# Chronicling the Effects of the 2008 Xenophobic Attacks amongst a Select Group of Congolese and Burundian Women in the City of Durban

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## Abstract

During 2008, Congolese and Burundian women experienced xenophobic attacks in South Africa and the impact it had on shaping respondents' views about South African society, is recounted. The article investigates whether the 2008 xenophobic attacks have changed the way Congolese and Burundian women perceive South African society, before, during and after the xenophobic attacks of 2008. The article highlights the gendered dimension of xenophobia and how female migrants understand South African society before coming to the country. It also explores how Congolese and Burundian women rebuilt their livelihoods and recovered from the emotional shocks following the 2008 xenophobic attacks. This article reveals that all respondents in the study were aware of South African xenophobic attitudes toward foreigners while in their home countries. Despite this knowledge they took risks to eke a livelihood in a country where they may experience extreme prejudice. Finally, the authors highlight the emotional vulnerability of victims of the xenophobic attacks and the impact that this had on their livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, livelihood, survival, trauma

# Introduction

Since the 2008 xenophobic attacks on African foreigners, numerous social and political debates have been raised on South Africa's tolerance for the presence of fellow Africans originating from the same continent. While migrants from the continent consider South Africa as a location of choice where democracy, socio-economic justice and human rights are more respected compared to their country of origin, the 2008 xenophobic attacks provided reasons for victims of attacks to question South Africa's role as a champion of democracy, human rights and socio-economic justice on the African continent (Rukema 2011; Nagy 2004).

In finding explanations for the prevalence of xenophobia, Harris (2001:11-12) asserts that a wide range of assumptions that describe xenophobia in South Africa exists since the country's political transition to democracy. The xenophobic phenomenon is relatively new in the South African context which includes the 'scapegoating hypothesis' resulting in foreigners being blamed for taking on limited resources and unfulfilled expectations in the new democracy. There is also the 'isolation hypothesis' which locates xenophobia as a consequence of South Africa's history of isolation from the international community prior to the 1994 elections resulting in the movement of people into the country without the stringent restrictions imposed by apartheid. Lastly, the 'bio-cultural hypothesis' explains that xenophobia operates through the level of physical and cultural appearance of foreigners. International literature on nationalism suggests that xenophobia is a negative consequence of nation-building.

Despite the different explanations of xenophobia, it is understood as a violation of human dignity and human rights in keeping with Article 26 of 1998 of the United Nations which declares racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia as human rights violations (Bustamante 2002:337). As a social issue, numerous studies have proven that xenophobia is institutionalised in many sectors of South African society, including government, media and financial houses (Taylor 2012; Murray 2003; Dodson & Oelofse 2000). Baruti *et al.* (2010) and Vale (2002) aptly assert that political xenophobic rhetoric and attacks against foreigners are grounded and ingrained in the politics that marked the apartheid and post-apartheid leadership and influenced public policy toward African foreigners that filtered in post-apartheid South Africa.

Former Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who made a no proven claim in parliament in 1997 attests to the assertion of political xenophobic rhetoric in the following statement:

> *With an illegal population estimated at between 2.5 million and 5 million, it is obvious that the socio economic resources of the country, which are under severe strain as it is are further being burdened by the presence of illegal aliens...[citizens should] aid the Department and the South African Police Services in the detection, prosecution and removal of illegal aliens from the country...the cooperation of the community is required in the proper execution of the Department's functions (Crush 2008 cited in Baruti, Bond, Cele & Ngwane 2010).*

There is increasing evidence that the press has by and large also contributed to creating a climate of fear of migrants. Neocosmos (2008:590) observes that a number of surveys of press reports on foreign migration issues depict a negative image lacking analytical critical insight into the issue of African migration. The content of the press often suggests that migrants 'steal jobs', they are mostly 'illegal', 'flooding into the country to find work' and that 'foreigners are unacceptably encroaching on the informal sector' and therefore on the livelihoods of South Africa's huge number of unemployed people. Similar observations were noted by Smith (2008), McDonald and Jacobs (2005).

In line with the above studies, it provides reasons to believe that the media and political statements against African foreigners tend to legitimise a long standing negative community perception since democracy towards African foreigners, reinforced negative stereotypes resulting in a buildup to attacks that were witnessed in 2008 across South African cities and townships that raised the ire of the international community. As early as 1995, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) surveys illustrated that 16% of South Africans were in favour of a blanket prohibition on people coming from other countries, increasing to 37% in 2006. SAMP confirmed South Africa as one of the most xenophobic countries in the world (Steenkamp 2009:441).

