

Zimbabwean Immigrant Teachers in KwaZulu-Natal Count the Cost of Going under the Hammer

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Abstract

This article examines Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' experiences and thoughts on xenophobia in South Africa. The data draws from a qualitative study undertaken in the province of Kwazulu-Natal on Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' experiences. Worby's construct of 'disconnection' was used to understand Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' thoughts on xenophobia and feelings and behaviour upon being unwilling recipients of xenophobic practices, prejudices and attitudes. The findings indicate not only a self-imposed social disconnection by immigrant teachers but also a professional disconnection levied by the management in selected schools and by certain colleagues in Higher Education Institutions.

Keywords: immigrant teachers, social and professional experiences, disconnections

Introduction

Post-apartheid South Africa has been recognized as a country that is both a source and destination country for migrants (Manik 2012). In addition to the south-north emigration of SA teachers to the UK (Manik 2005; Morgan, Sives & Appleton 2006; Manik 2009) and Middle East (Manik 2010) there has been the south-south migration of teachers from largely sub-saharan African countries to SA. This is the result of SA being perceived to be an economically attractive country (Mosselson 2012). Much research attention

has been devoted to the experiences of SA teachers abroad , however, the experiences of foreign teachers in SA, especially Zimbabwean immigrant teachers who are possibly the largest cohort of immigrant teachers, has not received the same interest. It is therefore understandable that the phenomenon of xenophobia has not been previously probed amongst these immigrant teachers. Crush and Ramachandran (2009:i) have declared that xenophobia ‘has not received explicit attention despite anti- immigrant sentiments and practices being on the rise in receiving countries in developing regions’. Whilst anti-immigrant and refugee sentiment and actions have been documented prolifically in Europe, in the SA context much scholarship abounds on particularly the causes of xenophobia in specific environments (Neocosmos 2006; Bekker *et al.* 2008). It is therefore vexing that there are limited studies on the nature and consequences of xenophobia as experienced by skilled foreigners in developing countries, like SA where xenophobic violence has been in the media limelight since 2008. This article locates itself in that gap, by providing insight into Zimbabwean immigrant teachers’ thoughts, feelings and behaviour choices upon some being unwilling recipients of xenophobic behaviour, prejudices and attitudes.

I commence this article with a discussion of the need for clarity in understanding the phenomenon of xenophobia. I then hone in on examining a particular facet of xenophobia, namely educational xenophobia. Thereafter, I account for the presence of Zimbabwean immigrant teachers in SA and explain the methodology undertaken in this study. Zimbabwean immigrant teachers’ experiences of xenophobia are then analysed. The article culminates with a discussion of selected thematic strands.

In Search of Clarity: Conceptions and Deceptions of Xenophobia

Xenophobia unfortunately is a phenomenon clouded by a distinct lack of lucidity in terms of its meaning (Crush & Ramachandran 2009). It has been used widely in conjunction with racism and discriminatory practices but it is an ambiguous word which has led to it being conceptualized in many different ways by various scholars. Crowther’s (1995:1385) definition of the concept of xenophobia is ‘an intense dislike or fear of strangers or people

from other countries' which implies a resentment of foreigners. Crowther further explains that xenophobia manifests in a host of prejudices which are not supported by rational views. For the purposes of this article, I rely on the definition of xenophobia as 'attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity' (ILO, IOM & OHCHR 2001).

