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## **Love thy Neighbours**



**Exploring and Exposing  
Xenophobia in  
Social Spaces in  
South Africa**

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# *Alternation*

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Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the  
Arts and Humanities in  
Southern Africa

## **Love thy Neighbours – Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia in Social Spaces in South Africa**

Guest Editors  
*Sadhana Manik and  
Anand Singh*

2013

CSSALL  
Durban

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# **Editorial: Love thy Neighbours – Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia in Social Spaces in South Africa**

**Sadhana Manik  
Anand Singh**

Globalisation, political discord, environmental hardships, socio-economic strife and a desire to obtain an improved standard of living will continue to be drivers for human migration. At a continental level, Africa is poignantly subject to all of these factors so it's no surprise that migration is perceived as a common solution/ escape. South Africa (SA), the big apple of Africa has been perceived as a destination where dreams can be accomplished given legislative and policy advancements post-apartheid but this will soon plummet to South Africa being perceived as the rotten apple of Africa, if xenophobia is not addressed and repetitively swept under the carpet especially by government institutions, key political figures and civil society.

Whilst there is an understanding that xenophobia is not peculiar to SA, having reared in ugly head in numerous developed countries and continents such as Europe, it has been debated and discussed and certainly not avoided like the plague, the route South Africa has opted to follow. Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh (2005) declared a long time ago that 'South Africa is a highly xenophobic society' and despite the ongoing pronouncements and declarations, some to the contrary, as academia (through this special edition) there is the voice of social justice that calls for constant engagement with xenophobic discourses to understand and address xenophobic outpourings in its myriad forms in contemporary SA. But what constitutes xenophobia in a SA context? There are some constructions of xenophobia as an attitude (Bekker *et al.* 2008) which has culminated in foreigners being associated with undesirable behavior such as stealing the jobs of locals and criminal activities such as drug dealing and hijacking.

Violent outcomes for foreign nationals particularly those from Africa signaled another understanding of xenophobia, one that has been extended to denotations of action with xenophobia being understood as a verb (Von Holdt *et al.* 2011). There has been a plethora of research into the causes of xenophobia in SA and some of the threads that appear to emerge post 1994, include the following links: what constitutes the South African identity, media coverage of incidents and political suggestions that indicate prejudice. Khan (2007), drew attention to the preoccupation we, as South Africans, have about identity recognition which snakes its way into each and every aspect of our daily existence, from applying to attend a school or university, opening a bank account, buying furniture/ appliances. Equally important is the use of language, especially fluency in a South African language. So it's no shock that we differentiate between those in receipt of a South African identity document and who aren't. But isn't this strangely reminiscent of a 'dompass' mentality which has become ingrained in the SA psyche despite us overcoming apartheid?

Media coverage, also, has frequently been blamed for portraying foreigners as the perpetrators of unsavoury incidents, although recently the media spot highlighted the physical abuse by SA police of a Mozambican taxi driver in SA (in 2012) which led to a public outcry. After his subsequent arrest, he died in police custody fuelling speculation about police brutality towards foreigners. But xenophobia is institutionalised in numerous other segments of South African society apart from the media. These include government departments such as the department of Home Affairs and financial establishments.

In the political arena, the president of SA, Jacob Zuma recently committed a huge *faux pas* when speaking about the introduction of toll highways in Gauteng. He remarked that as South Africans 'We can't think like Africans in Africa generally. [There was laughter at this remark.] We are in Johannesburg. This is Johannesburg. It is not some national road in Malawi' (eNews, 23 October 2013, 11h00; The Justice factor, etv, 28 October, 20h30). These comments drew continental criticism from leaders for implying that South Africans perceive themselves as superior to the rest of Africa. This type of sentiment is not unusual and it has led to scholars remarking that a particular brand of xenophobia was apparent in South Africa, namely that of Afrophobia (Osman 2009:09 cites Motha & Ramadiro

2005:18) which encompasses ‘negative stereotypes towards people from other parts of the continent’. African immigrants are commonly described using the label: ‘Makwerekwere’ which is an inflammatory label (Neocosmos 2006; Steenkamp 2009) that refers to people who are not *au fait* with an Nguni or Sotho language and who are also ‘pitch black’ in complexion (Sichone nd: 11). Makwerekwere also has other undesirable meanings apart from being an African immigrant ‘who lacks competency in the local South African languages’ and being dark-skinned, 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). Segale (2004) long ago noted that the use of ‘makwerekwere’ constitutes hate speech, however as South Africans, we have not chosen to explore ways to root out its use in society. In this edition, Muthuki (in her article in this special edition) concludes that Afrophobia has its roots in poverty on the African continent.

This special edition of articles explores and exposes xenophobia in an array of social spaces in SA, many of which have not previously been examined in studies. Furthermore, some contributions seek to provide direction to a somewhat impotent SA government to address the burgeoning xenophobic crisis as immigration spirals.

Daniel Tevera’s article commences this edition by honing in on urban violence in SA cities. He examines the recent literature to create a deeper understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. He argues that the apartheid footprint is still very prevalent in xenophobic incidents in city locales. His findings demonstrate that key discourses to understanding xenophobia evolve around the importance of human deprivation, (e.g. poverty and poor service), citizenship and belonging which play instrumental roles in the incidences.

Anand Singh’s article by contrast boldly unpacks South Africa’s racialised social order, where he argues that there is a tendency to downplay the extent and nature of poverty among Coloureds and Indians when compared to the situation of Africans. Using a case study methodology, he illuminates what he terms ‘perceived xenophobic cum racist practices and how such issues are being viewed as deliberate attempts to alienate’ SA Indians. He argues that the experiences of people across South Africa are far too diverse and complex to be packaged into one paradigm. Hence, he states that they could be collapsed into the interrelated categories of xenophobia, ethnocentric behaviour, racist attitudes, ethnic nepotism and narcissistic

egoism. He concludes that the alienation of Indians is more contextual than racist or xenophobic.

The next five articles are located in an education context with the first focusing on teachers' experiences of xenophobia, the second on teachers and lecturers' experiences and the third and fourth articles on students' experiences of xenophobia in higher education. The fifth article focuses on the perspectives of foreign learners in school. Zimbabwean migrants are the largest cohort of foreigners in SA and Suresh Singh's article examines Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of xenophobia in schools in the rural province of Limpopo, which borders Zimbabwe. He exposes a host of challenges that Zimbabwean teachers face for example 'local teachers, students and community members use local indigenous languages to exclude foreign teachers'. He concludes that locals need to acknowledge the value of Zimbabwean teachers in advancing education in schools where their skills are in dire need. This idea is furthered in the next article. Sadhana Manik's article continues the theme of Zimbabwean teachers in SA, by focusing on Zimbabwean school teachers and lecturers in KwaZulu-Natal province and their experiences of and thoughts on xenophobia. Her findings reveal that issues of race, class and location matters in incidents with xenophobic violence. Also, Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' experiences indicate that whilst their expertise is required in critical subjects, they are not valued by being treated with the respect deserving of professionals. She exposes Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of social and professional disconnections, which were either self / externally imposed, which led to their psychological trauma. Interestingly, she shares the view of Jesika Singh, the next article discussed, that institutions of higher learning are establishments where fear and the threat of violence hangs in the air for foreigners.

Jesika Singh's study is located in a rural university which is close to the South Africa's borders and it has experienced an influx of foreign students. She reports on foreign students' experiences of xenophobia in their daily lives on campus. Her article chronicles xenophobic attitudes in foreign students' interactions with other students in their attempts to integrate, by university academics in their teaching and by support staff. Her findings point to university institutions being sites that do more than promote 'teaching and learning' but rather spaces where hatred of the 'other' and a lack of integration and fear amongst foreign students is engendered. Janet

## *Editorial: Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia*

Muthuki's article continues this theme of xenophobia in institutions of higher learning but she moves the location of her study to an urban based university and unpacks the phenomenology of xenophobia by examining the xenophobic experiences foreign post graduate students. Interestingly, some participants in her study report that xenophobia in SA has a striking resemblance to xenophobia in their home country.

The next article by Nirmala Gopal, is written from the perspective of foreign learners and it provides insight into how foreign learners think and feel about xenophobia. Using thematic analysis, she highlights the 'social exclusion of children and youth through the threat of violence and intimidation' which she argues should be addressed by the state and civil society. She advances that South Africa should embark on the protection of the rights of foreigners by engaging with key role-players.

The next article by Vahed and Desai examines the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, and also distils measures that should be adopted to address xenophobia. They note the multitude of explanations have been advanced to account for the 2008 attacks. These include 'the absence of a clear immigration policy, porous borders, corrupt police and Home Affairs officials, socio-economic inequities in the country, and even the African National Congress's poor service delivery record which is resulting in ordinary South Africans venting their frustration on foreign nationals'. They advocate the possibility of legalising migrants which would then provide them with the protection of labour legislation, and to also offer amnesty to long term residents. These suggestions are embedded in previous decisions by SA where 'migrant workers who entered South Africa legally before the 13 June 1986 were regarded as 'ordinary residents' and received voter registration cards and South African Identification Documents' (Harris 2001: 22-23). They conclude by noting the futility of any attempts to restrict immigration into South Africa as immigration is an international concern.

The following article by Rukema and Khan is located in the metropolitan area of Durban. They hone in on Congolese and Burundian women's experiences during and after the 2008 xenophobic attacks against them. They explore the impact the xenophobic attacks had on shaping and reshaping foreigners' views about South African society. They also examine the coping strategies used to rebuild livelihoods in an attempt to recover from the emotional trauma of the 2008 xenophobic attacks. They conclude that 'the

emotional and psychological scars of the xenophobic attacks continue to remain a lived experience in the minds of victims.' The Next article by Yasmeen Vahed is also located in Durban. Her article examines the two issues of crime and xenophobia, in a mixed income suburb in Durban. She focuses on 'how residents and the police view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community and the social, economic, and political factors' which are responsible 'for shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals.' She concludes that her respondents' narratives 'associate crime with race and nationality.'

Continuing the theme of the criminal justice system in Durban is Shantha Singh whose study gives voice to foreign nationals awaiting trial at Westville Correctional Centre in Durban. She accesses their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality by documenting the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial. She reports that the increase in the crime rates in South Africa post1994 is frequently ascribed to immigrants, 'without any justifiable proof.' She notes the dissonance between SA Immigration Law and its practice by stating that a foreign national is only allowed to stay for 30 days whilst awaiting trial but the mean term was in excess of a year. She concludes that 'foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system... and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.'

The next article by Desai and Vahed shift the focus to the role of non-governmental agencies (NGO) in xenophobic incidents. Using a case study methodology they examine one NGO, namely the Gift of the Givers in their role of 'providing assistance and material help' to victims of xenophobia in the 2008 attacks. This article notes a shift from the politics of xenophobia to a humanitarian focus by GOTG with the SA government as a key partner. Strangely, the government intended closing down the refugee camps following the 2008 incidents. The participants in the study bring to the fore a depravity amongst South Africans eager to take advantage of or dismiss foreigners in numerous ways: for example alleged corruption in refugee camps, the provision of rotten food and a home affairs department expecting refugees of the 2008 attacks to pay R 800 to renew their permits when they have lost all their property.

The final article by Mondli Hlatshwayo explores xenophobia and the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplace.

Using interviews and documents, he locates his analysis of COSATU within the 2008 xenophobic attacks and argues that COSATU's policies on immigrant workers and xenophobia are contradictory. He provides evidence that 'the federation claims to be opposed to xenophobia, but some of its policy utterances belong to what can be regarded as xenophobic discourse and national chauvinism'. He notes the humanitarian aid provided by COSATU during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 but states that although it adopted resolutions against xenophobia, the federation as a whole, (notwithstanding the work by Cosatu Western Cape) has not used its strengths to rally against xenophobia.

It is apparent that xenophobia is pervasive, that it manifests itself in many ways, from the blatant physicality of violence to subtle forms of psychological violence and dehumanizing slander and that it has taken a stronghold in SA society. This special edition comes at a critical moment in SA, as it seeks to plunge the topic of xenophobia into the limelight again, in the hope that readers of this edition, feel sufficiently stimulated to generate the much needed dialogue and propagate a love for thy neighbours in their social gatherings, professional hubs and daily conversations.

Finally, we want to thank Wazir Surajlall for the cover painting, done in oils. It is an aesthetic representation of an owl, which denotes a wise creature associated with the concepts of wisdom and good advice.

