XENOPHOBIA ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CHALLENGES OF SOUTH-SOUTH MIGRATION: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Paul-Sewa Thovoethin, *PhD*, **Salami Issa Afegbua** *PhD*,
Department of Political Science, Lagos State University, Ojo-Campus, Nigeria.
Department of Public Administration, Lagos State University, Ojo-Campus, Nigeria.
E-mail: paulsewathovoethin@gmail.com, salami.afegbua@lasu.edu.ng
Corresponding Author: Salami Issa Afegbua

ABSTRACT

Globalisation has offered the free movement of capital and goods between countries which has resulted in the integration of national economies into one global economy. Thus, migrants have consistently on daily basis travel to richer countries to seek better opportunities which are scarcely available in their own countries. In the African case, South Africa which has one of the best economies on the continent has recorded the highest number of cases of south-south migration. Migrants from other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Somalia, Cameroon, Mozambique, Nigeria, move to the Country on daily basis seeking for greener pasture. However, as these migrants settle in South Africa, host populations become disillusioned with the large influx of migrants who are considered as a drain on public resources, as well taking over the jobs and benefits of South Africans. This disillusion by host populations turns into frustrations, where they begin to resent people from other countries on the continent which results into xenophobic attacks. It then can be argued that through these xenophobia attacks in South Africa, south-south migration is under threat. Since we are in globalised world in which migration cannot be resisted, this paper investigates the root causes of xenophobia, how xenophobia affects national integration and cohesion and in the final analysis it makes recommendations that could address the problem of xenophobia not only in South Africa but in the entire African continent. In order to achieve the objectives of the paper, the author adopted data triangulation approach. That is, the use of multiple sources of data. These include observations, interviews and document exploration. Document exploration was used in order to corroborate the interview data and by so doing, developed convergent lines of inquiry.

Keywords: *Xenophobia, Immigrants, South Africa, Ubuntu, Integration, Mobilisation*

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 it was predicted by the United Nations that 2.2 million people will migrate to developed countries, each and every year with the trend being consistent up to the year 2050 (Katenga-Kaunda, 2015). In the African case aside the increase in the rate of south-north migration is the similar increase in south-south migration, especially since the fall of apartheid government in South Africa in 1994. Many Africans have consistently migrated to the country because it is believed that South Africa is one of the largest economies on the continent. Thus people who cannot move to countries in the global north see South Africa as alternative country where they could seek greener pasture. Therefore, at the moment South Africa has the highest number of immigrants on the continent. Though there are conflicting data of immigrants in South Africa, however, according to the South Africa's national statistics there are an estimated 3.6 million migrants in the country out of an overall population of well over 50 million (Reality Check team BBC News, 2019). Out of these figure 70% come from neighbouring Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho. The remaining 30% is made up of people from Nigeria, Malawi, UK, Namibia, eSwatini, previously known as Swaziland, India and other countries (Reality Check team BBC News, 2019).

However, as these migrants settle in the Country to pursue a better life, local host populations become disillusioned with the high numbers of immigrants that have been settling in their Country (Katenga-Kaunda, 2015). South Africans have the believe that the huge immigration flow coming into their country puts an enormous strain on all their public services and also portend economic disadvantage to the South Africa citizens. It is through situations like these that local populations begin to resent immigrants, and through contact they begin to harbour negative sentiments about them. These feelings then culminate into strong feelings of dislike for foreigners, who are considered as aliens who should have stayed in their countries. In South Africa, xenophobia reached new heights where foreigners were subjected to violent attacks by some of the local populations in 2008, 2015, 2017, 2018 and recently in 2019. The African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) has a record of 482 verified xenophobic incidents from 1994 to October 2018 (Misago, 2019). Added to these figure is an additional killing of at least twelve people during the violence that began in late August 2019 (Human Rights

Watch, 2019). These killings especially with the killings that occurred in 2019 forced some countries, especially Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Malawi to repatriate some of their citizens from South Africa.