The attitudes of law enforcement institutions in the country and its

failure to protect foreigners whenever there are attacks, demonstrates the extent of xenophobic behavior which has permeated state institutions which are expected to protect citizens and foreigners alike who live in the country either legally or illegally. A series of studies suggest police brutality toward African foreigners and a failure to protect them when under attack by their South African counterparts (Taylor 2012; Murray 2003; Harris 2001; Vigneswaran 2008; Ngwane 2009; and Rukema 2011). According to a Human Rights Commission (HRC) study on policing approaches to African migrants in 1999 suggests that there was '*substantial failure of enforcing officers to comply with even minimal requirements of the law'* (HRC 1999 cited in Vahed & Desai 2013).

The consequence of the xenophobic attacks of 2008 resulted in the loss of material and human lives. In addition, emotional scars and mistrust against fellow South Africans continue to reverberate amongst the foreign African community in the continent. A number of African states in the wake of the xenophobic attacks expressed displeasure on violence perpetrated against their citizens. For example, during the recent attacks on Somali nationals, the Prime Minister of Somalia, Mr Farah Shirdon, made an appeal to the South African government to protect Somali citizens 'as a matter of urgency to intervene and contain this unnecessary and unfortunate violence against Somali business communities to preserve peace and stability'(Business Day Live, 4 June 2013).

Within the above context, this article investigates Congolese and Burundian women's experiences during and after the 2008 xenophobic attacks against them. This article discusses the impact the xenophobic attacks have on shaping and reshaping respondent's views about South African society. A key question that is investigated is whether the 2008 xenophobic attacks have changed the way Congolese and Burundian women perceive South African society, before, during and after the attacks. The article, lastly examines the coping strategies used by respondents in the study to rebuild their livelihoods and recover from the emotional trauma of the 2008 xenophobic attacks on their social well-being.

This study focused on six females who were victims of xenophobic attacks in 2008. Three were from the Democratic Republic of Congo and three from the Republic of Burundi. Interviews were conducted using the Snowball Sampling technique where the first respondent provided a lead to

another respondent with similar experiences to participate in the study until the desired number of respondents for the study was attained. The reason for using the Snowball Sampling technique was primarily due to the fear prevalent amongst victims of the xenophobic attacks to volunteer participating in a study of this nature as they needed to have closure on their traumatic psychological experience. Lack of trust to talk about such traumatic experiences to outsiders restricted the sampling size. Notwithstanding the restricted sample size, in-depth quality interviews with vulnerable groups is known to provide insight into their interpretations of experiences. Such forms of data collection technique are known to provide an interpretative analysis on the existence of observed patterns, interpretations and implications attached to these (Babbie & Mouton 2001). It helps to elicit what Geertz (1973) refers to as *'thick descriptions'* of actions and events in individuals' lives. To this end, the interviews focused on their experience of xenophobic attacks against them and their counterparts.

## Congolese and Burundian Immigrants in Durban

Post-apartheid South Africa has seen a great influx of immigrants, mainly from African countries. The city of Durban has not been excluded from the exodus of foreign nationals from the continent. An earlier study by Shindondola (2002: 4) points out, the number of Congolese immigrants in Johannesburg alone was estimated at about 23,000 in mid-1995 but over the years considering these figures it is assumed to have increased although no country wide official statistics can attest to such trends and patterns. In the year 1995, the Democratic Republic of Congo, known as Zaire, was relatively stable. However, from 1996 political instabilities continue to plague the nation. As a result, thousands of men and women have fled the country seeking refuge in neigbouring countries, including Europe, America, and Asia and in other parts of the African continent with South Africa being no exception.

Following the history of political violence in Burundi, it has forced an exodus of internal and international migration leading to high levels of movement of people to neighboring countries, Europe, America, and Asia and in South Africa particularly. While there is no official statistics

indicating the number of Burundians living in South Africa, their presence in the country is most observable. Observation visits by the authors around the city of Durban, visits to many foreign established churches and mosques and different Burundian associations around the city of Durban, suggests a significant presence of Burundian nationals.