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# **African Migrants, Xenophobia and Urban Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa**

**Daniel Tevera**

## **Abstract**

The urban space in South Africa is increasingly becoming a troubled terrain of xenophobic violence. In recent years xenophobia has emerged as one of the major contributing factors to urban violence in several African countries and the phenomenon is becoming an urban management challenge that deserves academic inquiry and policy attention. Yet most of the academic research into the incidence and causes of xenophobic violence has not explored the connections between urbanity and xenophobia. This article aims to contribute to the debate by examining the broader relationship between xenophobia and urban violence in South African cities and by pulling together the latest literature into creating a better understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. This article provides an assessment of xenophobia in contemporary South Africa within the context of the on-going and important debate regarding the extent to which poverty and poor service delivery are determinants of urban violence. In addition, it argues that debates surrounding the complex spaces of deprivation in urban areas, citizenship and belonging should be central to the discourses on violence in South Africa's cities, which in many ways are still struggling to erase the imprint of apartheid. Xenophobic violence in cities is a phenomenon that deserves policy attention and direct intervention by central government, local authorities and community leaders.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, urban violence, multiculturalism, migrants, South Africa

## Introduction

The term xenophobia involves negative social representations and practices that discriminate against immigrants, refugees and migrants (Rydgren 2004; Roemer & Van der Straeten 2007). In recent years xenophobia has emerged as one of the major contributing factors to urban violence in many African countries and the phenomenon is becoming an urban management challenge that deserves academic inquiry and policy attention (Anderson 2002; Crush & Ramachandran 2009; Hassim *et al.* 2008). Xenophobia, and its various forms of intolerance and violence, is a source of concern because it generates rhetoric that at times provides moral justification for the exclusion of non-nationals from accessing basic services that they may be entitled to, such as public health and education, shelter, potable water and sanitation. Also, xenophobia places migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in difficult situations where their human and labour rights are circumscribed by anti-migrant policies (ILO 2004; Taran 2000; Wickramasekera 2008; Lefko-Everett 2007). In his overview of various forms of violence in urban South Africa, Abrahams (2010) provides a useful discussion of xenophobic violence in the country during the post-apartheid era. Several other scholars have engaged in the debate on xenophobia and these include Danso and McDonald (2000), Charman and Piper (2012), Crush (2000), Crush and Pendleton (2004), Morapedi (2007), Hassim *et al.* (2008), Hossay (1996), Misago (2009), Morris (1998), Tshitereke (1999) and Nieftagodien (2008). Various surveys on xenophobia that have been conducted in the country during the past decade reveal two disturbing findings. First, that urban South Africa exhibits high levels of intolerance and hostility to outsiders that is occasionally reflected by xenophobic attacks on migrant communities, their livelihoods and properties. Second, that there has been a hardening of anti-migrant attitudes during the post-apartheid era. The two findings are disturbing because they are at odds with the discourse of the 'New South Africa' and the 'rainbow nation' that conveys a different and inspiring message about inclusiveness and tolerance.

This article aims to contribute to the debate by examining the broader relationship between xenophobia and urban violence in South African cities and by pulling together the latest literature into creating a better understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. The article focuses on xenophobic violence and does not examine the other forms of urban violence

that have been examined in great detail by scholars such as Hough (2000); Harris (2001); and Palmary *et al.* (2003). Also, the article gives an overview of xenophobia in contemporary South Africa and it argues that debates surrounding the complex spaces of deprivation in urban areas, citizenship and belonging should be central to the discourses on urban violence.

A plethora of studies has been undertaken on the relationships between urban poverty, xenophobia and urban violence in both industrialized and developing countries (Rodgers 2010; Moser, 2005; Agostini *et al.* 2007). In southern Africa studies on xenophobia and international migration by Crush and Pendleton (2004), Danso and McDonald (2000), McKnight (2008), and Morapedi (2007), have generated a rich literature on patterns and forms of anti-migrant expressions in the region but the studies have lacked a distinctive urban focus. Some of the literature shows how different urban communities in the country have variously accommodated and assimilated xenophobic patterns through variegated forms and expressions ranging from subtle hostilities to physical attacks on non-nationals (Charman & Piper 2012; HSRC 2008; Crush 2000; Crush 2001; Hunter & Skinner 2003; Misago 2009; Morapedi 2007; Nieftagodien 2008; Hassim *et al.* 2008; Hossay 1996). The literature also reveals that the rise of intolerance and xenophobia has destabilized and undermined the linkages between international migration and human development (De Haas 2010; IOM 2008; 2010; Nyberg-Sorensen *et al.* 2002; Dodson *et al.* 2010). A review report by Crush and Ramachandran (2009) on the linkages between xenophobia, international migration and human development reveals that the increased volume of South-South migration since the late 1990s has resulted in repeated attacks on migrants in the receiving countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Not surprisingly, such xenophobic attacks have contributed to the vulnerability and exploitation of various categories of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees. Studies by Roemer and Van der Straeten (2007) on the triangular connections between racism, xenophobia and the economy, have contributed to our understanding of how xenophobia and urban violence can be a hindrance to economic and human development. As Roemer and Van der Straeten (2007) further argue, in order to maximize the socio-economic benefits accruable from the international migration process, there is a need to tackle all forms of xenophobia in the economic and social arenas.

## Migrant Spaces and Entrepreneurship

South Africa has one of the most robust economies in sub-Saharan Africa and has a long history of recruiting skilled and semi-skilled labour especially from countries in the SADC region with relatively weak economies (e.g. Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) and histories of political instability (e.g. the DRC and Mozambique). Weak national economies and political instability are the main migration triggers that have directed the flow of migrants from their home countries to South Africa (Campbell 2001; Crush 2002; McDonald and Crush 2002; Tevera 2011; Maharaj & Rajkumar 1997; Crush & Tevera 2010; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush *et al.* 2006; Pendleton *et al.* 2006). South Africa is one of the few countries in southern Africa that has historically received more people than it has lost from the migration process and as a result many urban areas reveal strong multiculturalism patterns in the form of languages spoken, religious practices and foods eaten. Post-apartheid labour recruitment has given rise to the emergence of diverse and vibrant African diasporic communities including Zimbabweans, Batswana, Basotho, Swazi, Somalis, Nigerians, Senegalese and Congolese. Among the enduring legacies of the African migrants to the country, has been the growth of vibrant and multicultural urbanscapes dominated by a rapidly growing informal street trading sector in the ‘deracializing’ urban space where national and foreign traders often compete but also collaborate. According to a study done by Hunter and Skinner (2003) there is a strong migrant presence in street trading in central Durban largely because this unregulated activity is outside the purview of direct local government control. However, migrant entrepreneurial spaces are not confined to inner city streets but they also stretch to the former African townships. A study by Grant (2013) reveals that an analysis of the spatial impress of informal entrepreneurship in Soweto re-veals a gendered and local diasporic investment patterns. The limited linkage of the former African townships to the wider urban economy is one of the spatialised legacies of apartheid planning that has stifled economic activities in these areas (Grant 2013; Beall *et al.* 2000; Charman & Piper 2012).

The presence of these migrant groups as shop owners or street traders has not only contributed to the transformation of the landscape of the post-apartheid South African city but has renewed the lifeblood in low-income neighbourhoods as is manifested by the vibrancy of the economic and

social activities in townships such as Alexandra near Centurion, Motherwell in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, and De Doorns in the Western Cape (Grant 2013; Hunter & Skinner 2003; Morris 1998; Rusinga *et al.* 2012). In the last decade, South African cities have experienced a sharp increase in the number of African and Asian migrants who have opened small shops at the periphery of the central business district (CBD) or have engaged in various street trading activities. The presence of the small shop traders has been, on the one hand, beneficial to low income consumers facing increasing economic hardships and who have come to depend on the low prices. On the other hand, they have become a source of bitterness to local shop owners who feel that they are being pushed out of business and would like to see the government introduce legislation that restricts the operations of foreign traders. A decade ago, Hunter and Skinner (2003) eloquently showed that most African migrants in Durban effectively used the informal sector as the entry point to other entrepreneurial activities in the formal sector. The migrants often find themselves competing with nationals for street space and for the same clientele. This direct competition with locals partly accounts for the often tense relations between nationals involved in street trading and African migrant traders operating in the informal sector as spaza shops owners.

## **Xenophobic Violence in Urban Areas**

Recent surveys on xenophobia in South Africa provide useful data about citizen attitudes towards migrants and refugees (Crush & Pendleton 2004; Campbell & Ocho 2003). A study by McDonald and Jacobs (2005) which analysed media coverage of migration issues showed that xenophobia was pervasive, deep-rooted and structural. In 2001/2002 and 2006, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) undertook national surveys of the attitudes of the South African population towards foreign nationals residing in the country. For example, SAMP's 2001/2002 National Immigration Policy Survey (NIPS) on attitudes of citizens towards immigration in southern Africa revealed that xenophobia was widespread among diverse communities across urban South Africa and Botswana and often cut across class, employment status, race, and gender lines (Crush & Pendleton 2004). According to the survey, about 50 percent of the respondents in Botswana were willing to participate in actions that would inhibit migrants from

moving into their neighbourhoods; while 46 percent would block foreigners from opening businesses in their localities if they had the capacity to do so; and 38 percent were willing to prevent children from immigrant families from studying in the same schools as their children (Campbell & Oucho 2003; Oucho 2000).

The 2006 SAMP Xenophobia Survey shows that South Africa exhibited increased levels of intolerance and hostility to most categories of foreign migrants. Nearly three-quarters (74%) supported a policy of deporting anyone who was not contributing to the growth of the national economy. Quite extraordinary is the increase in the percentage of respondents who wanted to see the borders with neighbouring countries electrified from 66% in 1999 to 76% in 2006. The SAMP findings also reveal that nationals did not want it to be easier for foreign nationals to engage in street trading or to operate small businesses in South Africa or to obtain South African citizenship. The data from the quantitative survey allowed the SAMP researchers to analyze the state of the national sentiments on immigration, immigrants and refugees in the period immediately prior to the well documented wave of xenophobic violence in South Africa that occurred in 2005 and 2008 in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. The three metropolitan centres dominate the recent literature on xenophobia in South Africa largely because they have been the locus of violent xenophobic protests during the post-apartheid era (HSRC 2008; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush *et al.* 2006; Pendleton *et al.* 2006; Morris 1998; Misago 2009).

The hardening of anti-migrant views between 2002 and 2008 culminated in the May 2008, violent attacks on foreign African nationals which left many migrants homeless and generally in positions of extreme vulnerability (see Table 1). Similarly, in the December 2005 xenophobic attacks on African migrants at Olievenhoutbosch, near Centurion in Gauteng Province, began with local groups chasing away foreign Africans living in the Choba informal settlement from their shacks and business premises. Foreign migrants are generally identifiable on the basis of biocultural factors such as physical appearance and an inability to speak indigenous languages. Reports reveal that several people, mostly migrants, were killed in the burning and rampant looting that followed. Two years later, in 2007, similar attacks on foreign nationals resulted in the deaths of at least 100 Somalis followed by looting and the setting on fire of their businesses and other properties. The

small shop-cum residence has become the archetypical signifier of entrepreneurial Somali migrants who operate small general dealer shops at the periphery of the central business district of urban regions and has become a regular casualty of xenophobic violence in many South African cities.

Yet again, in May 2008 several South African cities witnessed large-scale xenophobic attacks that mostly targeted migrants of African origin (Crush *et al.* 2008). This episode marked the latest development in a long series of violent incidents involving the victimization of migrants and refugees in the urban areas of the country (Crush 2000). Alexandra township, which is located to the north-east of Johannesburg, was the site of one of the first waves of violence against foreign nationals, which later spread to other townships across the country in May 2008 and resulted in the deaths of more than 60 people (including South African nationals and foreign cross-border traders). In addition, more than 500 shops were either looted or burned down and about 100,000 African migrants, refugees and citizens were displaced and many were hospitalised after sustaining physical injuries (IOM 2009; Misago 2009; (McKnight 2008; Iggelsden *et al.* 2009; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

A detailed article by Misago (2009) argues that the attacks in the sprawling township of Alexandra were spearheaded by a group of less than 300 residents who were on a crusade against foreign migrants whom they accused of sabotaging national economy and household livelihoods in the townships. In January 2009, an armed group led by a community councillor occupied a building in Durban and began an assault on the foreigners present. Similarly, in November 2009 about 2,500 Zimbabwean migrants at Stofland informal settlement in De Doorns (the Western Cape) took refuge in government buildings after several of their informal dwellings (shacks) were attacked and demolished by local residents who were unhappy that farm owners had been employing Zimbabweans whom they paid lower wages and were not recruiting from the local community (Morris 1998; Misago 2009; Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

## **Factors Accounting for the Hardening of Xenophobic Views and Increased Attacks**

The causes of the hardening of anti-migrant views and the xenophobic

attacks that have occurred in South African cities during the post-apartheid era are contested. On one hand is a neo-liberal perspective which argues that xenophobic violence in urban areas is fueled by stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants often presented by some sections of the media. On the other hand, there is a more radical perspective which argues that xenophobia studies need greater epistemological reflection. The more radical analyses view urban space as a terrain of contestation over access to services, rights to urban accommodation and general urban citizenship rights.

It has been argued from a neo-liberal perspective that xenophobic violence is fueled by stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants often presented by some sections of the media. The media has also been criticized for fanning the flames of a socio-spatial discourse that is dominated by xenophobic hostilities (McDonald & Jacobs 2010; Hossay 1996; Danso & McDonald 2000). Scholarly analyses of the media in southern Africa by Danso and McDonald (2000) and more recently by Crush & Ramachandran (2009) reveal that it is exacerbating the diffusion and intensity of xenophobic sentiments across the urban landscape through negative profiling of migrants. For example, press coverage on immigration in southern African countries between 2001 and 2003 in newspaper articles frequently used pejorative images of migrants as ‘job-stealers’, ‘carriers of disease’, ‘criminals’ and ‘illegals’ (Crush 2001; Crush & Pendleton 2004; Campbell & Oucho 2003). Newspaper headlines, featuring articles by various writers such as Carnie (2006), Leeman (2001) and Kearney (2001), reveal considerable media interest in issues like ‘foreign migrants stealing jobs’ or ‘foreign migrants being involved in crime and other anti-social behaviour’. In situations of heightened xenophobia, foreign migrants often endure threats of violence and victimization as xenophobia increases their vulnerability by exposing them to regular harassment, intimidation, and abuse by society (Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

Clearly, when migrants are made scapegoats or are demonized for various urban ills, such as crime and unemployment, negative and biased stereotypes are produced and re-produced. A case in point is the physical violence against Somali shopkeepers which has been cited as evidence of xenophobic violence in urban South Africa (Grant 2013). Perhaps, as a result of a recent history of intense economic competition in the *spaza* market in which migrant entrepreneurs have come to dominate, increased levels of

violent crime against migrant shopkeepers have been reported. However, what is not clear is whether this is solely attributable to xenophobia or could it be a reflection of a societal symptom characterized by an emerging violent entrepreneurship whereby business competitors often resort to physically attacking the opponents?