There is an understanding that xenophobia can take on an assortment of forms, including the use of 'derogatory language' and 'violence' (Handmaker & Parsley 2001: in Steekamp (2009). In Sichone's (n.d.) study he found that whilst a skilled immigrant alluded to being called a derogatory word: 'makwerekwere', he was not assaulted. His explanation for this behaviour by his African colleagues was that whites and coloureds did not engage in name calling because they were highly educated in comparison to the African colleagues. He also surmised that the local Africans were envious because he was superior in his performance workwise. It was thus apparent from his view that xenophobia was a mask being used to disguise jealousy and hatred by underperforming local Africans towards immigrant Africans who were highly productive. In South Africa, xenophobia is painted with a nationalist brush with non- South Africans being 'demonized' (Sichone n.d.:12). Osman (2009:09) cites Motha and Ramadiro (2005:18) in explaining that the South African brand of xenophobia frequently unfolds as '*Afrophobia* which indicates holding negative stereotypes towards people from other parts of the continent'. African immigrants are described using the label: *Makwerekwere* which is an antagonistic label (Neocosmos 2006; Steenkamp 2009) that specifically refers to those who are not au fait with an Nguni or Sotho language and who are perceived to be 'pitch black' in complexion (Sichone n.d.: 11). Morris (1998 in Neocosmos 2006: 04) explained that immigrant Africans are recognized 'as the 'other' due to their accents, physical features, and clothing styles'. However, these can be misleading categories as numerous South Africans have been wrongfully arrested (Sichone n.d.:13) by the SA police who mistook them for being 'illegal aliens' (Mosselson 2010: 647). This term *Makwerekwere* also carries a host of undesirable meanings aside from being an African immigrant 'who lacks competency in the local South African languages', it also refers to 'one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally

backward in relation to South Africa' (Azindow 2007:175). By implication in using this term, South African citizens therefore perceive themselves to be superior to other Africans. The use of this term is reminiscent of the use of a derogatory label by Whites in apartheid SA to describe immigrant Indians.

A common question in understanding xenophobia as a phenomenon has been: What is the biographical profile of xenophobes? Unfortunately this has remained elusive according to Crush and Pendleton (2004:02) who remarked that it's impossible to create a 'xenophobia profile' as it's so widespread, that it cuts across race, gender, employment and economic status. Thus, they ask the question, who do you target? Some of these sentiments especially the race variable has been echoed by McDonald and Jacobs (2005) in Steenkamp (2009). However, Sichone (n.d.) does not agree with the contention of an obscure xenophobia profile and in a small scale study amongst economic immigrants in Cape Town, he found that men were more xenophobic than women.

Examining the Nature of Educational Xenophobia in SA

Explanations abound to the aetiology of xenophobia in South Africa (Bekker *et al.* 2008). It has been examined from a political perspective (Neocosmos 2006; Mosselson 2010; von Holdt *et al.* 2011) with Neocosmos (2006) reporting that,

Citizenship and xenophobia are manufactured by the state both under apartheid and post-apartheid forms of rule This points to the centrality of citizenship in understanding the phenomenon.

He has also alluded to politicians commenting that 'Some nationalities are singled out in the press in particular as being associated with illegal activities'. Xenophobia has also been explored from a legal perspective to socio-economic reasons (Mosselson 2010; Von Holdt *et al.* 2011). Many of the studies (Moirriera 2010; Von Holdt *et al.* 2011) however, do not focus on xenophobia as experienced by professional legal immigrants but rather to xenophobia as experienced by un- and semi-skilled legal and illegal immigrants.

Thus the character of xenophobia in the immigrant teacher's context is still a mystery and this article seeks to explore xenophobia 'from below' as Polzer (2007) refers to it when examining xenophobia as an experience/s by immigrants. It is interesting that Osman (2009:34) argues in her study on learners' experiences of xenophobia in Johannesburg that 'xenophobia, as a phenomenon in education, does not exist in South Africa only but in other countries as well,' so it's not a criticism unique to SA. She (Osman 2009:67) found that during the 2008 xenophobic violence, schooling was affected in numerous ways and 'immigrant teachers stated that they did not report for duty, as they felt insecure, and that xenophobia affected them emotionally'. Strangely, she also found that the principals of a few schools were unaware or oblivious to xenophobia as a problem in schools during this critical period. She (Osman 2009:69) reported on learners revealing that at one of the case study schools that 'teachers started calling us names and stuff like that and children ... it became worse ... but now it stopped because my principal stopped it'. It was evident that teachers at this school were exhibiting xenophobic behaviour towards their learners and management had to intervene to discontinue its practice. Interestingly, Neocosmos (2006) maintained that it is largely organs and rules of the state and personnel who are responsible for xenophobic practices.