Congolese and Burundians have many things in common. They have a similar colonial history, cultural practices and post-colonial backgrounds and legacy. Both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi were colonised by Belgium resulting in a common political experience in their struggle against colonialism. Their post-colonial political history was marked by internecine political violence, which forced many to flee their respective countries and seek asylum elsewhere. Congolese and Burundians speak French and Kiswahili as administrative and official languages and share a long history of inter-marriage.

## Historical Overview of Migration in Africa

Like in other parts of the African continent, the history of migration to South Africa can be traced back from pre-colonialism, colonialism and post-colonialism periods. Each of these colonial epochs was characterised by different forms of migration due to a diverse number of factors (Adepoju 2000).

At the heart of historical and current human migrations in Africa are both political and economic factors such as trade, a search for pastoral land under drought conditions, famine, and internal political and social instability. This occurred in the context of capitalist expansionist policies that created inequalities within and between countries leading to labour migration [Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 2006 Report]. Deterioration in and shortage of land was a catalyst for rural people to migrate to urban centres in search of work to better and moreover secure decent living conditions elsewhere (Adepoju 2000). Colonial economic activities in francophone West Africa for example and legislation on forced labour sparked internal and cross-border clandestine migration of unskilled labour workers required for infrastructural development, mainly in transport network and commercial agriculture comprising sugar cane, cocoa, and peanut cultivation (Adepoju 2000). While there are many factors influencing

migration, it has become a means of livelihood for the movement of people outside their country of naturalisation. As Zeleza (2002) asserts, the central defining feature of international migration is that people are doing so mainly to sell their labour power, suggesting that human movement patterns, and labour procurement and utilisation are shaped largely by the capitalist system.

In the context of South Africa during apartheid, internal and regional migration dynamics were different from the rest of the continent (HSRC 2006 Report). Shidondola (2002) argues that apartheid government's sealed border control policy and discriminatory laws such as the Aliens Control Act of 1963, made internal and external movement of people extremely difficult. With the burgeoning gold and diamond sectors, despite restricted migration laws, South Africa opened up its borders and allowed the movement of rural people to meet the labour requirements of the mines. The increase in labour demand further warranted the movement of people into South Africa from the southern African states which has grown into a survival strategy for some of the poor households in the region. Lesotho, for instance, is economically dependent on South Africa (Adepoju 2000; McDonald 1999). The adoption of an 'internationalisation' policy resulted in many local job seekers being replaced by foreigners. Following economic hardship and political volatility in the neighbouring states such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana to cite a few, cross-border migration continues to be a prominent feature in the southern African region.

## Defining and Contextualising Xenophobia

'Xenophobia' is a contested and ambiguous word. The word 'xenophobia' derived from the Greek words 'xenos' and 'phobos' which correspondingly mean 'strange or foreign and fear'. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines xenophobia as a 'morbid dislike of foreigners'. Scholars define xenophobia differently. Berezin defines xenophobia as the 'fear of difference embodied in persons or groups' (Berezin 2006). For Nyamnjoh (2006), xenophobia is 'the intense dislike, hatred or fear of others'. It has been characterised as an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population and perceived as hostility towards strangers and all that is foreign. Other scholars such as Pain (2006) view xenophobia as 'attitudes, prejudices and

behaviours that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity'.

These definitions illustrate that the word xenophobia has certain common characteristics. Similarly, prejudices and behavior of rejection are also common among people of the same nationality. Racism and tribalism are types of prejudices based on skin colour and cultural orientation based on one's ethnic back ground. At times, prejudice is extended towards non-citizens and other marginal groups. Although xenophobia is widely debated in the South African context, it is a global phenomenon prevalent in both developed and developing countries.

For instance, in United States of America, Germany, France, Great Britain, there are several reports that highlight the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners migrating to these countries (Yakushko 2009; Crush and Ramachandran 2009). The World Values Survey 2005 found that nearly 40 percent of participants from nineteen European countries enforce strict limits on immigration while 42.5 percent supported the entry of immigrants as long as employment was available. Nearly 9 percent of the respondents endorsed a total ban on immigration based on a variety of national interest factors (Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

In order to provide a more inclusive contextualisation of xenophobia in the African context, Neocosmos (2008:587) attempts to provide a conceptual understanding of this negative social phenomenon through the works of Frantz Fanon. Fanon observed the collapse of nationalism in the post-independence period in Africa occasioned by the new post-independence elites, who grabbed the jobs and capital of the departing Europeans while the popular classes only followed in their footsteps in attacking foreign Africans. This suggests that a politics of nationalism founded on stressing indigeneity lay at the root of post-colonial xenophobia.