Some of the more radical analyses have blamed the xenophobic attacks on service delivery challenges in many urban areas and increasing poverty and unemployment levels in recent years which have led to the scapegoating of foreign migrants by frustrated citizens. For example, scholars like, Nieftagodien (2008); Hassim *et al.* (2008) and Hossay (1996) have argued that perceived rather than real economic threats are the major drivers of xenophobic tendencies in South Africa. This argument helps to explain why communities experiencing debilitating economic circumstances have experienced more xenophobic riots and violent attacks than the more economically sound communities. A case in point is Alexandra whose 350 000 residents experience high levels of unemployment, poor accommodation, inadequate infrastructural services, systemic exclusion and deprivation. Here, unemployment and infrastructural challenges are decisive determinants in the reproduction of poverty and deprivation that in turn have generated conditions that are conducive to the emergence of conflict or violence. In Alexandra, as in many former African townships, residents often struggle violently for access to basic infrastructural services, such as decent toilets, clean water and electricity. The 1995 and 2008 xenophobic riots are examples that illustrate how struggles for access to services can rapidly degenerate into urban violence engulfing entire residential areas and often spilling over to adjacent public and private spaces. Nieftagodien (2008) eloquently argues that the Alexandra xenophobic violence could be explained by the local residents daily eking out an existence in the congested squatter camps and dilapidated prison-like hostels. Previously in 1995 the ‘Buyelekhaya’ (go back home) campaign in Alexandra had driven Malawian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean immigrants to a police station as part of a campaign to rid the township of foreigners whom they blamed for causing crime and unemployment (Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

However, despite the obvious connections between the incidence of xenophobic violence and the high levels of material deprivation in the townships, it is inadequate in explaining why some poor urban communities

have repeatedly engaged in xenophobic violence while other urban communities confronted by similar challenges have remained relatively peaceful. Some scholars have attempted to respond to this question by focusing on the role of community leadership in promoting xenophobic violence. According to Misago (2009), who investigated the immediate causes which led to recent xenophobic violence, the micro-politics of local communities, particularly the lack of institutional structures and trusted leadership in the affected areas were the fundamental causes of the violence. In Atteridgeville and Alexandria, meetings were held by the local community leadership to explore ways to close down all foreign-owned shops. The same pattern was followed in several other communities, such as Cape Town's communities of Delft, Masiphumele, Crossroads, Phillip East, Khayelitsha, Samora Machel and Gugulethu (Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

What this all means it that the rise of xenophobia in the urban areas of South Africa since the 1990s is the result of a combination of complex factors which, however, should not be delinked from the migrant inflows from neighbouring countries, that characterize the post-1994 migrations patterns. Clearly, the xenophobic conflicts are not just about economic struggles between competing local and foreign business people but they are also a vivid manifestation of intolerance of diversity in the growing multicultural cities. It is worth noting that in most urban spaces, foreign migrant communities remain largely unassimilated and excluded and this raises major issues surrounding the notions of belonging and citizenship under conditions of multicultural urbanism. Also, hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999).

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to contribute to the debate on xenophobia and violence in South Africa's multicultural cities where streets have often become sites of perpetual tension and conflict between local and migrant groups. Studies show that the high levels of anti-migrant rhetoric and general xenophobic attitudes are quite disturbing and do undermine efforts towards the realization of policy goals of promoting urban and national development. Xenophobia poisons social interactions between locals and migrant groups,

and at the same time it undermines the positive effects of migration on human development. The inevitable result is to increase the social distance between migrant and local populations and this has created challenges with respect to notions of social cohesion, belonging and citizenship. In such settings ethnic tensions, overcrowding and competition for access to scarce resources have provided the spark that has given rise to complex forms of economic and social violence that the media commonly refer to as xenophobic attacks. Also, public spaces in cities have become sites of tension and conflict between local and foreign traders, especially in the low income townships where struggles for basic infrastructural services are perpetual. Violent attacks on foreign African nationals have not only left many migrants in positions of extreme vulnerability, but have also had high economic and social costs due to the destruction of properties and the dislocation of some urban communities. As a result, areas like Alexandra, Atterridgeville and Olievenhoutbosch have become regular sites of xenophobic violence. At the same time, there has been a huge development of ‘fortified enclaves’ across urban spaces as one of the responses to prevent the possible spread of violence and crime into the traditionally safe neighbourhoods.

The causes of the hardening of anti-migrant views and the xenophobic attacks that have occurred in South African cities during the post-apartheid era are contested. What is evident, however, is that in the urban areas, the stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants presented by some sections of the media; the organizational role of community leadership; and the existence of complex spaces of deprivation, have not only provided a recipe for violent xenophobic outbreaks, but they also helped to explain variations in the incidence and intensity of xenophobic violence within and between cities and neighbourhoods.

What is required, if the development potential and gains of labour migration into the country are not to be undermined by xenophobia, is a more coordinated and systematic effort to understand and manage the phenomenon. The Immigration Act of 2002 commits the government to challenge xenophobia by rooting it out in all social spheres. However, success in this endeavour will require societal changes and intervention by community leaders. In addition, there is need for government and the media to embark on a major public awareness and education campaign to counter

xenophobia. However, any plan to develop tolerance towards foreigners must take place alongside a programme that addresses the crisis of poverty, housing and unemployment in urban areas. One is reminded that, following the 1990s xenophobic attacks and concerns for the safety and well-being of non-nationals, the National Consortium on Refugee Affairs (CoRMSA), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations launched the Roll Back Xenophobia (RBX) campaign in 1998 with the primary aim of promoting awareness about the legitimate presence of foreign nationals and the need for a harmonious co-existence. The campaign used community radio, television and school programmes and seminars as part of its national public awareness. There is a need to pursue strategies whose objective is to address all forms of xenophobia through socially inclusive dialogue and participatory decision making involving all the stakeholders, including central government, local authorities, community leaders and migrant communities.

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**Table 1: Major Sites of Xenophobic Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa**

<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Alexandra township (Johannesburg)	'Buyelekaya' inspired attacks on Malawian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean migrants	1995
Alexandra township (Johannesburg)	Attacks on migrants resulted in over 60 deaths including locals; 342 shops looted, 213 premises burned down, about 100,000 people were temporarily displaced	May 2008
Olievenhoutbosch (Near Centurion in Gauteng)	Attacks on migrants at Choba informal settlement resulted in several deaths; looting and destruction of foreign-owned spaza shops, hair saloons and taverns	December 2005
Olievenhoutbosch (Near Centurion in Gauteng)	Attacks on migrants resulted in several deaths; looting and destruction of shacks and property	2007
Durban	Armed group led by a community councilor led attacks on migrants; 100 Somali owned businesses were looted and over 400 Somalis were displaced	January 2009
De Doorns (Western Cape)	Attacks on Zimbabwean migrants at Stofland informal settlement resulted in looting and destruction of shacks; 3000 foreigners were driven from their shacks	November 2009

Cape Flats (Western Cape)	Seven migrants were killed following disputes between locals and migrants residing in the area. The violence spread to neighbouring low income areas.	September 2000
Cape Flats (Western Cape)	Attacks on Somali migrants resulted 20-30 killed; looting and destruction of shops; several Somalis were displaced	August 2007

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# **‘Positive Discrimination’ and Minorities in Post-apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Indian South Africans**

**Anand Singh**

## **Abstract**

There are numerous ways in which people attempt to make sense of the transformation that is taking place in contemporary South Africa, especially with respect to ‘positive discrimination’ and ‘affirmative action’ – often used interchangeably as synonyms<sup>1</sup>. Against the background of its racialised past, characterised by the highest privileges for Whites and a narrowing of privileges for Coloureds, Indians and Africans (in this order) – during apartheid, reference to changes is often made in the context of a continuation in discriminatory policies that resembles institutionalised patterns of ‘reverse discrimination’, a somewhat grim reminder of the Apartheid era. As people (Indian respondents) refer to this they often bring up a sense of turgidity in at least 3 issues such as ‘positive discrimination’, ‘affirmative action’, and ‘Black Economic Empowerment’. In a similar vein, their references to these being forms of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, ethnic nepotism, collective narcissism, or sheer racism in reverse, shows the lack of clarity that the lay person often has about the academic contexts of these concepts. This article argues that while they may not be accurate, as people often tend to use them interchangeably, the terms often overlap in definitions and they do have one thing in common i.e. reference to institutionalised forms of discrimination and polarisation. While South African Indians often feel that the alienation brought about by affirmative action/positive discrimination is harsh and reverse racism, the evidence herein suggests that ethnic nepotism is a more

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article both words will be taken as synonyms.

appropriate concept than its related counterparts because it does not have their inbuilt harshness.

**Keywords:** Affirmative action, positive discrimination, xenophobia, Black Economic Empowerment, minorities, South Africa, Indians

## **Introduction**

From about May 2013 a pressure group calling itself the Mazibuye African Forum began making provocative statements against the building of a statue to commemorate Mohandas K (Mahatma) Gandhi in Durban. They claimed that Indians were too privileged under minority rule and were generally racist towards Africans. Their call was for Indians to be excluded from Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programmes and for greater socio-economic parity for Africans, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The call was immediately rebuffed by a number of people across the racial divides in South Africa, and the state appears to have acted swiftly in curtailing the group from further derogatory statements, understood in South Africa as ‘hate speech’. The interesting aspect about this racialised rage lies in ignoring the contemporary realities of the South African political economy – that while Africans are in control of the political arena, Whites are still largely in control of the economy. Yet there has been no rage against Whites and the hegemonic position that the elitists among them still occupy.

However, the ways in which people responded demonstrated the varying perceptions that prevail in South Africa about the nature and pace of transformation in the country. While some assume that there was a clear divide between Whites and other subjugated groups (African, Coloureds and Indians) during the apartheid period, others believe that Indians and Coloureds collaborated with Whites to frustrate African advancement. In ongoing media and academic analyses, and as responses from the field accrue, it is clear that there can be no simplistic analysis of the direction that South Africa is taking towards satisfying the needs of all its citizens.

Despite the noises by the Mazibuye Africa Forum, a critical statement from a senior member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party, Mathews Phosa, placed the nature of transformation into a perspective that is shared by many commended analysts:

South Africans started designing the first draft of the black empowerment policy in 1990. The unfortunate fact is that black economic empowerment, although a work in progress, did not make any meaningful or substantial contribution towards addressing the twin ills of poverty and unemployment. It did not address a fundamental issue, namely that for economic transformation to be successful, we had to create black entrepreneurs who were not the beneficiaries of wealth created by others.<sup>2</sup>

In a more incisive attack on contemporary characteristics of political leadership, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela made Durban's evening *Daily News* front page headlines with the caption: 'Stop the greed... It is time for the ruling party to take stock'. She was forthright in her attack against rogue elements in the party:

I cannot pretend all is well...today it is all about self-enrichment. The struggle was never about individuals but today you open a newspaper there is a councillor being charged and there is a government department being investigated and an institution in trouble because it cannot account for huge amounts of government expenditure<sup>3</sup>.

While Phosa attacked policy failure, as noted in the first quotation above, Mandela attacked self-interest and greed within the party – warning the state of a possible revolt by the poverty stricken masses. In doing so they are alienating themselves from the mainstream population<sup>4</sup>, including the African majority. But there is a way that the ruling party (ANC) is trying to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.polity.org.za/article/bee-not-working-phosa-2012-10-26>.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, Wednesday, September 18, 2013, page 1.

<sup>4</sup> Told this in two independent conversations by African individuals (males) living in squatter camps, who want to vote for the White led Democratic Alliance (DA) (March 2013). They believe the ANC no longer has the confidence of the Black majority. N.B. this is not meant to be evidence, but a reflection of at least how some Africans are beginning to think about the ruling party.

circumvent its increasing alienation from the masses viz. through ‘justifiable discrimination’, also referred to as ‘positive discrimination’.

Durban’s Archbishop Wilfrid Napier publicly denounced this approach in a more recent Sunday Tribune edition (27 January 2013) against discrimination in South Africa, while attacking President Zuma on his moral behaviour:

Today many, including myself, are upset about being victims of a new race classification which is passed off and applied as ‘justifiable discrimination’ because it is meant to benefit the previously disadvantaged. It is a moot question whether discrimination can ever be justified. Whether it is white discrimination or black discrimination, it remains discrimination. And our constitution says there should be no discrimination. And Nelson Mandela said he would stand up against any type of discrimination.

Against the background of the ticket that the ANC used to unify the previously disadvantaged in South Africa viz. the Freedom Charter, their about turn in selectively creating opportunities for the African majority is viewed widely among Coloureds and Indians as akin to treacherous practice.