Zimbabweans in SA

In respect of immigration into SA, European immigrants were in the majority in terms of documented immigrants until 1998 (Bekker *et al.* 2008). From 2000, there was a shift with the majority of immigrants now from Africa, and Wa Kabwe-Segatti (2008) approximates that 50% of legal permanent resident permits are presently issued to Africans followed by Asians and lastly Europeans. Zimbabweans entering SA have been seen as a 'human tsunami' (Hammar *et al.* 2010) due to Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political decline hence it's no surprise that they could be the greatest cohort of foreigners in SA. Indeed, Worby (2009) has remarked that labour migration from Zimbabwe to SA is not a new trend although it has intensified since 2000. Zimbabwean teachers have been 'going under the hammer' by selling their skills to the highest bidder in the SA labour market. A statement made by the interim chairperson of The Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe

(PTUZ) in SA provides some insight into the cohort size of Zimbabwean teachers in SA. He maintained that in 2006 there was an average of 4000 teachers who exited Zimbabwe annually from 2000 and that most of them can be found in SA. A calculation then reveals that there should be more than 40 000 Zimbabwean teachers in SA schools at present but in another article I report on Zimbabwean immigrant teachers who have failed to procure satisfying teaching posts and are therefore employed in semi and unskilled jobs in SA (Manik 2013). Zimbabwean teachers have reported that they are in SA due to socio-economic, educational and political reasons (Manik 2012). Despite their desire to escape their oppressive situations in Zimbabwe, the fear and vulnerability that Zimbabweans and other immigrants faced, was evident in the 2008 xenophobic violence that spread across SA (Hammar *et al.* 2010; Worby 2010).

Worby (2010:420) has undertaken extensive work on the social relations of immigrants and he has studied the strategies of

social ‘disconnection’ that Zimbabwean immigrants use in relation to the social world they have left behind- strategies that involve remaining socially out of sight, under the radar, incommunicado, or socially ineligible sometimes refusing to be recognized at all.

He is aware that this may lead to an analytical path towards the moral economy, as he unpacks the ethics around the choices Zimbabwean immigrants make when relatives attempt to contact them in SA. I utilize Worby’s construct of ‘social disconnection’ to analyse Zimbabwean immigrant teachers’ feelings and behaviour in KZN, SA in respect of their experiences and thoughts of xenophobia. In particular, I use the construct to demonstrate their agency in relation to the social world that they inhabit in KZN and not one that is afar. Furthermore, I extend the idea of ‘disconnection’ in my analysis to the professional domain of immigrant teachers to show the purposive nature of disengagement that is forced upon them at times in their workplace which leads to them retreating emotionally. I choose to subscribe to an economy of ‘values’ which I locate in a socio-economic context: the value of Zimbabwean teachers to SA in terms of their specialized teaching skills and education and their call for socio-professional justice.

Methodology

This article utilizes data from a qualitative study undertaken in 2011 on Zimbabwean immigrant teachers in Kwa Zulu-Natal who migrated to South Africa post 2000. The study had several objectives: to provide a demographic profile of the teachers, the reasons for their exit from Zimbabwe and migrating to SA, their personal and professional experiences in South Africa and the duration of their stay in SA. I did not probe their interactions with teacher unions in any depth as the teachers at the time of the interviews, were holding temporary posts and therefore unlikely to be affiliated to any teacher union. This article addresses a specific caveat of their experiences in SA, namely that of their experiences of and thoughts on xenophobia.