These types of xenophobic attacks and killings become serious challenge for south-south migration in Africa. This trend needs to be addressed if south-south migration would continue in Africa. The import of this paper therefore, is the examination of how xenophobia could be addressed in South Africa as well as other African Countries. In order to achieve its aims the paper is divided into three sections; section one takes an overview of the causes of Xenophobic attacks in South Africa, section two assesses the effects of Xenophobia on social cohesion and assimilation in South Africa, section three examines how to address the problem of xenophobia and then the conclusion.

An Overview of Causes of Xenophobia Attacks in South Africa

The question that one should ask is that what could prompt fellow Africans to rise up in arms against one another, which have been referred to as xenophobic attacks. Various explanations have been offered for the occurrence of xenophobic attacks which started in 2008 in South Africa and escalated within the space of eleven years (2008-2019). In response to these puzzle academics, political leaders, migrant rights organisations and other analysts have sought to identify and explain its causal factors. Scholarly analysis has led to competing explanatory models. Under this section I shall examine some of the causal factors of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. These factors shall be group into two categories; the immediate causes and the remote causes of xenophobic attacks. The former will be the first area of interest before the latter factors.

According to Khosa and Kalatanyi (2014) the fear and jealousy related to employment and income were responsible for xenophobia in South Africa. For these two authors South Africans see foreigners with businesses and they don't know how they got their money. That is where the jealousy is coming from and that is when the fear becomes xenophobia. For instance a study conducted in a Port Elizabeth township by the two authors revealed that jealousy was one of the main reasons for xenophobic violence there. In a related study in Walmer Township, it was discovered that xenophobic violence usually takes place when attackers are jealous of the foreigners' business success (Khosa & Kalatanyi, 2014). More so, the struggle over women is another issue that

cause xenophobia in South Africa. In the country it is believed that xenophobic violence is as a result of foreigners who 'steal women' from the locals. Mnyaka (2013) explains that African immigrants have not only taken over the streets of South Africa but, it is alleged, its women as well (Mnyaka, 2013:21).

Furthermore, immigrants accepting below minimum wages are another explanation for xenophobia incidences in South Africa. In the country immigrants are prepared to do any job regardless of its standing in society and without taking into account the financial returns. 'Stealing jobs' remain one of the most repeated reasons given for xenophobic aggression in South Africa.

Another interesting argument that has been offered for the continuous increase of xenophobia in South Africa is that most of the youths that were involved in xenophobia were those youths that were born after end of apartheid in 1994. Those that raise this line of argument aver that these youths were not aware of the contributions of other African countries to the end of apartheid and hence the hostility. While I quite agree with these popularly stated macro- and micro-level socio-economic and political circumstances elements as causal factors of xenophobic attacks which I have classified as immediate causes, I will take the frontier of this analysis further by examining the remote causes of these attacks.

I shall take this analysis further by emphasising an often-missed empirical factor and key element in the xenophobic violence causal chain: mobilisation. According to (Misago, 2019) mobilisation is the vital connective tissue between discontent and collective violence. For him as a trigger, mobilisation helps explain the pathways from collective discontent and/or instrumental motives to collective violent action. Mobilisation broadly refers to all activities, interactions and processes aimed at recruiting and persuading individuals and groups to participate in a collective action: the process of bringing potential participants into action. It focuses on the instigators of violence or "violence entrepreneurs" (Tilly 2003) and their ability to assemble individuals and persuade them to participate in a collective action for a seemingly common/collective goal (Misago 2017). Let me justify my position that mobilisation is a remote cause of xenophobic attacks with some few examples.

According to (Misago, 2019) in Alexandra, a township in Johannesburg that has experienced multiple episodes of xenophobic violence since 1994, mobilising for the May 2008 violence against foreign nationals was the work of the "comrades" (a term commonly used for local community leaders). The comrades called a mass community meeting where the decision to attack and remove foreign nationals from the area was formally endorsed and after which attacks immediately started.