## **The Freedom Charter and Expectations of Non-Racialism**

As the post-apartheid regime surges ahead in attempting to create level playing fields in employment, access to learning institutions, and political office across racial boundaries, it is seemingly alienating many of those they once pledged to incorporate into their equity programmes. Evidence about such perceptions is replete among White, Coloured and Indian citizens<sup>5</sup>. When statements around responses such as: ‘We are no longer confident about future prospects in this country’, or ‘the privileges of employment and promotion in government departments no longer exist for us because we are not Black enough’ are repeatedly made (by respondents during this research

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<sup>5</sup> Reference to these racial categories still prevail in South Africa, and are not intended to be derogatory.

exercise), several critical questions arise about the nature of the state with respect to either multi-racialism or non-racialism, and the future of minorities in South Africa. These questions become ever more critical when budding contributors to the essential services such as in health-care feel constricted - from the point of entering medical learning institutions to their post-graduate employment. There were huge expectations, especially among those still referred to as 'Coloureds' and 'Indians', who believed that the major political force in the country viz. the African National Congress (ANC), was committed to the principles enshrined in the Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 by a multiracial gathering calling itself 'Congress of the people'<sup>6</sup>.

The Freedom Charter, adopted by the non-racial Congress Alliance in 1955, was the cornerstone around which opposition to Apartheid was mobilised, particularly through the United Democratic Front (UDF, formed 1983). It facilitated support from across the four racial categories in South Africa, although support from Whites was minimal, and Coloureds and Indians showed substantial but not necessarily majority support<sup>7</sup>. One of the most important pillars of this document was its bold rejection of race as a criterion for entry into educational facilities, residential areas, employment and economic and political opportunities. It was emphatic about discarding the notion altogether in order to create a non-racial society based upon meritocracy and achievement<sup>8</sup>.

The new South African constitution, introduced in 1996 after the first democratic General Election on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994, incorporated most of

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<sup>6</sup> The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; The People Shall Govern!

<sup>7</sup> However, in the race-based elections in 1983, in which Africans were excluded and relegated to ethnically enclaved and relatively unproductive areas called 'Homelands', Whites, Coloureds and Indians were cajoled to vote for their respective representatives in what was called the 'Tri-cameral' parliament. The overwhelming Indians and Coloureds chose to boycott the elections, because it was White controlled.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/cape-town/formation-and-launch-udf?page=3>

the principles of the Freedom Charter and it introduced the Equity Bill in 1998, which was aimed at specifically monitoring fairness in implementation and practice. In Section 6, Paragraph 1 of the Equity Bill, the statement is clear that discrimination of any sort on the basis of at least 19 grounds, including ethnic background, race or language, is unconstitutional and a libellous offence. The Department of Labour has strengthened this point by emphasising that ‘Affirmative Action ensures that qualified people from designated groups have equal opportunities in the workplace’<sup>9</sup>. ‘Designated Groups’ in this context is understood to include Africans, Coloureds and Indians, and implies non-discrimination among them.

South Africa’s apartheid past with respect to discrimination across various fronts has made the legal system and organs of the state ever more conscious of how not to persist (seemingly) with this practice in whatever form it might emerge. The recent case of Jon Qwelane, a journalist, for instance bears testimony to this. It showed the level of seriousness South Africa’s democracy watchdogs can take against issues such as hate speech - when Qwelane wrote pejoratively in the Sunday Sun about homosexuals: ‘Call me names, but gay is NOT okay’ (*The Witness* Thursday 29 August 2013: 2), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) instructed Qwelane to pay a one-hundred-thousand rand fine, and to apologise through the Sunday Sun, against which he intended to appeal.

The point about the SAHRC is that as an organ of a constitutional democracy and it being independent of the state, it can take up issues of a discriminatory nature and impose severe penalties upon transgressors. However, issues around ‘positive discrimination’, implemented through the policies of affirmative action, seldom reach the SAHRC. An understanding of ‘African’ entitlement prevails in South Africa to a point where Whites, Coloureds and Indians submit somewhat helplessly to it when jobs are not offered to them in favour of Africans - even when they might be more appropriately qualified and meet the criteria. This ‘reverse discrimination’ is seemingly justified through reference to Africans being the most marginalised during the years of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. There is a widespread belief that in terms of the racial hierarchy that was

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.workplacelaw.net/human-resources/blogs/41023/positively-unfair-workplace-discrimination-in-south-africa>.

created by apartheid there was a condescending order that put Whites on the top, Coloureds and Indians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom. Hence access to employment and the quality and investment in education was staggered along this hierarchical basis. It is against this background that post-apartheid democracy aspires to bring about equity, especially for Africans. However, while there is a significant amount of truth about South Africa's racialised social order, there is a tendency to downplay the extent and nature of poverty among Coloureds and Indians when compared to the situation of Africans. In the sprawling municipal provisioned housing in urban complexes, widely referred to as 'townships', such as Chatsworth and Phoenix for Indians and Wentworth for Coloureds, the nature and depth of poverty among all three of the classified population categories could hardly be different from one another. The poverty in Coloured and Indian townships was and still is no less among those who have been structurally alienated by apartheid's policies (Desai 2002; Desai & Vahed 2013). The significant difference between Africans and Coloureds and Indians is that the former is a substantially bigger population group than the latter two. While there has been visibility of the Indian and Coloured middle classes, the overwhelming majority of the people from both these categories still reside in townships and are still as economically and politically alienated as they were during apartheid. There is little, if any difference at all in the extent and nature of poverty among Africans, Indians and Coloureds when compared in terms of household-for-household.

One of the main problems of affirmative action cum positive discrimination in South Africa is that the issue of race is placed before economic status. Many of those benefitting from positive discrimination policies are from the African middle classes rather than from the working and underclasses – where the greatest attention is needed<sup>10</sup>. It is in these types of issues that accusations about a lack of vision, opportunism and reverse discrimination have been attributed to the successive post-apartheid governments soon after the first democratic General Election in April 1994. Public cries about reverse discrimination are an almost daily issue in the popular print media, in staff room meetings, social gatherings and in one-on-one interviews. Against the background of such frequency and prevalence, it

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/244570>.

would be prudent to suggest that debates about its merits be brought out into the open in order to ascertain the legitimacy of latent fears and possible directions that the state is taking in respect of addressing minority fears.

When issues of discrimination are raised in the context of multi-racial societies and where hegemonic forces are at play, they raise crucial questions in analytical studies, especially with respect to how they should be understood. When the application of positive discrimination among Africans themselves ignores issues around class, it adds to a racialised situation that is already complex. For instance, former South African President F.W. de Klerk has acknowledged that apartheid was fraught with problems and that some form of positive discrimination ought to be applied in order to correct the imbalances of the past. But his view was that this should not occur at the expense of the potential that lurks among the young and talented from among the other racial groups<sup>11</sup>. De Klerk however, emphasised the plight that young Whites were facing as a result of positive discrimination, with little attention paid to the plight of Coloureds and Indians. On the surface of contemporary politics in South Africa, it does appear that the grousing are more about mere accessibility to employment or places in educational institutions, than about more severe forms of discrimination. When severe forms of discrimination do arise, crucial to this is how we contextualise prevalent perceptions and experiences, especially where evidence is available.

## **Contextualising Economic Redress and Positive Discrimination**

In bigger and more diverse countries such as India and the USA the practice of positive discrimination cum affirmative action is usually reserved for minorities who have been politically and economically marginalised within the mainstream economy. The difference about positive discrimination in South Africa is that it applies to the majority population and discriminates against the minorities. Over the years, the Union Government since 1910 and

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1545193/De-Klerk-condemns-positive-discrimination.html>.

since apartheid in 1948 African movement into and out of the urban areas in South Africa was regulated by influx control laws that were rooted in the Native (Black) Urban Areas Act No. 21 of 1923 which was applied stringently to control African movements to meet White labour requirements. By 1937 the law was revised in order to strengthen control over African movements into urban areas. Africans were given 14 days to find employment or return to the areas then known as 'Reserves', subsequently changed to 'Bantustans' and then to the more aesthetically sounding word: 'Homelands' (Sharp 1988).

While the political and legal references changed, the extent and material circumstances of these areas remained the same. The majority of the population, which happened to be African and in excess of 80 per cent, remained constrained to the smallest vestiges of the most unproductive land in the country. Such restrictions on Africans however, did not mean that Coloureds and Indians had similar privileges to Whites in several respects viz. freedom of movement, ownership of land, access to business opportunities, access into political office, or free choice of employment and career building. In movement, occupation and ownership of land, Indians were constrained long before apartheid came into effect in 1948. There are a series of enactments that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century that demonstrates how people of Indian origin were continuously harassed, constrained and blatantly discriminated against to ensure that their upward economic mobility was limited to levels that did not challenge White business, political or social interests<sup>12</sup>.

As early as 1876 the Free State passed legislation that prohibited Indians from becoming citizens there, precluding them from ownership of property or establishing long term interests. In the South African Republic (or the Transvaal – now known as Gauteng) Law 3 of 1885, enacted similar measures against Indians. A petition was filed by the British Indian Government against these measures, but was rejected - only this time the demeanour assumed a punishing plot - it placed all Asians on the same level as 'Africans' i.e. as labourers. On 11 September 1891 all Indians were forced to close their businesses and were removed from the Free State without any

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics-and-society/anti-indian-legislation-1800s-1959>

compensation. While Africans were disenfranchised in 1865, Indians in Natal were disenfranchised through the Franchise Act No. 8 of 1896, through a process that began in 1894. Act 17 of 1895 imposed a three pound tax on ex-indentured labourers, which was to include all males of 16 years and females of 12 of age from 1901. This law was rescinded in 1913 through a non-violent protest led by MK Gandhi (Swan 1985). This law and subsequent protest of 1913 bore significant similarities to the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906 when the imposition of a poll tax turned into a bloody confrontation between the British and the Zulus, who had no alternative but to fight against it in this way.

Containment of the African majority was further perpetuated through restrictions on Africans from acquiring competent education and training in skilled employment. Their task was to remain in menial, subservient and unskilled labour that ensured a subversion of potential threats to White hegemony in every aspect of South African life. People who were classified Coloured were permitted to vote and were allowed to enter into apprenticeships in skills training from the 1950s. Indians were only accepted as South African citizens in 1961 and those classified as ‘Indian’ were granted permission to enter into the building trade in the 1960s and into the engineering trades in the early-1970s. It was forbidden to offer Indians apprenticeships in jobs that trained them as electricians, metal workers, welders, motor mechanics, or as fitters and turners for most of their stay in South Africa. Visibility among Indians in South Africa emerged mainly through professional work in law and medicine, in businesses through petty entrepreneurship and small scale retailing, and in semi-skilled office and factory work that was generally low paid. While a few managed to break through middle barriers and enter into relatively big manufacturing businesses, or in agriculture, they were few and far between. None of them however, were able to match or compete with the enormity of big White capital in the country (Arkin *et al.* 1989).

Such opportunities were delivered as ‘privileges’ to Indians and not as citizen based rights. As confidence in White minority rule consolidated through the 1950s and 1960s, Africans were being increasingly relegated to their reservations or restrictive high density townships. Their only recourse to paid employment was through unskilled labour. As conditions in the reservations and townships deteriorated, so did the patience of African youth

and their political leaders<sup>13</sup>. Agitation against the oppressive system rose to a point of entrenched opposition to apartheid and a determination to completely dismantle it. At least four incidents in each of the decades stand out in the history of opposition to apartheid and a widespread opposition by people of all racial groups. An ‘early’ sign of this movement was at Kliptown on 26 June 1955, when progressively minded politicians and their followers from across the racial spectrum in South Africa met to declare their opposition to apartheid’s practice of institutionalised discrimination. The major parties viz. the African National Congress (ANC), The South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (SACD) and Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC) opened the meeting with the declaration that ‘The People Shall Govern’, and thereafter referred to the event as the ‘Congress of the People’. The second major hallmark in oppositional politics was on 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville when thousands, mainly Africans, marched against the state to protest against ‘pass laws’ that also required Africans to carry their identity documents with them at all times. Around 180 people are said to have been injured and at least 69 people died as a result of police brutality. The subsequent banning of the respective Congresses led to a lull in oppositional politics and to the strengthening of White minority rule. However it all came to a head when the then Minister of Bantu Affairs wanted to make Afrikaans a compulsory language in African dominated schools. The aim was to bring Afrikaans on par with English and subjects such as mathematics, arithmetic and social studies had to be taught in Afrikaans. This led to the third major event in 1976, when African high school learners in Soweto marched against the state and were once again met with brutal police force. While many learners died others subsequently began leaving the country to join banned organisations like the ANC and PAC because they no longer saw any value in peacefully protesting against the state (Lodge 1983).

The fourth major opposition was marked once again by the well pronounced multiracial opposition in 1984 – when elections for the ‘Tricameral Parliament’ was set up by then President PW Botha and his government. But the Houses for Indians (House of Delegates) and for

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<sup>13</sup> I use the phrase deliberately, because leadership was based then on racially based distinctions.

Coloureds (House of Representatives) had suffered a credibility crisis when only 16.2 per cent of these population categories turned out to vote. The lack of participation among these classified racial groups was not mere complacency about voting, but it was an active publicised campaign to discredit the entire tri-cameral system because it excluded Africans. Most individuals who stood for elections then were not popularly sanctioned by their respective constituencies and were not known for any measure of critical engagement against apartheid's system of institutionalised discrimination<sup>14</sup>. When opposition against racism in South Africa was challenged, it was done so by such candidates on the basis of sectional interests. They firmly represented interests of Indians, Coloureds or Whites only. It was the ANC however that represented the interests of all, on a somewhat non-racial basis. It was their adherence to the Freedom Charter and the continuous popularisation of the 'Congress of the People' in 1955 that brought most Indians and Coloureds under one political umbrella, albeit in varying degrees of affinity and trust in the rhetoric that they dished out to the masses.