All immigrant teachers were interviewed whilst they were in South Africa post their migration. The absence of a data base of foreign immigrant teachers at the time of this study, coupled with a lack of knowledge on where Zimbabwean immigrants live or work made it impossible to locate a representative sample. The expenses and difficulty of locating teachers within the entire KZN province meant that the study was limited to 3 areas: Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Jozini. The first two are cities in KZN and Sisulu *et al.* (2007) have noted that Zimbabwean professionals are located in urban nuclei. Two sampling strategies were utilized. A form of purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used to locate initial participants from a higher education institution in KZN and from a church in Durban which provides support to refugees. Secondly, to prevent a skewed sample, a field worker was sent to visit schools in Jozini, which is in rural KZN to elicit the contact details of willing participants as anecdotal evidence indicated that numerous foreign teachers were teaching in rural areas close to the KZN border. All participants (n=13) were given pseudonyms and interviewed through either face-to-face or telephonic semi-structured interviews by the researcher. The average duration per interview was an hour. The data gathered from the interviews were supplemented and triangulated with data from a semi-structured interview and iterative dialogue with the co-ordinator of the Refugee Council in Durban, KZN.

Profile of Zimbabwean Immigrant Teachers

A biographic profile of the teachers who were interviewed (n=13) is as

follows. In total there were 8 males and 5 females. Eleven of the participants were married, one was widowed and one was divorced. The average age of the participants was 35 years which indicated that these were seasoned teachers immigrating to SA. The majority of participants (n=8), who migrated to SA did so as their first migration experience. The minority (n=5) had previously migrated to other African countries close to Zimbabwe. A professional profile of the participants indicated that one participant had a doctoral degree, six had masters' degrees, two had honours' degrees, two had a Diploma in Education, one had a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree and one had an incomplete B.Ed degree. The majority of the participants were thus highly educated. The use of the concept 'teachers' is all encompassing in this article as it refers to professionals teaching in schools and in institutions of higher learning. The categories were not mutually exclusive since some participants had immigrated to South Africa to teach in schools but after a period of time, they accepted academic positions as tutors/lecturers in higher education institutions. At the time of the interviews, five of the participants were level one teachers and eight were lecturers. A majority of the teachers located in the schools were Maths and Science specialists whilst the majority in higher education institutions specialized in education.

Findings

A majority of the immigrant teachers found themselves experiencing xenophobic prejudices, attitudes and behaviour at the workplace and in greater society, in a myriad of different contexts.

Professional Experiences, Ethnicity and Language

Post-apartheid SA schools ought to have achieved high levels of desegregation in respect of staff and student population as SA is twenty years into a democracy and there have been several educational reforms to encourage integration. Despite attempts being made to create sensitive multicultural environments (via the latest school curriculum), this has not achieved great success in certain schools. Rodney spoke about his specific experiences of xenophobia at school. He explained,

I didn't attend school for two days and the deputy principal of the school said to me 'I think we should deport you'. ...During meetings with staff, management makes comments that offend foreigners... 'there where the foreigners and Sothos live ... it must be the Nigerians who stole the laptops'.... There is a need for principals, to be appraised...with multi-cultural education.

It is apparent that Rodney was offended by the attitude of the deputy principal towards his absence from school. Rather than showing pastoral care for a teacher returning from sick leave, he used the opportunity to threaten Rodney with deportation treating him like an illegal immigrant. Furthermore, in a formal professional environment such as a staff meeting, comments from the management indicate their ethnic prejudices and unjustified views that foreigners are engaging in illegal activities. There is also the hint of a lack of social integration by immigrants in the community, as particular locales appear to be inhabited by the 'other'.

Immigrant teachers also articulated how unfairness pervaded processes at school but immigrant teachers who are employed by school governing bodies do not have a platform to voice their concerns and even if they did, they were unlikely to openly express their feelings due to a fear of losing their jobs. An example of the unfairness is evident in the management culture at some schools which demonstrated a distinctively biased ethnic culture that was evident in the recruitment practices of teachers. Rodney explained the ethnic prejudices that impacted on the employment of teachers at the two schools where he had taught:

The kind of principal- he can be racist, he wants the school to only be staffed with Zulu teachers. In the previous school they were unqualified teachers but he wanted them.