More so, it should be noted that the first xenophobia attacks started in 2008 after the media reported Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini saying that foreigners "must pack their bags and go where they come from". The violence started in Durban and spread to townships in and around Johannesburg, claiming at least eight lives and displacing thousands. Zwelithini however claimed he was misunderstood, but his statement was widely believed to have triggered the violence.

Furthermore, public statement in 2014 by some African National Congress (ANC) leaders could also be said to have instigated xenophobia in 2015. According to former President Jacob Zuma "South African blacks should not behave as if they were typical blacks from Africa. More so, the African National Congress Secretary-General, Gwede Mantashe, blamed foreigners for stoking unrest in South Africa's platinum belt. In January 2017, small business development minister Lindiwe Zulu, said the businesses of foreign Africans based in township could not expect to coexist peacefully with local business owners unless they shared their trade secret (Abatan 2015). These statements by these public official has been alleged to have triggered xenophobia in 2015 and 2017.

In sum analysis so far under this section has identified immediate and remote causes of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. These include competition over scarce resources and opportunities between citizens and the increasing number of African migrants. Political, historical and institutional explanations put forward the country's past and current political and institutional configurations. Cultural stereotyping resulting from the South Africans' new direct contact with foreign Africans. In addition to these broad structural, socio- economic and political dynamics to the increasing rate of xenophobic attacks is the impact of mobilisation. Thus I have demonstrated and agree with Sen (2008) that in order to locate causes of xenophobic attacks we should avoid isolationist models because individual factors, no matter how important they are, cannot

provide an adequate understanding of the causation of such a complex phenomenon in isolation from other societal conditions and processes. As Sen argues, "A solitarist approach is, in general, a very efficient way of misunderstanding nearly everyone [or everything] in the world" (Sen, 2008:6).

Xenophobia and Challenges of Social cohesion and assimilation in South Africa

In South Africa there is the familiar aphorism expressing a traditional African ethic known as Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1990). In South African, the origins of Ubuntu can be traced back to the traditional indigenous societies living in the Transkei and Ciskei regions and the word itself originates from the Nguni language family, which comprises of Zulu, Xhosa, Swati as well as Ndebele, four of the numerous South African languages (Poovan, 2005). Ubuntu is defined as the essence of being fully human, that is, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic and as a worldview (Ngunjiri, 2010; Gade, 2011). Umuntungumuntungabanyeabantu' which means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others (Khomba, Vermaak and Gouws, 2011; Gade, 2011; Mabovula, 2011).

In his own view Oppenheim (2012) explains that the word Ubuntu comes from the Xhosa/Zulu culture, the community into which Nelson Mandela was born, and has been summarized in the phrase, ―Umuntungumuntungabantu‖ in the Nguni language of Xhosa, Zulu, or Ndebele. The concept of this phrase can be translated to mean, ―A person is a person through other persons, or ―'I am because we are' (Oppenheim, 2012:13). In the opinion of Mangaliso (2010) he says Ubuntu is an African word for a universal concept that places the good of the community above self-interest. Ubuntu refers to the communal responsibility of sustaining life; it refers to people and the collective respect for human dignity. ―The cardinal spirit of Ubuntu is expressed in Xhosa, one of South Africa‛'s eleven official languages, as ―Umntungumntungabanyeabantu" understood in English as ―People are people through other people and I am human because I belong to the human community and I view and treat others accordingly (Mangaliso 2010). From various authors' elucidations on the concept of Ubuntu it can be seen that having Ubuntu means striving to show respect to others and to be honest and trustworthy.