In the period that Nelson Mandela reigned as President of South Africa (1994-1999), the relatively large number of Indians who were in senior parliamentary and political appointments created consternation among Africans who felt uncomfortable about it<sup>15</sup>. This gave rise to internal murmuring and then to more public statements against such levels of representation so high up in politics. In the Thabo Mbeki<sup>16</sup> era, followed by that of Jacob Zuma, rumblings about Indian representation slid downwards to include employment and admission to the educational institutions as injustices to African attempts towards upward economic mobility. This has been implemented to a large extent, but has surfaced in numerous ways, according to Whites Coloureds and Indians as alienation, narcissism, reverse discrimination, and the admission or employment of inappropriately qualified people whose under-performances are already showing in the lack

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/sites/default/files/files/downloads/Learners%20book%20Chapter5.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> The issue came to the fore when Thabo Mbeki replaced Nelson Mandela as State President in South Africa.

<sup>16</sup> South Africa's second post-apartheid President.

of service delivery. Accompanying this situation is the perception of alleged impatience towards transformation and increasing public cries about inefficiency, hampered service deliveries and concerns about the future viability of the state (Desai 2002).

## **Evidence from the Ground**

There are clear signs of discontent among minority groups throughout the country about accessibility to education and employment. In a survey of 20 households in two middle-class neighbourhoods viz. Clare Estate/Reservoir Hills and Westville, during the months of June and July 2013, and among six of my own siblings with respect to these 'cries' about being marginalised, some interesting facts emerged. In the 26 households there were a total of 58 'children' between 21 and 31 years of age, who had reached graduation levels at technical institutions and universities. All of the 58 were gainfully employed in their respective areas of specialisation. Against this, what then could the problem be?

Three key issues emerged as common grousing. First, that state funded primary and secondary schools have been 'swamped' by African children from neighbourhood squatter camps and from neighbouring African townships. This was because the alleged perceptions among African parents was that Indian teachers and schools are the most preferable to White teachers and schools, which were better equipped but too costly for them to send their children. Secondly, this necessitated Indian parents having to send their school going children to White dominated schools much further away. The costs in terms of time, transport and school fees increased phenomenally for Indian parents, because, as all families claimed, learning with Africans who were not conversant in English was too much of a 'risk' – in that it compromised the pace of teaching and learning in the class (Singh 2001). And thirdly, while all of the respondents were employed, their tasks of acquiring employment were made more difficult because of affirmative action that favoured Africans before any other racial category. Within their work environments too much emphasis upon a preference for African employees over other racial groups tended to emphasise their distinctiveness as 'the other'. In the course of interviewing at least three statements are worthy of recording here since each one led to further investigation:

- I had to send my child away from the school only 3 doors away from our home because it was impossible for him to continue learning with the Black children. If they can't speak English then when are the teachers going to talk to our children in English? What would have become of him and his cousins in high school and university if they carried on there?
- My grandson applied to Wits and UCT medical schools, and both warned us not to have our hopes up for him. So we also applied to a medical school in Mauritius. Of course when I look at what UCT did to that Indian family there we are no longer banking on him studying medicine here in this country. (See Case Study 2 below.)
- We had an African woman employed at the call centre in the municipality. She was given the post of supervisor, but the job was entirely out of her depths. After she made a mess with job, the very people who supported her appointment, that is Africans themselves, turned against her because she was useless. But the xenophobic tendencies in the municipality against Indians are strong. There is no way Indians are going to have much of a chance in employment anymore.

The statements above illustrate how words such as 'xenophobic' and related concepts emerge in implicit ways to argue the uncertainties they feel about transformation. In other responses people referred to the pattern of transformation as being 'reverse discrimination', 'African racists/racism', and 'narcissistic'. Numerous references were made to known incidents that caught the attention of the media and became public issues – especially with respect to what the implications for Indians in SA, in the future. Each statement is followed by a case study below which provides incidents of perceived xenophobic cum racist practices and how such issues are being viewed as deliberate attempts to alienate Indians.

## CASE STUDY 1

SR - a 60 year old widow recalled how she and her husband's brother had to

follow what their entire neighbourhood had to do since 1996 in order to save their children from what they deemed was the unfolding of an inferior education, brought about by an unbridled entry of non-English speaking African learners into their junior primary school. The situation became increasingly intolerant when Indian children had to sit in classes of more than 40 learners, being threatened and having their stationery and lunches allegedly stolen, and in several instances the children were assaulted for standing up against being bullied and threatened. African learners were allegedly often older than their Indian counterparts and did not share much in common with them as speakers of a different language and as learners from different class backgrounds. The neighbourhood was generally complacent but at individual levels they complained incessantly about how insensitively the state was handling their educational institutions. The residents in the area saw themselves in oppositional terms on various fronts: that they were being undermined because they were a minority far smaller than those classified as 'Whites' and therefore easier to manipulate; that they were property taxpayers and the Africans as squatters were not; that while the ANC spoke about transformation towards a non-racial South Africa, in actual fact they practiced reverse discrimination towards Indians by ignoring their contributions towards stable and prosperous neighbourhoods; that Africans were being given greater attention because their bigger population numbers gave the ANC greater political mileage during elections; that Africans do not have a tradition of literacy like Indians and Whites – thereby making fair competitive meritocratic performances untenable in education, training and employment practices. SR and her neighbours were grateful that they moved their children away from the district primary school and placed them in ex-Model C schools (previously for Whites only during apartheid). While they moped about the astronomical costs and inconveniences this decision imposed upon them, they marvelled at the fact that their children were now well educated University graduates in well placed employment.

## **CASE STUDY 2**

In March 2005 an Indian couple applied to the Cape Town High Court to have their daughter admitted to the University of Cape Town Medical School, while their admissions policy was being reviewed. The High Court

ruled against their appeal and ordered them to pay the University's hefty legal bill. The couple's daughter, Sunira, was one of 2100 applicants for 200 places in UCT's medical school. Seeing that their daughter would have lost the year, the couple decided not to pursue the case any further. But the ruling was based on the approach that Sunira's legal team adopted viz. that all learners from among Africans, Coloureds and Indians, were equally disadvantaged, even if they attended private schools. Judge Rosheni Allie said that while both UCT and Sunira's parents agreed that the University's admission policies appeared to be discriminatory, they differed in terms of whether the policies were reasonable, justifiable and capable of dealing with the inequities of the past. While Senior Counsel for Sunira argued that all Coloured and Indian learners were discriminated against despite their schooling backgrounds, Indian learners were divided into two categories i.e. whether they attended private schools or government schools, and are regarded either way as not having had disadvantaged education under apartheid, or under contemporary conditions<sup>17</sup>.

### CASE STUDY 3

The respondent who made the third statement above was an engineer who was employed by a major municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province. While he enjoyed being employed there, he finds the emphasis on affirmative action too alienating and often 'openly racist'. His relative satisfaction emerges out of the fact that he gets along well with all of his colleagues who work around him, irrespective of race or department. But his problem is with how vacant positions are filled and what is often said, especially by Africans themselves, about who should be considered. The case of the Floor Manager in the Call Centre for instance was one of the more talked about positions because of the popularity of the previous person. She was Coloured, had

... excellent managerial skills and was a people's person... Since she ran the department so well people did not think about how complex the duties were and how important it was to be a committed but

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/indian-couple-to-pay-uct-s-legal-fees-1.235661?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>.

approachable manager .... Only when she left and was replaced did many realise that personality and capability was more important than race. It was a relief for all of the staff of the Call Centre when this newly appointed African botched up enough and suddenly resigned. While management realised that it was their obsession with affirmative action that led to the situation, they still wanted to persist with employing another African, until staff from the Call Centre insisted that an Indian woman who was a deputy, be given an opportunity to fill the post – and it is working far better this time ....

A similar situation exists in all of the engineering departments. When African graduates cannot be sought for the positions, the posts are left vacant for up to a year before a person from another racial group is considered. But in such periods service is seriously affected and pressure mounts upon available staff.

In each of the case studies above there is evidence of at least three crucial issues: that Africans are now the most preferred candidates for the entry into medical teaching institutions; Indians are feeling the negative impact of positive discrimination; and state departments – being service driven as opposed to profit driven, have little interest in filling vacancies where Africans are not available to occupy them, even if service delivery is compromised. While each of the statements above is from/about individuals, they point to how positive discrimination is being implemented and how it is impacting upon perceptions and experiences among the designated groups that feel victimised by it. The second case study above was chosen to complement the first and third case studies that are presented here as material from interviews.

A crucial question here is: Is Section 6 of the Equity Act and the statement made by the Department of Labour real commitments to achieving equity for all those who were previously discriminated against, or is it merely rhetorical and for mere public distraction? Is South Africa receding into an apartheid-like situation that has once again adopted institutionalised forms of discrimination that can be matched to issues such as xenophobia, racism and ethnocentrism? The discussion below is intended to find discerning ways of understanding the nature of discrimination in post-apartheid South Africa.

## Is a Singular Paradigm Possible?

In the course of interviews and in general day-to-day interaction, it is not unusual to have someone refer to the notions of affirmative and positive discrimination in South Africa by one of its various related concepts viz. xenophobia, ethnocentrism, narcissism, and racism. While there are specific meanings attached to each concept, there is also a significant overlap among them, causing people to use the words rather loosely. The genesis and meanings of these concepts have been widely researched and debated globally (see for instance LeVine & Campbell 1972; Burns *et al.* 2004; Billiet *et al.* 1996; Blalock 1967; Coenders & Scheepers 2003). Against the information that has been provided above, it would be appropriate to delve into at least a glimpse of how the respective concepts have been defined, and to gauge whether they are befitting to the process of transformation in South Africa:

- Collective/group narcissism – when an individual in a group demonstrates excessive love for his/her group. The concept is related to ethnocentrism<sup>18</sup>;
- Ethnocentrism - The term ethnocentrism was first used in 1906 by Sumner to describe a cultural narrowness in which the ‘ethnically centered’ individual rigidly accepted those who were culturally alike while just as rigidly rejecting who were culturally different. Ethnocentrism refers to the belief that the in-group is the center of everything and is superior to all out-groups (Öğretir & Özçelik 2008);
- Xenophobia – generally understood as a natural dislike or hatred for out-groups; in South Africa xenophobia is racialised, even though it is widely associated with local Africans showing antagonism against Africans from outside the country (Harris 2002; Warner & Finchil-

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<sup>18</sup> Documents\Paper on Collective narcissism - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.mht.

escu 2003; Jost *et al.* 2013; Patel 2013)<sup>19</sup>; and

- Ethnic nepotism – applied in multi-ethnic societies in ways that discriminate against out-groups, especially in situations of intense economic competition<sup>20</sup> (see also Sailer 2004; Vanhenen 1999; Salter & Harpending 2013).

While South Africa's intensely racialised history has enforced a spill-over of racial prejudices into the contemporary era, it is in the last bullet above viz. ethnic nepotism, that much of the 'positive discrimination' appears to apply in South Africa. Although Indians are a minority of barely 2.5 per cent of the country's total population, the economy over the last two decades has not grown sufficiently to embrace the increasing number of job-seekers, creating tensions between classified groups over who should receive highest privileges in the emerging democracy that is South Africa. Indians are widely viewed by Africans as being more privileged in economic opportunities, leaving them with the justification for privileged access to work. There are two issues that emerge out of what prevails in the country and how people conceptualise around what they see and experience. The first is that Africans as the new preferred segment to economic and political privileges are viewed as deliberately alienating minorities who were equally disadvantaged; and the second is that placing Africans in positions of responsibility when they are not adequately ready for it is pathological. When viewed retrospectively the beliefs and concepts that prevail in the mind-sets of minorities, via their contemporary experiences as victims of institutionalised racism, are difficult to box as being of one type or the other.

Against the background of an aesthetically pleasing and unifying concept that emerged soon after the 1994 general election that acquired international currency viz. 'Rainbow Nation', how is that South African minorities find themselves in a situation that reflects a widespread reduction in pride and patriotism? Much of the answer undoubtedly lies in its history of colonialism, apartheid as well the contemporary post-apartheid era. Like

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<sup>19</sup> See also reports at: <http://www.news24.com/tap/topics/xenophobia>; and <http://mg.co.za/tag/xenophobia/attacks>.

<sup>20</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic\\_nepotism/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_nepotism/).

most pluralistic societies, South Africa's trajectory of racialised planning, with the chief characteristic being for preference groups over different eras, continues to mould and entrench attitudes in terms of in-group/out-group mentalities. During colonialism and apartheid those who were classified as 'Whites' were the preferred group and most privileged beneficiaries of state driven programmes and incentives, as well as in big private businesses.

In the vitriolic opposition to apartheid over the years, especially in the 1980s, the all-embracing concept of 'Black' was bandied about to refer to all the designated groups that did not receive the same privileges as Whites. Soon after April 1994 'Black' gradually took on a reference to the African majority, excluding those who were classified under apartheid as Indian or Coloured. The dismantling of apartheid did not lead to the dismantling of boundaries that divided people along racial lines. In both situations, institutionalised racism that previously operated in favour of Whites, and positive discrimination that currently operates in favour of Africans, is ascribed with a pathological tinge that endlessly focuses upon racial boundedness. Contemporary South Africa is a juxtaposition of all four areas of discrimination mentioned above, coupled with the irony of a progressive constitution and progressive trends towards de-racialisation. It is the scramble for scarce employment, scarce state funding for entrepreneurial opportunities, and degrees of collective narcissism that adds to the robustness of post-apartheid South Africa. But the experiences of people across the nine provinces in South Africa are too varied and complex to box them into a single paradigm. They do however vary to the extent that they could fall into the related categories of xenophobia, ethnocentric behaviour, racist attitudes, ethnic nepotism and narcissistic egoism.