A school principal's preference for teachers who were isiZulu speaking, was also articulated by Theresa, who added that even the isiZulu language took precedence although it was not the medium of instruction at the school. She taught in a school where the staff was multi-cultural but predominantly African. The principal, regardless of this, would use the medium of isiZulu when he would speak to staff in meetings. She said: *'He speaks Zulu in the*

meetings, all the time Zulu' even though there are two Indians, one Coloured and one White teacher in addition to the African teachers. isiZulu is the language and Zulu, the culture of the majority of Africans in the province of KZN but immigrant teachers were of the opinion that it was being used in a discriminatory and exclusionary manner, not only to foreigners but also to South Africans of other race categories. It should be noted that although SA is now a democracy, categories of race persist in legislation, recruitment (affirmative action), the formation of organisations (e.g. Die Bruin Bemagtiging Beweging) and daily conversations. Immigrant teachers felt that they and other staff were being marginalized by virtue of the language that the principal selected for communication as he was aware that not all the staff were conversant in the isiZulu language.

Tanya spoke of experiencing xenophobic attitudes in society whilst using public transport and in the workplace. She reported that,

people see a black (African) person and that you can't speak their language and they ask you what are you doing here if you don't speak our language.. very often this happens- even this morning in the taxi. Even colleagues (at the university where she lectures) ask 'why don't you learn our language? Why should they? There is English which we both speak. There is another experience that constantly recurs in the staffroom: colleagues, Africans not anyone else, start interacting using their mother tongue and to me it's like you don't belong. Where I come from you're not welcome if someone speaks in a language that they know you can't understand.

Reedi concurred with this view and she explained,

you feel that you are out of place because you can't speak the language of the majority especially Zulu people don't want to speak English. I look African but they expect you to speak Zulu and not English. They query why you can't speak the language.

Tanya's use of binary pronouns of 'their (language) ... our (language) ...' suggest that there is a 'lack of fit' in that she feels there is a social distancing being created and promoted in the use of isiZulu by her colleagues. All of the

immigrant teachers preferred the use of English which is deemed to be the global language of communication and also a language frequently used in urban environments in KZN. It is evident from the above articulations that language allows accessibility and acceptability in social and professional settings. This Afrophobic behaviour in KZN province is suggested by immigrant teachers as being a verbal attack.

Apart from personal interactions, even rules and regulations in professional institutions such as research foundations were perceived to be ingrained with xenophobic prejudices as John, a doctoral student and a lecturer at university, explained. He answered in the affirmative when I asked him if he had experienced any forms of xenophobia. He replied,

yes, we face it everyday ... as a student and staff. When we have to apply for bursaries and grants, like the NRF (National Research Foundation) competitive grant, you're excluded.

John revealed that one of the criteria for receiving a grant such as the competitive National Research Foundation grant, is that the applicant must be a South African citizen, which automatically disqualified him from applying. Cody also spoke of rules that govern social institutions such as banks, as being xenophobic in nature. He has a work permit valid until 2015 but he said: *'when you want to open an account, then you can't. In banking they will not grant you a loan. So there are limited benefits as a banking client'*. It is thus evident that the rules governing some professional and social institutions are created solely for use by South African citizens and they prove to be barriers to immigrant teachers who are legally resident in South Africa. In respect of Cody's concern, there is no guarantee that his work permit will be renewed after 2015, thus the bank maybe safeguarding its interests if he wanted to apply for a long term loan.

Fear, the Threat of Violence and Lifestyle Choices

Institutions of higher learning are places not immune to xenophobic practices and fears. Spaces such as lecture theatres and residences alike are sites for xenophobic articulations. Lewis who is a lecturer at a higher education institution revealed that students' comments in lectures drew unwarranted

attention to his status as being a foreigner with students implying that he does not understand them because he is not a South African citizen. Tanya explained an experience when she was a warden enforcing residence rules:

when I was a warden at student residence, the students would use abusive language in Zulu, when you would reprimand them for doing things that were unacceptable.

