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Loving the alien? Citizenship, law, and the future in South Africa's demonic society FREE

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Abstract

In May 2008, South Africa witnessed two shocking weeks of deadly attacks on foreigners and other suspect outsiders. This article makes sense of the violence with reference to an extended history of South African statecraft that both induced the conflict and hamstrung efforts to address it. In particular, it describes how decades of discursive and institutional efforts to control political and physical space have generated two demons with which the country must now contend. The first is a perceived enemy within: an amorphously delimited group of outsiders that is inherently threatening, often indistinguishable from others, and effectively impossible to exclude spatially. The second demon rests in a society prepared to kill to rid itself of those retarding the country's post-Apartheid renaissance. For many of those behind the attacks or empathizing with them, controlling the movement of people within the country and across its borders remains essential to security, prosperity, and South Africa's national self-realization. Political leaders now face a dilemma: extending legal identities and constitutionally promised protections to outsiders and other foreigners risks being seen as betraying the national project by the demonic and visibly violent society they have helped create.

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