## **Conclusion**

When a senior politician such as Mathews Phosa makes a public statement about how the state is failing in their social service delivery to disempowered Africans, there must be some substance to it. And when such a statement is backed up by another generally popular woman politician among African youth such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela about politicians needing to be less selfish and more committed to service delivery, it confirms the extent of the pathology that has set into the real politic in South Africa. Such public

statements reduce the Mayibuye Africa attacks against Indians as no less than racial ranting. Phosa's and Madikizela's open admissions and challenges that are thrown out at politicians flies in the faces of narcissistic organisations such as the Mazibuye African Forum, that blames African lack of advancement on Indian privilege under White minority rule rather than on the short sighted policies of BEE as pointed out by Matheus Phosa, or on the greedy politicians that Winnie Mandela had referred to. However, such candid public declarations against their own political party should not shift attention away from the fact that BEE rests upon politicians lack of vision and greed, and that it is in these ways that the minorities who have much to offer economically and politically are being alienated in ways that often show indifference towards their feelings of helplessness. The fact that all of the graduates surveyed had employment does not necessarily mean that the South African state is doing an acceptable job. Most of them are employees in profit driven private enterprise, not in service driven state departments. When equity enrolments in tertiary institutions such as the case of Sunira against UCT precludes a child entry into a course that she wants to study, or when the local government hires an inefficient person as a manager largely because she was African, then such policies go beyond either individual or collective narcissism. Such instances point toward practices that are no less than crude forms of racism, ethnocentrism or xenophobia (see Billiet *et al.* 1996). The common factor in each of these forms of discrimination is that they appear in either veiled forms of ostracism or bold acts of exclusivism because they have the power to do it. Excluding Indians from the same privileges that Africans now enjoy after building up their hopes during the struggle against apartheid constitutes an about turn that operates on a form of selective amnesia. Against perpetual exclusivism in admission to tertiary institutions, to employment opportunities and to political office, the inclination to believe that racism, ethnic nepotism, xenophobia and/or ethnocentric attitudes are at work should not be too far off the mark as an analytical derivative. But the fact that in the snap survey of 26 households with graduates who were all gainfully employed and who experienced no overt animosity in acquiring their jobs, demonstrates that alienation of Indians is more contextual than crudely racist or xenophobic. The shrinking national and global economies, as well as corruption across civil society, including state officials, would serve as more convincing explanations for the

intense competition in accessibility for learner and economic privileges.

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# **Zimbabwean Teachers' Experiences of Xenophobia in Limpopo Schools**

**Suresh Kamar Singh**

## **Abstract**

Due to the shortage of teachers in schools, many foreign teachers are employed in South African schools. In rural areas, foreign teachers offer services to communities that need teachers desperately. In the Limpopo province, which is predominantly rural, a large number of foreign teachers are employed in both public and private schools. Many of these teachers come from different neighbouring countries; however, the focus of this study is on teachers from Zimbabwe. These teachers experience many challenges teaching in South Africa. Xenophobia is experienced in many forms. The study was done using qualitative data collection methods. Data was collected from Zimbabwean teachers working within the Capricorn District of Limpopo province. The data collection tool employed was the interview. Teachers were asked to reflect on the incidents of xenophobia that involved them personally, took place within their work or home environment. Findings from the interviews revealed that Zimbabwean teachers experience xenophobia on a daily basis; xenophobic attacks on teachers escalate when there are incidents of xenophobia in the school community or the country; teachers experience xenophobia when local teachers' jobs come under threat (temporary posts, substitutes). Xenophobic attacks range from: verbal abuse, indirect insulting, to the chasing of foreign teachers from villages. The recommendations made by this study include: Zimbabwean teachers should have equal status as local teachers, xenophobic attacks on Zimbabwean teachers must be documented and Zimbabwean teachers in scarce skills areas who work in rural schools should be permanently employed.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, foreign, teachers, schools, rural

## Introduction

In South Africa, issues relating to education, access to services, disparate economic status, autonomy and problems arising from migration are among the manifestations of racism and xenophobia (Chakma & Jensen 2001:90). In particular, this article focuses on the issues relating to education. In the context of basic education, teacher shortage is a common problem experienced in South African schools, especially in rural areas. In scarce skills areas or subjects like Maths and Physical Science, the extent of the shortage is even more greatly felt largely due to the shortage of teachers but also because South African teachers prefer to teach in urban rather than rural areas. This gap in the supply of teachers to rural schools in the scarce skills areas has been exploited by foreign teachers. For many years, Indian nationals highly qualified in Maths and the sciences have been employed in these teaching positions (McConnell 2009:38). More recently, with the continued economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe, millions of Zimbabweans have fled the country (McConnell 2009:38) and have temporarily settled in South Africa. They brought a wealth of expertise into South Africa; many of these Zimbabweans are qualified teachers who are proficient in the English language. This is an area of expertise sorely needed in South African rural schools where English is used as a medium of instruction and most learners are English second language learners and speakers. Given this scenario, it would be expected that these teachers would be welcomed, however, Landau *et al.* (2005:4) reports that

South Africans' negative attitudes towards non-nationals are largely oriented towards other Africans, although there are increasing reports of discrimination towards new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent.

This led to the central question that this article addresses: What are Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of xenophobia in Limpopo schools? It is crucial to examine this phenomenon in the context of the wider society where xenophobic violence is a constant threat. Since the violent and widespread xenophobic violence of 2008, there have been constant flare-ups of xenophobia across South Africa. As the result of this, foreign nationals live in constant fear of attacks by local people. In order to further understand the

concept, xenophobia is discussed by examining definitions, forms of xenophobia as experienced by the international community and a historical review of xenophobia as experienced in South Africa.

## **Defining Xenophobia**

The concept of xenophobia is believed to have originated from two Greek words: *xenos* (meaning foreigner or stranger) and *phobos* (meaning fear) (Soyombo 2008:86). However, fear of a stranger or foreigner is a simple way of defining xenophobia. In reality, the concept of xenophobia may slightly differ in different contexts. Xenophobia may also be targeted at people or groups of people who are not strangers but are immigrants living in a community for a long time but are not regarded as *sons of the soil* (Soyombo 2008). Xenophobia has also been seen to entail *contempt* or *loathing* of strangers (Van der Veer *et al.* 2011). Whilst fear-like emotions imply a feeling of vulnerability, contempt and dislike imply some kind of dominance (Van der Veer *et al.* 2011). Other terms used to describe xenophobia are *hatred* and *prejudice* against foreigners (Laher 2009). Fear may not necessarily be associated with people only but it can be explained in the context of the fear of losing one's national identity and purpose (Moisi 2009). Xenophobia is also defined as attitudinal, affective, and behavioural prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign (Yakushko 2009). Of all the definitions cited, this perhaps best explains the type of xenophobia experienced by foreign teachers in South African schools. A negative attitude and behavioural prejudice is directed towards foreign teachers by local teachers, students and the local community.

## **Xenophobia as Experienced Worldwide**

Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon. It has been experienced worldwide under various kinds of circumstances (Soyombo 2008). Xenophobia is a multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon (Yakushko 2009). Among Western nations, the United States has one of the highest numbers of total immigrants coming to live within its borders each year (Yakushko 2009). Although often related to periods of political and economic instability (like Zimbabweans in South Africa), xenophobia often also follows terrorist

events like the bombings of the twin towers on 11 September 2001. Jones (2011) terms this toxic xenophobia (or Islamophobia). Jones (2011) also reports that xenophobia towards Muslims in the United States and Europe has increased since 9/11. The example she cites is the ban or laws regulating the wearing of the veil by Muslim women in schools and public places, France was the first country to ban the wearing of veils by Muslim women. The other example that Jones (2011) cites is the growing movement by the Swiss to ban the building of minarets. Jones (2011) has identified three distinct forms of xenophobia: *exclusive* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and therefore exist outside of our imagined community); *possessive* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and are trying to take our jobs, money, medical aid etc.); *toxic* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and are trying to destroy that which we hold most dear, our freedom).

In recent times, studies have focused on how to use education to resolve issues of xenophobia in many different countries. Yakushko (2008) suggested strategies for including a systematic focus on the impact of xenophobia in psychological practice, education, research, and policy advocacy. Jones (2011:44-45) proposed creating a critical curriculum within the United States which can facilitate resistance to xenophobia and bias and cites the following conditions as necessary to resist toxic xenophobia through the curriculum: explicitly confront issues of power and privilege; delineate the creation and mobilization of xenophobia against various groups of people internationally and within the US; counteract ethno genesis through explorations of the complexity and diversity of the group called Muslim Americans; and bring in graphic images of xenophobia for critique and for verbal and graphic response. Osler and Starkey (2002) see education for citizenship as a way of combatting racism and xenophobia. This Education for Democratic Citizenship programme was proposed by the Council of Europe. This education programme emphasises the key role of education in combatting xenophobia as it is seen as a barrier to democracy and social cohesion. Van Zalk *et al.* (2013) conducted a study on the extent to which adolescents and their friends socialize one another's attitudes towards immigrants. One of the findings showed that friends' xenophobia predicted increases in adolescents' xenophobia. Put simply, friends influence one another's xenophobic behaviour. The measurement of xenophobia has been inconsistent (Van der Veer *et al.* 2013) and they set out to describe the

development and cross-cultural validation of a new instrument. By using a sample of US, Dutch and Norwegian students, they found that individual respondents' criteria for the ranking of the scale items strongly depend on the way immigrants are framed. They concluded that we often think we know what we measure, but in fact it is not the case. They suggest using pretesting to attain this goal.

Students travelling to other countries also experience all the challenges associated with studying and adapting to a foreign country. Scheunpflug (1997) examined the conditions under which it may be possible to overcome xenophobia through cross-cultural encounters and suggests that communication (common language), planning and length of partnership should be the focus of cross-cultural studying. Cross boundary travel is also influenced by xenophobia as found in the study by Friebel *et al.* 2013). They investigated how emigration from a developing region is affected by xenophobic violence at destination. They surveyed 1000 Mozambican households before and after the xenophobia attacks of 2008 and found that the intention to migrate after the attack was lower.

## **Xenophobia in South Africa**

Over the years, there have been various cases of xenophobia across the African continent; the most recent and highly notable is the May 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa (Soyombo 2008). In South Africa, xenophobia appears to be a racial issue. Black immigrants from other African countries in particular are at a greater risk of being victimised than white immigrants (Warner & Finchilescu 2003). Despite the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, prejudice and violence continue to mark contemporary South Africa (Harris 2002). The culture of violence can be described as a situation in which social relations and interactions are governed through violent, rather than non-violent means; this culture of violence is a legacy of apartheid (Harris 2002). Despite this legacy of the past, South Africa has a democratic constitution and immigration policies and laws which govern the rights, responsibilities and treatment of foreigners (refugees, immigrants etc.) (Landau *et al.* 2005). The legislation has been able to address certain issues like acknowledging the existence of xenophobia and holding South Africa responsible for the treatment of

immigrants (Adjai & Lazaridis 2013). Yet cases of xenophobia are constantly reported in the media. Neocosmos (2010) argues that a new beginning of the conception of politics is needed. He argues that

a truly political community can only be imagined and constructed on the basis of respect for the other; that social justice cannot be bought at the expense of the oppression of others (foreigners, ethnic groups, women, children or whoever) (Neocosmos 2010:549).

An active politics of peace is necessary (Neocosmos 2008:587). Consequent to the xenophobic violence, many sectors of the community (media, social commentators, researchers, public) rightfully questioned the capacity and willingness of the government's safety and security and criminal justice departments to act decisively and effectively against perpetrators of various forms of violence (Seedat *et al.* 2010:18). However, as previously mentioned in this article, xenophobia cannot be easily explained away or blamed on a government. The African context of politics and migration needed to be examined and the impact of this on all aspects of South African life. Of particular note has been the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. According to McConnell (2009:38), in 2007 alone, 45 000 new applications for asylum were made to the South African Department of Home Affairs and more recently, an estimated range of between 500 000 to 3 million Zimbabwean refugees are living in South Africa. These large numbers of people, whose presence had not been expected or planned for, put an enormous strain on resources within South Africa. However, measures were taken to prevent xenophobic violence; for example, the Counter Xenophobia Unit was established. Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) describe the 2008 xenophobic violence as 'Two Steps Backwards' and argue that the ANC government must take a lead in the fight against xenophobia. Despite decisions and statements by political parties on xenophobia, at the level of ordinary people, there is a constant threat of xenophobic violence. Bateman (2011) describes xenophobic experiences of foreign doctors and the lack of support from some local colleagues. Bateman (2011:788) quotes one doctor:

I was ready for the risk of violence and other problems, but not exclusion by colleagues whom we came to help out with the

shortages. It's not an outright xenophobic attitude – more like ignoring you in a group speaking their own language or not informing, involving or supporting you.