Lewis further harbours a fear of the students turning violent on campus and at the residence and he believes that they will use the opportunity of a xenophobic outbreak on campus to draw him out for revenge. He stated,

I can pick up that there is xenophobia when students say 'you say that just because you are a foreigner' when you make a comment to them. If xenophobia erupts (on the campus), I will not be spared, they will come for me. It's not from colleagues, it's through interactions with the students. Even conversations at residence.... the comments about foreigners in general.

The immigrant teachers who had not experienced any forms of xenophobia, attributed it to their agency in choosing to live an insular lifestyle. Morgan who is a student stated that,

I've met some really good friends who don't mind where you came from. Fortunately, I live on campus so I'm not exposed to the outside. Almost all of us (12 out of 15 post graduates studying either a masters / phd degree) are foreigners, only 3 are South Africans, so I haven't really experienced prejudice.

Morgan's articulations in his interview revealed that he has quarantined himself, he doesn't socialize outside of the university environment and he perceives himself to be fortunate in this way. Also, most of his peers are foreigners which he feels explains the absence of xenophobic experiences. Tanya's agency, is evident in her personal lifestyle preference which has impacted on her experiences. She revealed how she had also quarantined herself *'I live on campus, I don't go out much. I have a few people that I*

interact with. I don't really socialize'. She added that this was a choice she made because she did not have anyone that she could relate to (given the xenophobic utterances by her colleagues) and there was no support structure for Zimbabweans in the city where she is located. She revealed that her lifestyle choice led to a personal challenge of coping with loneliness. Although her son and daughter have now joined her in SA, she stated '*I just miss being at home (Zimbabwe) with your own people, speaking your own language ... it's very difficult to be away from home'*. It was apparent that her choice to isolate herself had emotional repercussions. It is understandable that she expressed a longing for Zimbabwe, her home, as she had alluded to xenophobic behaviour at work and in society which had tainted her socially. At work she had physically withdrawn to her office where she spends most of her time, and not venturing out to the staffroom during breaks.

Socio-Economic Geographies as Prescriptions for Xenophobic Incidents

The intersection of race, class and location appeared to be a critical nexus for the occurrence of xenophobic behaviour. Scott who was teaching in a private school explained that he hadn't experienced xenophobia for the following reasons:

it's because of the location of the school, it's in a relatively affluent area and the parents we draw from don't see me as a threat to them. Xenophobia is related to the threat of SA jobs, my staff is mostly white.

It is evident from Scott's articulations that he has professionally integrated, this is apparent in his use of the pronoun 'my' when referring to the staff at school. He is of the opinion that he remained unaffected by xenophobia because he is located in an elite area where his 'foreign-ness' is not perceived to be a threat to local jobs. Furthermore, he believed that he remains exempt because 'his' school is populated by a majority of white staff and Africans are understood to be the perpetrators of xenophobic incidents. Reedi concurred that it's the location that determines ones susceptibility to xenophobic violence. She said:

those who are staying in the townships are vulnerable. I'm staying in the suburbs. People don't know who you are and where you're coming from, they mind their business and don't ask. In townships the situation is different: they want to know who you are and what you're doing.

Socially, outside of the professional environment, proximity to one's neighbours and interactions with them appears to be an influential factor in determining the occurrence of xenophobic attitudes and behaviours towards immigrant Zimbabwean teachers.