Drawing from Fanon's accounts on xenophobia in Africa, post-apartheid South Africa can in many ways be contextualised similarly to the rest of the continent. The demise of apartheid has heralded an emerging black bourgeoisie class with almost half of the population confined to the periphery of the economy with low levels of basic services and development. Attempts by the ruling party to create a sense of nationhood has succeeded only amongst those who stand to benefit from the political system whilst

those excluded have to compete with foreign migrants for scarce resources, hence the transfer of xenophobic attitudes towards their African counterparts from the continent. In a way the 2008 xenophobic uprising mainly in the townships and informal settlements of South Africa distracted attention from the state due to a belief that their poverty and misery is attributed to foreign migrants taking up resources that was promised to them. Such displacement of anger dealt a blow for the ruling classes reducing the much celebrated Rainbow Nation construct to a political fallacy.

## Xenophobic Attacks in Durban 2008

Xenophobic attacks on African foreigners in 2008 were largely concentrated in four provinces. Gauteng, Western, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal may be dubbed as the catchment areas were xenophobic attacks occurred. While other provinces despite not having experienced actual physical or material damages, the emotional and psychological trauma affected African foreigners given the widespread media coverage. With such widespread media coverage of violence against foreign migrants even those who have not directly experienced this inhumane encounter have been traumatised. In KwaZulu-Natal, the media reported damage to properties, harassment and injuries. According to data gathered during interviews for this study, respondents reported experiencing xenophobic behavior in different ways. Four out of six respondents indicated to have their properties and livelihoods affected as a result of xenophobia.

Two of the respondents were street vendors and when the attacks took place, their goods were looted. Others were forced out of their residences and left behind without their belongings. The attacks created a generalised sense of fear among African foreigners living in Durban but at the same time a source of emerging solidarity, support and unity amongst them. It opened new avenues for unity, making compromises on their differences and developing resilience to protect their safety, security and social well-being. The following response from a victim best describes the response of foreigners in the city at the time of the attacks:

> When people were fleeing township, even town where there is concentration of Zulu, I remember in Point Roads, all foreigners

organized themselves and said that we cannot die like women. Let us organize ourselves and fight back these Zulu people. Everyone bought a machete, but nothing happened. Zulus were also afraid. If they could try, it was just a war that would have happened (Respondent One, 2013).

The extent of displacement of foreigners in Durban did not compare to townships such as Alexandra in Gauteng. Nonetheless, in Durban given its concentration of foreigners, dealt a similar assault on their well-being in areas inhabited by small pockets of foreign migrants. Both victims of xenophobia and those who were fearful of the attacks sought refuge in churches, mosques and community centres. They also sought assistance from many non-governmental organisations. Those with relatives sought comfort in their homes. Victims relived traumas experienced in their home countries when they were displaced again. One respondent indicated that the secondary displacements brought back memories of wars at home. The following testimony demonstrates how xenophobic attacks reminded victims of past experiences:

It was not different from war we experienced in my country. When we heard that they are coming to kill us, we could not take anything. We had to leave everything behind. It was just like any other wars on the continent (Respondent Two, 2013).

## Recounting the 2008 Xenophobic Experiecne

This section analyses Congolese and Burundian women's exposure to xenophobia while in their home country and their experience of xenophobia while in South Africa during the 2008 xenophobic attacks. Also discussed are the victims' experiences following the 2008 attacks, the implications of the attacks on their livelihoods and the strategies used to recover financially and emotionally.

### *Knowledge of Xenophobia in South Africa*

This study highlights that all respondents were aware that South African

society has negative attitudes towards African foreigners. Respondents were aware of South Africa's history of political violence and high level of crime, but the extent to which black South Africans were subjected to poverty and inequality remained unknown. The degree to which South Africans demonstrated negative views toward foreigners as perceived by the respondents was measured in terms of derogative statements made about them and not to physical and material damages. During the 2008 xenophobic attacks, all respondents reported being horrified by their exposure to people being killed and properties being damaged due to a strong sense of xenophobic feelings amongst South Africans. The response of one respondent aptly captures the exposure to xenophobic attitudes when arriving in South Africa:

> Yes, we knew that South Africans do not like foreigners. For me, insults were nothings as long as I have something to feed my family and take my children to school. You can insult as many times you want, but not hurting me or take my properties. When we arrived here, it was not just insults, but the denial of refugee rights. When we got to Home Affairs, officials were insulting us and could not give us papers on time. They kept telling us, why you came to South Africa. You must go back home. You see, up to now, I am here for ten years, but still have six month permit (Respondent Three, 2013).