Laher's (2009) study of African immigrants in Johannesburg also found that feelings of realistic threat increased prejudice. Sharp (2012) cites the example of day labourers in Cape Town and the constant squabbles that erupt between locals and foreigners. At this level, the basic survival instinct makes people react violently. Similarly, in the school situation, when job and survival are at stake, foreign teachers face the full brunt of the local teachers and communities. There is a gap in the literature concerning xenophobic experiences of teachers in South African schools. Osman's (2009) study of xenophobia as experienced by immigrant learners in inner city schools of Johannesburg contains some accounts of foreign teachers experiences of xenophobia, however, these accounts are of teachers observations and experiences of xenophobia amongst the learners and not as experienced by themselves.

## **Theoretical Background**

Many theories can be used to explain the basis of xenophobia. The two theories most relevant to this study are the psychologically postulated theories of Integrated Threat and Scapegoating. In the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000), four major components of threats are felt by one group in relation to another. *Realistic* threats endanger the well-being of the group and can include fear of harm or a decline in quality of life; *symbolic* threats are threats that are seen to be threatening the group's culture or place in the wider society by challenging or undermining accepted norms; *intergroup anxiety* occurs when two groups come into contact and relates to fear over the ability to communicate positively and effectively; *negative stereotyping* are ingrained attitudes and responses to members of another group that mediate contact, set expectations and that can hamper the process of mediation (Harrison & Peacock 2010). By examining the responses from the teachers, it was evident that these four concepts were experienced by the sampled teachers in various forms.

People sometimes use prejudice and discrimination to express hos-

tility arising from frustration. This is referred to as scapegoating (Osman 2009). When people become frustrated in their efforts to achieve a desired goal, they tend to respond with aggression. The source of the frustration is unknown or too powerful to confront, so a substitute is found to release the aggression (Osman 2009:17). According to Harris (2001), in Osman (2009:18), the phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa may be explained using the scapegoating hypothesis. This theory posits that foreigners are responsible for limited resources like jobs and education. The underlying factor (poverty and violence) is directed towards foreigners because of the perception that they commit crimes and take away jobs meant for South Africans. This is used as a convenient scapegoat for those experiencing the reality of hardship that has worsened since the arrival of Zimbabweans into South Africa (Osman 2009:18).

## **The Study**

The study was conducted in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province, South Africa. Limpopo province is the northern-most province which borders Zimbabwe and Botswana. Due to its proximity to Zimbabwe, many foreigners from Zimbabwe cross over the border to work and study in South Africa. The languages spoken in the northern parts of Limpopo province are familiar to Zimbabweans, especially those who live close to the border.

The qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyse data. Interviews were conducted with teachers from the Capricorn district (which is located at the centre of the province). In total, 14 teachers were interviewed. They were purposively selected from the teacher population in this district. Only Zimbabwean teachers were chosen as their experiences form the crux of this inquiry. A semi-structured interview was used. The interview focussed on their experiences as foreign teachers in South Africa. A descriptive account of their experiences are presented and discussed below.

## **Findings and Discussion**

As all the teachers interviewed were from Zimbabwe, this is not unusual in the Limpopo province since there is a large presence of Zimbabwean teachers ever since the political and economic problems began in that

country. Many professionals sought refuge in South Africa and took temporary teaching jobs in rural schools. This explanation is supported by the period that these teachers have been in South Africa. The range of years spent in South Africa is from 3 to 17 years with one teacher at 3 years, two at 4 years, six at 5 years, three at 6 years, one at 8 years and one at 17 years. Most of the teachers (9) arrived in South Africa 5-6 years ago during the economic melt-down in Zimbabwe. Of the teachers in the study, 13 knew of other foreign teachers who were teaching in South African schools. The Zimbabwean teachers prefer to spend time with colleagues from their own country (10) even if they are not in the same area, as opposed to interacting with local teachers. The reason given was that they share similar experiences with teachers from their own country.

Of the 14 teachers in the study, 8 experienced xenophobia in a direct way. Some Zimbabwean teachers were attacked because of the language they speak, they are fluent in English. The local learners show disrespect towards them because a black person is not expected to speak English. They ask questions like: 'why are you speaking English when you are black?' Learners also showed the Zimbabwean teachers disrespect while they were teaching and threatened the teachers when disciplined for bad behaviour. The Zimbabwean teachers also felt unrecognised in meetings when they wished to express an opinion. In addition, conversation in meetings is exclusionary because they use a local language in official communication and meetings which cannot be understood.

When it came to promotion, they were also excluded. One Zimbabwean teacher cites a case of where he acted in the position of principal for two years, however, when the post was finally advertised, the SGB of the school refused to appoint him citing a reason that he is a foreigner and cannot relate effectively with their culture. The working environment sometimes shows traits of xenophobia especially in the allocation of posts at schools; posts occupied by foreign teachers are often switched in order to save the jobs of local teachers. They also felt threatened with job loss because of their Zimbabwean nationality.

Another common problem encountered by the Zimbabwean teachers was the allocation of a heavier workload on the basis that they are foreigners and would not complain. Zimbabwean teachers also had to listen to conversations attacking their country and utterances to indicate that they

should go back and work for Mugabe. Locals also made verbal utterances that they will one day leave South Africa because they are foreigners.

Unlike acts of xenophobia in the general community where extreme forms of violence are used and people face the threat of losing their lives, for teachers the threats are more subtle and relate primarily to their job security. This ‘realistic’ threat is what the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000) refers to. One other significant finding was the use of local languages as a means of excluding the foreigner, surprisingly even at meetings. Generally, the greatest threat that foreign teachers face is losing their jobs. This is well known by the local teachers and they use this to exploit the foreign teachers as their experiences suggest. Zimbabwean teachers were also found to carry a greater workload compared to local teachers with 9 teachers reporting that they were given additional work due to their foreigner status.

Nine teachers also reported that they were called names in local languages. Name calling is a common practice in local communities. All the teachers reported that they often found themselves excluded from discussions where the local languages are deliberately used to exclude them from conversations. This type of behaviour suggests that the local teachers either see them as a threat or are not willing to engage in conversation with them. In a school environment, exclusion such as this makes it difficult for the foreign teacher to fit in. Schools are supposed to be places where respect for all kinds of people is taught. Disrespect shown to Zimbabwean teachers both by local teachers and learners do not auger well in a young democracy. The majority (9) of the teachers also had experience of situations where cliques were formed that excluded Zimbabwean teachers. The Zimbabwean teachers (9) also felt non-acceptance by other teachers in the school. Feelings of non-acceptance or rejection affect the emotions of a person and have implications on the psychological well-being of the foreigner.

The Zimbabwean teachers did not only experience xenophobia themselves, they also reported that close friends and acquaintances who are fellow Zimbabweans had similar experiences, some of which are listed below: being forced to leave after working for only 21 days, until that point, nine foreign teachers in almost five years have left the school; attending interviews and not being appointed despite being placed as the highest ranked candidate for the job. The reason for the rejection was also openly

stated - that the school was going to be dominated by foreign educators. One Zimbabwean teacher cited a case where her friend was fired because a local individual with lower qualifications wanted the job. In one case, when a foreign principal wanted to appoint qualified staff to occupy a vacant post, the local teachers strongly objected saying that he was trying to make the school foreigner-dominated. Some cases became very tense; one teacher cited a case in Johannesburg, where a house belonging to a Zimbabwean teacher was burnt because the locals felt that Zimbabweans are taking their jobs.

Two cases were also cited of friends of the Zimbabwean teachers who were working in other provinces in South Africa. The first quote indicates the extent of the challenges faced by Zimbabwean teachers –

my friend in the Eastern Cape was forced to move out of a house he was renting when the community was driving out foreigners; the community did not consider him as a teacher of their children; actually the department saved him by giving him alternative accommodation.

The second case involves paying money in exchange for a job:

My friend was teaching in Pretoria (Braazaville) during the xenophobia attacks in Pretoria. She was given an option to give them money or leave the place. To secure her job she gave them the money they demanded.

The above accounts focus on the treatment of Zimbabwean teachers by the community and the schools. As the examples depict, foreign teachers do not have many options when it comes to demands placed on them by the schools or the community. Very often, they comply with the threats simply because they want to keep their jobs. These quotes also provide evidence of the threat that the locals face in relation to Zimbabwean domination. They are afraid that their schools will become foreigner dominated if they employ more Zimbabwean teachers. What is ironic is that in the scarce skills subjects like maths, there are a limited number of qualified local teachers available. So the Zimbabwean teachers are actually providing great value to local schools, especially in rural areas.

Zimbabwean teachers do not feel safe in South Africa for the following reasons cited by the respondents: the community does not protect them as teachers of their children, easily taking sides against them when there are xenophobic attacks; foreign teachers are always looked down upon despite the services they offer; there is a lack of job security; they do not know the feelings of those around them and therefore find it difficult to feel safe; at any onset of violence, foreigners are targeted.

Zimbabwean teachers were also asked to state some of the observations that they made concerning what they considered xenophobia: sometimes foreign teachers are blackmailed into supporting personal ambitions of school managers on the pretext that if they do not do so, their contracts would not be renewed; some teachers are hostile because they do not accept that they are not performing and are not willing to work harder; some teachers do not accept that foreign teachers are here to help students, they believe they are here to take their jobs. Again, the threat of losing their jobs is a constant concern of foreign teachers. It seems that this is a well-known fact, since the local teachers and school managers exploit this vulnerability in the Zimbabwean teachers.

The interviews concluded with comments and suggestions made by Zimbabwean teachers about xenophobia and what should be done: Zimbabwean teachers are ‘punching balls’ for such matters as running errands for the school principal, whilst local teachers may refuse to do this, Zimbabwean teachers are just instructed to run errands; Zimbabwean teachers invigilate more hours than local teachers and afternoon sessions are a part of their invigilation routine; Zimbabwean teachers are expected to reach higher targets in pass rates in order for their contracts to be renewed; xenophobia limits what one can say or do to develop education; xenophobia should not be practiced because it will impact severely on learner performance in South African schools; xenophobia does not create a safe environment and reduces productivity of foreign teachers due to fear of reprisals if they perform well; xenophobia must not interfere with the school system since this has a negative effect on student performance; Zimbabwean teachers need to be protected for the sake of the students since they teach well and produce good results; Zimbabwean teachers should be treated like all other educators and enjoy the same benefits and privileges; xenophobia is counterproductive and a crime against humanity more especially when an

African attacks another African, it hinders transfer of skills that are lacking in the receiving country.

These insights by Zimbabwean teachers indicate their commitment to education. They provided suggestions for ways in which improvement can be made into the schooling system so that foreign teachers can become a commonplace in South African schools. They can be seen as providing essential services in areas much needed by the education system, for example, they can teach in rural areas where the quality of education is often called into question or they can provide expertise in scarce skills subjects that seriously compromises any education system.

## **Recommendations**

- Teachers from Zimbabwe should be treated with the dignity afforded to a professional anywhere in the world.
- Acceptance of Zimbabwean teachers by local communities should receive more attention especially during the recruitment phase so that all parties understand the crucial role that these teachers play in the education of South Africa's children.
- Local teachers should be more accepting of Zimbabwean teachers and develop a positive attitude towards the commitment that they display to the teaching profession.
- Zimbabwean teachers should be treated fairly in schools where they teach and not be used as 'scapegoats' to reduce the workloads of local teachers.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this article examined the experiences of Zimbabwean teachers in schools of the Capricorn district of Limpopo province. The findings indicated that Zimbabwean teachers do experience xenophobia within the schools where they teach. The greatest threat that they face is job security. They are constantly made to feel that they need to perform better, take on

bigger workloads and do other tasks that local teachers do not want to do in order to secure continued contracts. Local teachers, students and community members use local indigenous languages to exclude foreign teachers. Due to sporadic xenophobic violence and attacks across South Africa, Zimbabwean teachers are on constant alert. Xenophobia has become a more serious threat for Zimbabwean teachers in recent times and South Africans need to change their attitudes towards these teachers who are providing an essential service for local children who are in dire need of the skills they bring into this country.

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

**Sadhana Manik**

## **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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# **Examining Xenophobic Practices amongst University Students – A Case Study from Limpopo Province**

**Rachael Jesika Singh**

## **Abstract**

In recent years, with the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in communities in South Africa, foreign students have encountered more direct xenophobic attacks. This article explores xenophobic practices at a rural university which has a large number of foreign students. These students come from neighbouring African countries in search of quality education. Over the last five to eight years the foreign student enrolment has increased due to political instability in these countries. This article examines the xenophobic experiences of foreign students from a social conflict perspective. Data was gathered using questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The data was both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. The findings indicate that students are faced with a wide range of xenophobic experiences which include: name-calling using local African languages; exclusion from class discussions where a local language is used deliberately; cliques formed that exclude foreigners; difficulty in finding accommodation as they are not easily accepted in residences and; they are implicated whenever violent incidences occur. This article recommends that universities devise ways of protecting the rights of foreign students; practices of tolerance and respect be encouraged and practiced and; more research be conducted in different university environments on foreign students' experiences in South Africa.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, students, university, foreign, culture

## **Introduction**

South Africa is a melting pot of cultures, religions, languages and ethnic groups. This multicultural and multiracial environment has formally existed for over three hundred years. For much of the twentieth century, apartheid laws segregated people along racial lines. One of the legacies of apartheid was racially segregated universities which continue to exist under the name of historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs). Since democracy in 1994, a ‘rainbow nation’ emerged as an example to the world that unity can exist in diversity. Given South Africa’s history, the threat of xenophobia seemed unlikely. However, since 1994, incidents of xenophobia have been sporadically reported. The 2008 xenophobic attacks, which started in Alexandria in Gauteng spread rapidly to other communities resulting in the deaths of 62 foreigners and between 80 000 and 200 000 displaced persons (Igglesden *et al.* 2009; Seedat *et al.* 2010:16). It also shocked the South African government and the world at large, more especially given South Africa’s past and the role that African countries had played in supporting South African freedom fighters that went into exile during the apartheid era. Whilst the xenophobic attacks of 2008 were immediately diffused, the tensions have been simmering since then. In July 2012, xenophobic attacks erupted in the Western Cape and Free State. This time the target was foreign *spaza* shop owners. *The Times* headline, *SA edges closer to xenophobic flare-up* (*The Times* 13 July 2012:1), reported that NGO’s have blamed the attacks on the ANC’s policy document ‘Peace and Stability’ in which the party calls for stringent laws against trading by foreigners.