Religion is not sacrosanct in xenophobic discourses, and xenophobic attitudes were seen to penetrate religious services in community gatherings. For Irene, who admitted to being religious, going to church had opened her up to xenophobic attitudes as foreigners are perceived to be a threat to members of the local congregation who are seeking positions of authority. She explained that there is 'latent' xenophobia, where comments are generally not overt so as to sound offensive by referring to foreigners. She explained '*You have to read between the lines, it's in the comments that are made*'. She cited an example of a member of the church management stating '*people are coming in to take over positions in church*'. She felt disappointed that this was the view of the local church members who viewed foreigners as opportunistic but she had no intention of upward mobility into church management structures. She merely wished to pray regularly in a nearby church which she said she will continue to do regardless of the views being expressed.

Discussion

The presence of Zimbabwean immigrant teachers in South Africa is no revelation as South Africa has a dire need for teachers, particularly in scarce skills fields in schools and in higher education institutions and Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political decline is a strong incentive for the creation of an osmotic effect from Zimbabwe into South Africa. Of course this is in tandem with the current trend espoused by the World Bank (2009 cited in Crush and Ramachandran 2009:02) that 'In sub-saharan Africa more than 60% of migrants move to other countries within the region'. Whilst this was

a small scale study in one province, the findings are instructive on various levels. A key finding of this study was that none of the immigrant teachers had been victims of xenophobic violence at either work or in greater society. Undesirable reactive responses to African immigrants in particularly township areas had resulted in pockets of xenophobic violence from 2006 (Sisulu *et al.* 2007) with spiralling outbreaks in 2008 (Manik 2009; Hammar, Mc Gregor & Landau 2010). However, in ‘going under the hammer’ by trading their skills in SA, they were exposing themselves to a host of experiences some unsavoury, like xenophobia which had deep social, professional and emotional impacts. Grant in Motani (2002:226) warns that ‘an education system will naturally reflect the norms of the host society’, and this was apparent in the xenophobic practices, prejudices and attitudes, which can be interpreted as psychological violence, that some immigrant teachers spoke of when they shared their experiences of being in schools and in higher education institutions in KZN. Thus this study does concur with the finding that xenophobia cuts across employment as Crush and Pendleton (2004) have asserted, as it is evident amongst teachers.

Professional and Social Disconnections

Zimbabwean immigrant teachers’ experiences indicated that despite a rigorous process of immigrant teachers’ obtaining their various accreditations and work permits to participate in the formal economy as highly skilled professionals where their expertise is required in critical subjects, they are not valued by being treated with the respect deserving of professionals. They are viewed with the same disdain and attitudes shown to illegal immigrants and subject to threats such as Rodney’s threat of deportation by the deputy principal. A professional disconnection is imposed upon immigrant teachers by their colleagues in the staffroom, in choosing to speak in isiZulu in their presence knowing all too well that the immigrant teachers are unable to communicate in return. A professional disconnection is perpetrated by the leadership in the schools when principals opt to speak in isiZulu in staff meetings thereby excluding the input of some members of their staff. Ethnophobic (directed to the Sothos) and Afrophobic (directed to the Zimbabwean Immigrant teachers) behaviour is also demeaning to the immigrant teachers with management’s open disclosures of their resentment

of other cultures apart from the Zulu culture and labelling foreigners for particular social evils such as crime. The management at schools were demonstrating overt xenophobic behaviour in the comments that they were making against other ethnic groups and nationals (such as the Sothos and the Nigerians). Thus, cultural imperialism in KZN dominates with the Zulu culture and isiZulu language being promoted as superior in some KZN schools and in society. Recruitment practices at schools were revealed as favouring the hiring of teachers who were of Zulu culture even if they were unqualified for positions. Interestingly, Osman (2009) found that principals intervened in schools when teachers displayed xenophobic behaviour. Who will intervene in schools when management displays such behaviour? Osman (2009) also reported that principals were 'unaware' or 'oblivious' to xenophobia at its peak in 2008. Is it possible that the principals referred to by the immigrant teachers are unable 'to see the wood for the trees' and recognize their own xenophobic behaviour?