All respondents indicated that the political and economic conditions in their home countries were worse. It could not be compared to the impact of xenophobic attacks on their socio-economic well-being. They endured the psychological and emotional pains resulting from xenophobic attitudes from South Africans only because of hope for better economic opportunities and political stability they might enjoy in South Africa as compared to their country of naturalisation. Positive economic images of South Africa portrayed by the media according to Rukema (2011) attracted many African foreigners to the country even if it meant risking their lives. Such an attraction for personal advancement was a strong motivating factor for Africans to risk their lives by undertaking unknown routes, paying unscrupulous and illegal agents even to a point of losing their lives on their

long journey to a land perceived to provide them with economic prosperity (Rukema 2011).

The following statement demonstrates how the prospects for economic opportunities surpassed exposure to xenophobic attitudes and fear of safety in South Africa:

> When things were not going well in my country, I used to tell my husband that let us go to South Africa. Because I heard that life is good there. My husband used to tell me that in South Africa, people are not good and my husband preferred at least to go and stay in refugee camp. I was against my husband idea. How much money can you make in a refugee camp? I insisted to come to South Africa, hoping, despite xenophobia we can make money and go to another country where we feel safe after we had made the money (Respondent Five, 2013).

African foreigners' decisions of taking risks in seeking economic opportunities in South Africa, demonstrates the extent of desperation in their respective home countries. Victims of the xenophobic attacks could find no other way to escape the economic hardships and political instabilities prevalent in their country of origin other than take a difficult journey and tolerate the xenophobic attitudes of South Africans. As most respondents were exposed to social and political harassment and exclusion in their home country, they were de-sensitised to be tolerant of South African xenophobic attitudes, ostracism and social isolation. One respondent reported to have experienced xenophobia in her home country. In the DRC, ethnic groups who are of Rwandan origin are subjected to discrimination and derogatory statements. Therefore, xenophobia for Respondent Six was not new.

> People talk of xenophobia and complain that South Africans are xenophobic. For us, we experience worse xenophobia in our own country. They call us names; they kill people, just because they came from Rwanda or Burundi. For me xenophobia is not something new and not the only negative thing that people and government have to deal with. Africa has many problems from tribalism, regionalism, sexism and other very bad problems (Respondent Six, 2013).

## *Xenophobic Experiences of Respondents in South Africa before the 2008 Attacks*

The study demonstrates that while respondents were aware of xenophobic attitudes prevalent in South Africa, the extent to which they experienced it was in the extreme. All respondents reported to have suffered xenophobic attitudes, but the most common experience was the first day when reporting to the Department of Home Affairs to formalise their stay in the country. Although not all respondents reported being directly confronted by xenophobic attitudes by state officials, they have witnessed others being verbally abused.

The following testimony reveals one respondent's first experience of xenophobia in South Africa:

> I was shocked when I reported to Home Affairs. Security guard was hitting one man, saying that he crossed the queue. The man was bleeding and everyone was afraid to talk for fear of being denied asylum paper. It was very shocking. When I asked some people if they have seen that happening before, they told me that they experience that on daily basis. I concluded that what we used to hear about the abuse of foreigners in South Africa is not just story but a reality (Respondent One, 2013).

According to respondents, ill treatment of African foreigners at the hands of South African state officials exists within other government departments and private and financial institutions. Insulting, derogatory and inappropriate behavior exhibited by health care professionals in many hospitals in Durban, highlight xenophobic attitudes prevalent within state institutions. Four out of six respondents reported being verbally abused by health care professionals. One respondent aptly captured her experience of xenophobia:

> I was in a deep pain when I went to the hospital to deliver my first baby. Imagine, I was bleeding and one of the nurses asked me, why you did not go to your country and have your baby there. I was very shocked and scared that she can even kill me or my baby. It was horrifying to hear someone who supposed to save lives and care for the patients telling you such kind of words (Respondent Six, 2013).