The expectation is that a country like South Africa where the concept of Ubuntu is popular everybody leaving in the country would be treated equally irrespective of where anybody comes from, unfortunately the xenophobia incidences in South Africa have continued to create a narrative whereby there is a distinction between 'us' and 'them', which is almost killing the culture of Ubuntu.. In addition, the practice and narrative of labelling foreigners as 'Makwerekwere' or the hostile 'other' has downplayed the spirit of mutual respect for every human being. Seeing foreigners as the 'other' or 'outsider' in relation to the 'self' has immensely promote a culture of exclusion, rejection and unease rather than accommodation and integration. This can perpetuate a culture whereby the 'other' is seen as the existential threat to the 'self'. Although, Ubuntu is the common foundation of all African cultures and a consciousness of belonging together, the existence of xenophobia demonstrates an absence to tolerance other Africans (Adjai&Lazaridis 2013). Furthermore, the spate of xenophobic violence in South Africa is contrary to the very fundamentals of regional integration which is essentially based on the creation of a wider economic space for inclusive growth.

Addressing the Problem of Xenophobia and South-South Migration

Since the first outbreak of xenophobic attack in 2008 up to date the common approach by the government and the international community has always been the same. One of such approach was the issuing of National Action Plans to combat xenophobia which were not fully implemented. Another approach by the South African government has always been the arrest of perpetrators of the violence acts who were not prosecuted in order to serve as a deterrent to others. For instance after the 2019 attacks the Country's Police Minister reported that over 600 people were arrested on various charges related to public violence and looting, malicious damage to property, and grievous bodily harm (Human Rights Watch, 2019). These perpetrators were only arrested without immediate prosecution which led to the killing of some Nigerians after the September xenophobic attacks. On the part of the international community the approach has always been the condemnation of xenophobic attacks without taking concrete steps to address the menace. For instance on September 3, 2019 the African Union Commission chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, issued a statement condemning the violence and property destruction in South Africa (Human Rights Watch,

2019) without mentioning steps that the Union will take in addressing the problem. In the same manner the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet also issued a statement on September 9 urging South African authorities to act swiftly to ensure protection for the victims of xenophobic violence and accountability for the attackers (Human Rights Watch, 2019) without also mentioning proactive steps that would be taken in order to address the problem at the international level.

Before attempting an examination of the possible ways through which the problems of xenophobia could be addressed and how south-south migration could be enhanced I shall take a look at why it is very important for South Africa to address the problem for the benefit of the country and Africa continent at large. My first take on this is that historically South Africans relied on African solidarity in their struggle against apartheid and therefore is not expected to repay African solidarity by mercilessly killing fellow Africans. More so, the victims of the xenophobic riots, however, were poor. They did odd, informal jobs like street vending or hairdressing at makeshift salons. Others were security guards, shop attendants and restaurant waiters. Put together, their earnings are far below the foreign revenues of various South African companies which dominate many markets in Africa. South African retail companies run supermarkets and clothing stores all over the continent.

The biggest mining company in Zimbabwe, Zimplats, is South African. South African banks operate in neighbouring countries alongside local banks which do not have branch offices in South Africa. Therefore, the attack on foreigners in South Africa have far reaching consequences on the country's social, political and economic relations with the continent and the rest of the world and could damage the country's image internationally. The economic impacts will be felt most acutely in South Africa. It will also have a negative impact on the livelihoods of poor families across the region.

In view of the above stated concerns a multipronged approach is required for the effective integration of migrants into the South African society and this can be achieved through ensuring that the rights of migrants are respected constitutionally and in practice including the respect from the migrants for the South African laws and the community norms. Extensive collaboration is also required amongst all institutions in the public,

private, academic and civil society sectors to heal the damage done by xenophobia and to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

According to Trust (2015), South Africans must take a stand against xenophobia and condemn the consistent spate of attacks by South Africans against foreign nationals. He also encourages South African people to support initiatives and campaigns against Xenophobia and further call on the South African authorities to do more to effect a safe and secure environment in order to promote the effective integration of migrants into the economy and ensure their access to livelihoods. According to him it is also imperative to encourage the private companies operating in the region to do more in terms of local employment creation which will contribute to curb the influx of migration into South Africa.

