statement from Anthropology Southern Africa regarding violent attacks on “foreigners”

Council of Anthropology Southern Africa

EDITOR'S NOTE

Council of Anthropology Southern Africa comprises:

President: Andrew Spiegel (UCT)

Vice President: Kees van der Waal (Stellenbosch)

Treasurer: Christopher Colvin (UCT)

Secretary: Rehana Vally (Pretoria)

Members: Heike Becker (UWC) and Joy Owen (Rhodes)

Student member: Silvana Barbali (Rhodes)

Journal Editor: Stephe Herselman (UNISA)

Website: <http://asnahome.org>

22 may 2008

- 1 We are horrified by the violent attacks on fellow South African residents. In particular we are ashamed at the extreme violence against children, women and men, many of whom have settled in South Africa's cities to escape violence, persecution and the degradations of poverty elsewhere. We are shocked by the barbaric actions of those who have taken to brutal mob violence against their neighbours.
- 2 As anthropologists, we are deeply concerned, both professionally and as citizens, that these actions reflect a continuing emphasis in South African political discourse on cultural, racial and national differences. It is a discourse that, drawing on a long discarded anthropology, essentialises such differences even as it claims to celebrate them. It is a discourse that was central to colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid. It is a discourse that perversely persists to the present, now manifesting in the way the media

labels as « xenophobia » horrendously violent acts where some South Africans raise fists, swing axes and pangas, and use matches to light fires as means to attack their fellows who happen to speak different languages and allegedly look somewhat different from themselves.

- 3 We abhor the consequences of continuing and worsening poverty, unemployment, failed service delivery, and the global economy’s effects and how they conspire to create extreme hardship for South Africa’s vast majority, and to make attractive that essentialising discourse of difference. But we have to stress that never and nowhere can those conditions excuse violent unbridled attacks on fellow human beings.
- 4 We suggest that, contrary to the current South African and international political consensus, the presence of people who are deemed to be ethnically, racially or nationally different is not at the core of the problem; that the presence of so-called national, ethnic or racial minorities are no more the cause of uproar in Alexandra, Cleveland, or Hillbrow than they are of the ruthless hunting down in Naples, Italy, of people who call themselves Roma. The core of the problem lies, rather, in the fact of a system that breeds inequality, that marginalises people to an ever greater extent, and that then – through supposedly « celebrating diversity » – attributes their marginality to their alleged cultural, social and national characteristics. As Southern African anthropologists, we are convinced that closing borders and repatriating foreigners is not the solution. Rather the solution lies in a politics which explicitly fosters the non-racialism espoused by the South African Constitution, that rejects and resists the power of identity politics, and that strives for a cosmopolitanism that valorises the contributions of all who have ever settled in our part of the world whilst ensuring the freedom of association and of cultural and linguistic expression of all human beings.

AUTHOR

COUNCIL OF ANTHROPOLOGY SOUTHERN AFRICA

Anthropology Southern Africa is the regional association of social and cultural anthropologists.