Although African foreigners have limited access to job opportunities, they are creative enough to find work. Most African migrants work in the informal sector as hair dressers, street vendors, car guards, cleaners and the construction sector doing unskilled work. Women mainly occupy jobs as domestics, sales women, baby sitters, street vendors, selling of goods from their country of origin and food vending. The more creative females engage in garment and other skilled economic activities. Despite engagement with the South African economy, their attempts at making small savings using South African banking facilities, has been hampered by bureaucratic delays and in many instances the denial by banks to open up accounts due to a variety of reasons including inconsistency of banking policies and verification of migrants asylum documents. Only some banks are willing to open accounts for people with temporary residency permits. Respondents indicated to have received mixed responses due to varying banking policies. In some instances they are asked to provide proof of their refugee status and even though they provide such proof are denied the opportunity of opening bank accounts on the basis that they need to have identity documents. Five respondents tried to have bank accounts opened to enable them make small savings, but denied access as they were required to be in possession of refugee identity documents. Obtaining refugee identity documents remain a serious challenge. Some refugees receive their identity document only after its validity date has passed compelling them to re-apply again.

All respondents in the study witnessed one of their fellow country men and women being abused or insulted. The inability to speak a local language also deepened xenophobic attitudes toward African foreigners. According to two respondents, there was an apparent improvement in relationship with South Africans, when one is able to speak *isiZulu*. Speaking *isiZulu* opened avenues for foreign women to integrate and cooperate with South Africans. The following testimony captures the importance of language as a means by which to communicate and integrate:

> Yes, these people are very nasty. But when you speak of their language, they are somehow tolerant. After five years running business and selling stuff to Empangeni, I was able to speak Zulu fluently. No one would recognize that I am a foreigner. Even when they discover later, they wouldn't mind. Some are very excited to see

a foreign woman speaking their language to that level. It makes me also proud and shows respect of other people culture (Respondent Four, 2013).

During the height of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, language was used both by indigenous locals, law enforcement officers and state officials as a means to identify foreign nationals and subjecting them to different forms of physical and verbal abuse.

## *Experience and Consequence of the 2008 Xenophobic Attacks and its Impact on the Livelihoods of African Migrants*

While there were some improvement in social relationship and tolerance between African foreigners and South Africans, during the 2008 xenophobic attacks this somehow changed. According to four respondents, since the outbreak of xenophobia in Alexandra, the attitudes of their South African friends in Durban changed. Respondent Five, recalled how a long standing friendship with a Durbanite changed at the time of the attack:

Hey my friend, you know, the time has come for foreigners to go back in their home country. Have you heard of what is happening in Johannesburg? People are very angry about foreigners. The level of crime is high because of them. Our children no longer get jobs. They finish schools and they have to stay home, because all jobs are taken by foreigners (Respondent Five, 2013).

This statement suggests the perceptions held by many South Africans on the role of African foreigners in committing acts of crime and stealing jobs from locals. This is enforced by the views that African foreigners are better off than locals and the belief amongst some South Africans that the wealth of African foreigners in South Africa is generated through illegal means, such as trafficking of drugs and holding jobs which they do not deserve and pushing locals on the margins of poverty and unemployment (Baruti, Bond, Cele and Ngwane 2010).

The memories of xenophobia remain fresh in the mind of some respondents. For example, Respondent Five recounts how her business

started to thrive before the xenophobia attack and how it has destroyed her livelihood and how she is now struggling to re-establish her business. She asserted:

> I am a single mother. I struggled to raise my children after the death of my husband in 2003. After few years, things started going well. When these attacks happened, everything went back to the worse and now I am struggling to take care of my children (Respondent Five, 2013).

The 2008 xenophobic attacks had far reaching consequences for the livelihoods of foreign Africans. The findings demonstrated that feelings of fear, anger, mistrust and hatred were common sentiments expressed by all respondents. All respondents indicated that they became fearful of South Africans, even those whom they took as their friends before the outbreak of the xenophobic attacks. Such feelings are captured in the following excerpt from a respondent:

> I am still very bitter of what has happened to us. Since the xenophobia, I no longer come home late. I close my business early. Before the attacks, I used to work till late and sometimes leave my stuff with my South African friends to sell them for me. They would sell my stuff and give me the money. But now days, I no longer trust them. At least these days, some of them are starting to become friendly and I am not very much afraid of them as before when the attacks happened (Respondent One, 2013).