As a response to the 2015, the then President of the Country Jacob Zuma launched Operation Fiela, as a response to attacks on foreigners in Johannesburg and Durban. Operation Fiela-Reclaim is run by the South African Police Service's National Joint Operations and Intelligence Structure and continues to fall under the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration (IMC). Since its launch in April 2015 it has morphed into an initiative against crime in general (Daily Maverick Newspaper, September 8, 2015).

However, the implementation of Operation Fiela has raised various concerns. Many civil society organisations and human rights activists have criticised the operation for targeting foreigners, criticism that the government vehemently rejects. Although the use of the army was an appropriate counter-xenophobia measure, it should not become a long-term measure or an excuse for police brutality and human rights abuses. Military deployment should not become a long term solution, and Operation Fiela objectives should be clearly stated by the government, and its timeframe should be respected. Thus, the need for transformation in South Africa cannot be overstated. There is a need for collective reflection to come up with a sustainable solution to xenophobia. Responsible leadership is crucial not only in South Africa but also other African countries. Other African countries need to seriously think about immigration and relations of social interconnectedness on the continent, especially at a time when immigration is becoming a major security debate both continentally and internationally (Jeannine & Abatan, 2015).

Furthermore, the following mitigation strategies can be taken into consideration as a way to alleviate the challenges of xenophobia. Intensifying the Spirit and Theory of Ubuntu would go a long way in addressing the problem of xenophobia. The theory of Ubuntu should be expanded and clearly understood by all South Africans as a way of alleviating the xenophobia challenge on African immigrants in South Africa. As Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) have earlier pointed out before the 2015 xenophobic attacks, human rights, democratic principles and notions such as Ubuntu have been defined narrowly for the benefit of South Africans only and have not been extended to include foreigners.

Elsewhere, Adjai (2010) asserts that in a struggle for access to the political, social and economic entitlements of the country, black South Africans have exercised their rights as citizens in very exclusionary terms and this has limited the operation of concepts such as Ubuntu and human rights, making it difficult to embrace a consciousness of belonging together. Therefore, if xenophobic attacks must stop in South Africa exercising the spirit and theory of Ubuntu in its real essence becomes a necessary panacea. More so, the South African government should take full obligation on the issue of Xenophobia. In this regard the South African government must fulfil its international obligation to all migrants as codified in the Immigration Act 2002 and the Refugee Act of 1998. In relation to the Refugee Act the South African government passed the Refugees Act No.135 of 1998 to: formally adhere to international principles and standards relating to refugees, to provide for the reception of asylum seekers into the country, to regulate applications for and recognition of refugee status and to provide for the rights and obligations flowing from such status (Adjai, 2010).

In a similar manner, the South African government need to carry out nationwide educational campaigns to raise awareness about the plight of foreigners, especially black foreigners in South Africa and to sensitize the South African people as a whole about the positive contribution foreigners are making to the country. It is just too imperative for the South African government to have public educational campaigns which can be held in various communities in order to sensitize the citizens on the effects of immigrant movements around the world on regional and local socioeconomic dynamics (Shindondola, 2002). Another important matter which the Government should take into consideration is the Batho Pele. Batho Pele is a Sesotho phrase that translates as ―people first

(Moran, 2002). Adjai (2010) postulates that the Batho Pele principles should no longer state a better life for all South Africans but a better life for everybody living in South Africa. The author's suggestion should be taken into consideration as it will include all African immigrants residing in South Africa.

Furthermore, the government must eliminate the climate of impunity that makes foreign nationals appear to be unequal before the law and it must work harder to promote sustainable opportunities for integration and that the Rainbow Nation belongs to all who live in it (Mafukata, 2015). By so doing, stereotypes about foreign nationals would be soothed and ameliorated therefore promoting networks of social cooperation to the advancement of the country (Mafukata, 2015). The media also has a major role to play in avoiding perpetuating myths and stereotypes about foreign nationals being responsible for crimes, and also in presenting factual information about the contributions of foreign nationals to South Africa's economy. Inflammatory public statements, such as those made by the political and traditional elites should also be condemned and punished. Those who cross the line and directly incite violence against migrants should be prosecuted.