Institutions of higher learning are not unscathed, they are establishments where fear and the threat of violence hangs in the air as possibilities for Zimbabwean immigrant teachers whose students recognise them as foreigners and comment on their 'foreign-ness'. This study found that xenophobic behaviour and attitudes were apparent in HEI's, committed by students and colleagues with damaging social and psychological effects for the immigrant teachers such as self-quarantine which eventually led to loneliness for some teachers such as Tanya. Those immigrant teachers who had not been exposed to xenophobic incidents attributed it to their own choice of not socialising outside of the university boundaries. The findings of this study extend the discourse on xenophobia in HEI's. Pithouse-Morgan *et al.* (2012:84) have alluded to xenophobia in higher education institutions as providing a 'pedagogically unsound space'. They note in their narrative of an African immigrant postgraduate student's experiences of xenophobia that 'his accounts of living with a fear of xenophobic harassment and violence' was in sync with the accounts of three other African postgraduate students that they interviewed. Their study correlated with the findings of Shabangu's study (2011) on the lives of foreign students having xenophobia as a persistent feature.

There is a strong possibility that race, class and location matters in incidents with xenophobic violence. Von Holdt *et al.* (2011:38) found that

perpetrators expressed ‘the multi-dimensional nature of so-called “xenophobia” in ... expressing a complex mix of class, gender and ethnic antagonisms’. The variable of race is not cross cutting in xenophobia amongst Zimbabwean immigrant teachers. A distinctly racial slice was evident with immigrant teachers reporting African teachers and Africans in society behaving in a xenophobic manner. This ‘Afrophobia’ is in keeping with several media and research reports. Immigrant teachers were living in either the suburbs, on university residences and not in townships. They did not interact and socialise with their neighbours given residential norms in suburbia which insulated them. Living in the suburbs is characterised by walls which create a physical disconnection from one’s neighbours, facilitating the ease of a social disconnection which meant that they were not easily identified as being foreign. Township dwellers were perceived to be more prone to xenophobic violence than immigrant teachers who resided in the suburbs. Thus their social disconnection is a way of avoiding unnecessary attention. This resonated with the findings of a survey of 400 skilled non-citizens in South Africa in 1999, where Mattes, Crush and Richmond (2002:129) found that being a professional or from a high income group shelters immigrants from distasteful behaviour ‘meted out to foreign workers, immigrants and refugees’.

But social and professional disconnections are two pronged constructs: it can be self-imposed resulting in self quarantine as displayed by Morgan and Tanya as a display of their agency and/or citizen-imposed as with Reedi and Tanya. Reedi’s comment about ‘feeling out of place’ when isiZulu is used to exclude her from colleagues’ conversations at work resonates with the construct of ‘displacement’, one commonly used in Zimbabwean immigration literature to capture the feelings of Zimbabwean immigrants in SA (Hammar *et al.* 2010).

Conclusion

Much has been said in the immigration literature about how xenophobia runs contrary to the rainbow nation philosophy, the African Renaissance and SA’s human Rights constitution. Little has been said on how we can change the ugly tide of xenophobia sweeping the country. This study on xenophobia amongst Zimbabwean immigrant teachers in KwaZulu-Natal province may

offer an avenue for thought. Xenophobia is evident and also very relevant in the lives of immigrant teachers who are highly skilled professionals contributing to the education sector in SA, at school level and in higher education institutions. In this way they add tangible value to the pool of skilled teachers that SA needs to progress as a country. Their experiences revealed their social and professional disconnections which led to psychological trauma. But there was also evidence of a common thread, a call for socio-professional justice in their comments in desiring fairness in recruitment processes which are not skewed on the basis of cultural and national imperialism and in requesting for multicultural programmes to invite sensitivity amongst their colleagues. Given the findings of this study, I concur with Osman(2009:14) who said that ‘xenophobia poses serious challenges to the South African education system’ and it is for this reason that I suggest attention now be focussed on how Zimbabwean immigrant teachers can be harnessed to become agents of positive change in SA schools and HEI’s.

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