## Reconstructing Livelihoods and Recovery from the Emotional Scars of the Xenophobic Attacks

Rebuilding livelihoods amongst victims of the 2008 xenophobic attacks and coming to terms with the emotional trauma were some of the challenges that both men and women victims had to deal with on a daily basis. The findings suggest that the 2008 xenophobic attack impacted negatively on the livelihood of respondents. Once independent and self-supporting after entry into the country, they now had to depend on families and friends, churches,

mosques and non-governmental organisations for handouts as they lost their business networks, stocks and clients.

Respondent One remembered how it was difficult to rebuild her street vending business after she had had been affected by the 2008 xenophobic attack. Her first struggle was to raise money in order to restart her street vending business. Through donations and support from friends, she managed to raise R700. Her second struggle was to find a vending site where she could sell her goods along the street. After a few months of looking around she managed to secure herself a trading site along West Street. From there, she re-established her vending business. The story of Respondent One is not unique. All other respondents had their livelihoods affected as result of xenophobic attacks of 2008.

Amongst the group of African foreigners, a high level of solidarity, sense of community and co-dependence emerged after the 2008 xenophobic attacks. This is despite the fact that African foreigners are not a homogeneous group. Vast regional differences based on ethnic composition, language, cultural and religious differences exist on the continent. Many African foreigners originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo before the xenophobic attacks networked along ethnic lines confined their business, cultural and social relationship interests along these lines. After the xenophobic attacks, these social networks and boundaries became less rigid. Assimilation and mutual cooperation emerged. As one respondent claimed:

> Yes, my people helped me a lot. We spent about two weeks at the Catholic Church and when the fear was over, they gave us assistance and asked us to re-integrate in the community. People from my tribe, collected money and found us accommodation and thereafter they gave us small money to start afresh. It was not easy, but the support was good and helped us stand again (Respondent Four, 2013).

Faith-based organisations played an important role in ensuring that the victims of xenophobic attacks were re-integrated into the homes they were forced to abandon and ensured that their children returned to school. Those that lost property were supported by donations and in instances where they lost their livelihoods were provided with seed money to restart their businesses. In addition, the religious neutrality demonstrated by a diverse

number of faith communities was considered worthy of emulation by the diverse grouping of foreigners thus encouraging them to unite and co-exist as a community. Through pastoral counseling many of those traumatised by the attacks came to terms with their fears and anxieties. Those that displayed more serious psychological disturbances were referred to professional NGOs and CBOs in the city for professional help. Depression, suicidal and phobic behaviors were some of the serious psychological disturbances cited by the respondents to be prevalent amongst the victims. Other organs of civil society helped the different foreign African groups to organise themselves in the respective neighborhoods in the city and suburbs and advocated through law enforcement officers to ensure that the true spirit of protection and justice was accorded to victims of xenophobic attacks.

## Conclusion

This article recollects the 2008 xenophobic experiences of Congolese and Burundian women in the metropolitan area of Durban that gripped the nation. It documents by way of in-depth interviews the experiences, perceptions and voices of female victims of xenophobic attacks. The article highlights that the emotional and psychological scars of the xenophobic attack continue to remain a lived experience in the minds of victims. Women and men experienced similar trauma arising from the attack. They were dislocated from their communities, displaced from their homes, lost valuable property and experienced a heightened sense of insecurity about their safety and security in the country. Foreign migrants succeeded in coming together as a migrant community fostering greater solidarity, social cohesiveness and co-dependence. Although the scars of this experience continue to linger in the memories of xenophobic attack victims, it appears that they have succeeded in surmounting their traumatised experiences. The trauma of the xenophobic attacks superseded the zest to eke out a living in a foreign country which is perceived to be a land of hope, opportunity and prosperity. Despite the fact that the victims of xenophobic attacks had prior knowledge on the risks of xenophobic attitudes prevalent amongst local South Africans, at all odds they braved the way to this transforming country in the hope that they will derive a better quality of life. Such hopes were short-lived but at the same time foreign migrants despite the adversity of xenophobic attacks have re-grouped

as a community demonstrating a new sense of vitality and resilience to be part of the so-called Rainbow Nation.

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