CONCLUSION

Xenophobic violence as demonstrated in this work is a major concern for an effective south-south migration and a united Africa. We should be mindful of the fact that racially motivated attacks and hate crimes against migrants and refugees are not limited to South Africa, in fact, such attacks have increased dramatically and have become an almost daily phenomenon in a number of countries. However, what raises concerns is that on the continent of Africa South Africans are growing desensitised towards xenophobia and the violence that it fuels have not attracted much attention by the state and non-state actors in the country. The truth that must be accepted is that due to the continuous increase in south-south migration South Africans must overcome the point of becoming desensitised. The 2019 xenophobic attacks indicate that South Africans from all walks of life not only encourage xenophobia, but no longer hesitate to act on these feelings. One of the implications of this is that the country is raising the next generation of South Africans by setting an example of hostility and apathy. It has therefore become crucial for the country to start publicly debating this issue, and deal with it decisively. Unfortunately none of the suggestions proffered by this work is possible

without taking the first step – to admit that all South Africans, have some introspection to do.

REFERENCES

Abatan, E. (2015), 'Responding to Xenophobia: What can South Africa learn from Côte d'Ivoire?' (Unpublished)

Adjai, C. (2010), 'The halo slips? Xenophobia and its Consequences in the New South Africa'. *Masters of Philosophy Thesis. University of Leicester.*

Chinomona, E. & Maziriri, E. (2015), 'Examining the Phenomenon of Xenophobia as Experienced by African Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Johannesburg, South Africa: Intensifying the Spirit of „Ubuntu' *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management Volume 2, Issue 6*

Gade, C. (2011), 'The Historical Development of Written Discourse on Ubuntu', *South African Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 30 No. 3

Human Rights Watch (2019), South Africa: Punish Xenophobic Violence

Katemga-Kaunda, M. (2015), 'Xenophobia: A By-Product of Globalisation', International Association for Political Science Students Radboud University Nijmegen.

Khosa, R. & & Malitani, A. (2014), 'Challenges in Operating Micro-Enterprises by African Foreign Entrepreneurs in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences.* Volume 5, No 10

Mafukata, M. (2015), 'Xenophobia- The Evil Story of the Beginnings of Fascism in Post Apartheid South Africa' *the International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies,* Vol 3, No. 3

Mangaliso, M. (2010), 'Building Competitive Advantage from Ubuntu: Management Lessons from South Africa'

Mbiti, J. (1990), 'African Religions and Philosophy', *Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers*

Misago, J. (2019), Political Mobilisation as the Trigger of Xenophobic Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa, 2019. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 13, 1-10. doi: 10.4119/UNIBI/ijcv.646

Misago, J. (2017), Politics by Other Means? The Political Economy of Xenophobic Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa, *The Black Scholar* 47 (2)

Mnyaka, M. (2013), 'Xenophobia as a Response to Foreigners in post-Apartheid South Africa and Post-exilic Israel: A Comparative Critique in the Light of the Gospel and Ubuntu Ethical Principles', Pretoria: *Unisa*

Moran, G. (2002), 'A Practical Guide to Administrative Justice', Pretotia: *Justice College*

Poovan, N. (2005), 'The Impact of the Social Values of Ubuntu on Team Effectiveness', Master of Arts in Industrial Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch Thesis

Reality Check of BBC News (2019), South Africa: How Common are Xenophobic Attacks?

Sen, A. (2008), Violence, Identity and Poverty. *Journal of Peace Research* 45 (1)

Trust, F. (2015). 'Xenophobic Violence in South Africa and Its Negative Effects', Available at *www.finmark.org.za*