However, xenophobia cannot be simply explained or reasoned according to political policies alone. It is a much more complex phenomenon that requires careful and deep investigation. In the South African context, high levels of crime and unemployment have been sighted as mitigating factors (Neocosmos 2008). The notion is that African migrants are here to take only and not to give, a belief that is also shared by professionals (Neocosmos 2008:590). Although xenophobia presents itself mainly in socio-economically deprived communities, it is found everywhere – ‘even in institutions of higher learning where one expects a higher level of broadmindedness’ (Mogekwu 2005:10). Here xenophobia may not be expressed in the same manner as in poor communities where outbreaks of physical violence and attacks on businesses occur, but in ‘more subtle forms

of making the non-national feel so unwelcome and despised in an environment that is psychologically hostile' (Mogekwu 2005:10).

Although South Africa is a democratic country, racial divisions amongst South African students is very visible at higher education institutions. The policies of these institutions may contain democratic principles; however, the students' interactions with each other reflect racial divisions. Foreign students however, perceive these divisions differently. Cross and Johnson's (2008:311) study at Wits University revealed, amongst other things, that xenophobia 'has had serious repercussions' and that 'xenophobia is something that makes South Africa a very intimidating society'. Excerpts from one of the foreign students they interviewed indicated how foreign students experience xenophobia: 'They always feel like you are using their money to maybe develop yourself ... They still don't understand the concept of foreigners coming into their country ... Most students who are South African are still very much xenophobic' (Cross & Johnson 2008:311).

In South Africa, all universities enrol foreign students each year. Whilst at some universities, there is a deliberate policy to attract high calibre foreign students from all parts of the world; other universities attract foreign students for various reasons including location in relation to neighbouring countries, economic problems in neighbouring countries and programmes offered by the individual universities. For example, in Zimbabwe over the last five years, due to the economic and political challenges (Manik 2012: 82), lack of jobs, hyper-inflation and human rights violations (Bloch 2010: 235), many students and academic staff have crossed the border into South Africa to seek education and employment. Universities such as University of Limpopo and University of Venda located in the Limpopo province, by virtue of their close location to Zimbabwe, are natural choices for such students.

Unlike the xenophobic experiences in South African communities which are more violent in nature and openly hostile, xenophobia within the higher education context manifests in more subtle ways. The effect, however, is still the same. It leads to the foreign student being made to feel unwelcome and creates a sense of 'not belonging'. Cross and Johnson's (2008:310) findings at Wits University show that 'in real life, group identities on campus still reflect the apartheid legacy'. It has been sometimes been argued that

xenophobia is experienced by migrants in South Africa as a consequence of the isolation caused by apartheid (Crush *et al.* 2008:235). Whilst open acts of xenophobia within communities are widely reported and more ‘visible’, xenophobia amongst students is more subtle and can only be uncovered by establishing the individual experiences of students who are willing to share these experiences. Xenophobia as experienced by foreigners is rooted in constant fear of reprisals. By examining different theories of xenophobia and discussing it from a social conflict perspective, the aim of this article is to examine xenophobia from the perspective of foreign students at one historically black university in South Africa.

## **Theoretical Explanations of Xenophobia**

Three theoretical approaches that contribute to the rise of hatred were identified by Pedahzur and Yishai (1999) in Mogekwu (2005:9). The first which derives from the power theory relates to the socio-economic status of individuals and the perceived threat from foreigners that induce animosity. Often perpetrators of xenophobia state the following as reasons for their attack: ‘They (foreigners) take our jobs’, ‘They take our business’, ‘They rob us of economic opportunities’. The second approach is related to cultural identity where the main issue is the fear of loss of social status and identity. People usually prefer to be surrounded by their own kind (race, religion, ethnic group) rather than exposure to people who are not like them. In many ways, the opposite is true in South African society where people work, live and study in multi-cultural settings. However, despite the openness of South African society, one still finds groupings of people who identify with each other. A typical example at a university is the close friendships that develop between foreigners or students coming from the same country. Another unique South African example is where students are in the minority from a particular race group, they tend to keep company with each other. The third approach called phenomenology attributes xenophobia to general attributes of society. This occurs especially when society experiences crisis, this leads to a crisis of collective identity.

Soyombo (2008) uses Economic Theory, Frustration-Aggression Theory, Conflict Theory and Socio-Biological Theory to explain causes of xenophobia and conditions under which it is likely to occur. Economic

theory (like Power Theory) attributes xenophobia to economic factors like poverty and unemployment where poor and unemployed people are more likely to engage in xenophobic practice compared to rich and employed people. A criticism of this theory is that rich and employed people are also xenophobic. What is crucial to this theory is that in reality, it is the poor and unemployed that are more likely to engage in xenophobia. At HDUs, where most of the poorer students are found, they display similar survival characteristics as that of the surrounding poor communities. Poverty and politics play a role in xenophobia in such an environment.

Frustration-Aggression theory attributes xenophobia to frustrations experienced or imagined by one group, for which another group is held responsible (Soyombe 2008:99). This usually happens when one group experiences problems attaining a goal, they want to take out their frustrations on another vulnerable group (usually a minority), using them as a scapegoat. This is usually when the agent of the frustration is too powerful to confront. A criticism of this theory is that not all situations of frustration produce aggressive behaviour. Linked to Frustration-Aggression theory is Conflict theory where xenophobia is explained in terms of conflict between working and ruling class. In this context, the working class is always dominated by the ruling class and often, out of frustration, they engage in deviant behaviour such as xenophobia. An explanation for xenophobia by the Socio-Biological theory put forward by Waller (2002) in Soyombe (2008:101), and Omoluabi (2008) where ‘all human beings have an innate, evolutionary tendency to seek proximity to familiar faces because what is unfamiliar is probably dangerous and should be avoided’.

Other theories of xenophobia as discussed by Omoluabi (2008) include Psychoanalytic Theory, Avoidance Conditioning Theory, Modelling Theory and Cognitive Theory.

**Psychoanalytic Theory:** Originally Sigmund Freud put forward that the ego defence mechanism used by individuals to protect themselves in high-level conflict situations is phobia. This theory was later expanded to explain how xenophobia originated in children and later in adults (Arieti 1979, in Omoluabi 2008:56).

**Avoidance Conditioning Theory:** Related to consistent pairing of a neutral stimulus with a painful or frightening event resulting in a fear of the stimulus as a result of classical conditioning. This phobia, when related to

interactions with strangers or foreigners, could elicit xenophobic responses (Omoluabi 2008).

**Modelling Theory:** Postulated by Bandura and Rosenthal in 1995; this theory posits that pain-eliciting situations involving modelled behaviour results in a phobia for the situation (Omoluabi 2008). If people are exposed to such models like the media or individual powerful figures, they are likely to engage in xenophobic behaviour.

**Cognitive Theory:** This theory is linked to avoidances created by cognitive phobias that people possess (Heinrichs & Hoffman 2002, in Omoluabi 2008). It is usually associated with negative situations and events. This sometimes manifests in xenophobic situations where pre-conceptions and perceptions of strangers exist.

## **Social Conflict Theory**

This section examines how social issues and conflict intersperse especially in relation to xenophobic behaviour. ‘From the conflict perspective, xenophobia can be explained in terms of the conflict between classes and groups of people in a capitalist system’ (Soyombo 2008:101). Often, the working class is dominated by the bourgeoisie. This results in alienation, frustration and marginalisation. The poor, unemployed and isolated working class use xenophobic actions to vent their frustration; the foreigner is often an unsuspecting recipient of such deviant behaviour. Arogundade (2008:169,171) examined Carl Jung’s perspective on xenophobia by looking at the psyche and its effect on the individual. He examined the psyche as ‘a life processing energy that is a product of conflicts between the opposite forces within the individual’ (Arogundade 2008:169). Friendship and enmity are seen as opposing forces. He goes on further to propose that the fear of the foreigner could be an innate way of life of a particular group of people or a nationality. Social psychology, argues Olowu (2008:11), examines individual behaviour; however, ‘all behaviour takes place within a social context’. Social psychologists, in this sense, focus their attention on the effect of family background and environment on behaviour or attitudes of people towards a different race (Olowu 2008).

Henri Tajfel and John Turner posited social identity theory as an explanation to the psychology related to a range of prejudices and biases. This theory is used to understand how prejudices develop by pinpointing

identity and categorization as the main cause of social bias (Alarape 2008:78). Sometimes racial or ethnic groups are blamed for the problems experienced by the majority national group. This is attributed to the social psychology of nations which includes national identity that is the group's sense of belonging (Osuntokun 2008:25).

Social and cultural issues are related to each other and the interplay between them manifests in conflict situations where xenophobic behaviour erupts. Cross and Johnson (2008:304) argue that 'the effectiveness of any diversity initiative will certainly depend on its ability to integrate a theory of cultural recognition with a theory of social justice'. Race is also another factor that contributes to tension in the higher education environment. Not only is the foreigner a threat to local students, but students from different racial groups also poses a threat. However, race is 'sublimated' (Soudien 2008) in the university environment. This is because of the laws against the practice of racism. Whilst racism is more closely monitored by watchdog bodies, xenophobia does not enjoy the same protection. At universities, foreign students or international students (as they are commonly called) are further classified according to race, ethnicity and religious affiliation. According to Soudien (2008:305), 'students from different social backgrounds (race, gender, ethnicity, nationality) experience, and negotiate membership of campus life differently'. Clearly, university students are not exempt from the xenophobic behaviour that has been occurring in South African communities since 1998. As the tensions smoulder and erupt in different areas of the country periodically, these tensions are also felt by foreign students within universities. As already discussed, the tensions in an educational environment are of a more subtle nature. However, the effect created is still one of fear by the foreign student and a feeling of being unwanted.

## **Xenophobia Research**

Xenophobia manifests in different contexts across a spectrum of people and places. Harrison and Peacock's (2010) study in England on the interaction between home and international students found that home students perceive threats to their academic success and group identity from the presence of international students on the campus and in the classroom. In relation to

classroom practice of xenophobia, Osman's (2009) study of immigrant learners in inner city schools of Johannesburg concluded that the level of prejudice and discrimination against immigrant learners is severe and persistent. She cited bio-cultural factors such as shade of the skin as an important determinant of prejudice (Osman 2009:73). This view was earlier identified by Harris (2001:71) as the bio-cultural hypothesis which states that because foreigners are easily identified by their visible differences, this triggers xenophobic behaviour. In the South African context, colour of the skin is classified under race. At university level, race has been identified as the most important determinant of discrimination amongst students (Jansen 2004; Makobela 2001; Woods 2001).

South Africa has been identified as one of the countries which have the harshest anti-immigrant sentiments, together with Namibia and Botswana (Crush & Pendleton SAMP 2004). International comparative studies have also shown SADC countries to be among the most xenophobic in the world (Crush & Pendleton SAMP 2004; Crush & Pendleton 2007; Mcdonald & Jacobs SAMP 2005). These empirical studies were carried out before the 2008 uprising of violent xenophobic acts in South Africa. Biekpe (2008:5) cautions that 'today it is the foreign Africans on the receiving end of xenophobic attacks ... tomorrow it will be the middle class black South Africans and other racial groupings'. Given these sentiments, the next section looks at the study that was conducted amongst foreign students at a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa.

## **The Study**

This study was conducted at a historically black university which is situated in the Limpopo province. This university is a rural-based university which is situated in almost the centre of the province. The students at this campus are mainly from the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumulanga. The dominant home languages spoken by the student are Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda. The language of teaching and learning at the university is English. Foreign students communicate mostly in English. The university has a significant number of foreign students from African countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Cameroon. As Limpopo province borders Zimbabwe, many students from Zimbabwe choose to study in Limpopo.

A sample of fifty (n=50) students was selected from the foreign student component at the university using the snowball sampling technique. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The methods of data collection employed were questionnaires and interviews. The data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data is as follows.

Country of origin	Number of students	Male	Female	Time in SA (years)			
				1	2	3	4+
Botswana	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Kenya	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Nigeria	6	4	2	-	1	1	4
Swaziland	2	2	-	1	1	-	-
Zambia	6	3	3	-	1	2	3
Zimbabwe	34	20	14	7	15	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>				

**Table 1 – Country of origin, gender and time in SA**

## Findings and Discussion

Majority of the students in the study (34) come from Zimbabwe. This represents 68% of the total sample. The most obvious reason for this representation is the closeness between the two countries in relation to distance. The distance to the nearest Zimbabwe border post is 200 kilometres. The university also lies close to the main route that links South Africa to Zimbabwe; this is the N1 national road. The other significant reason for this representation is the recent political instability in Zimbabwe. In the past five to eight years, Zimbabwe has been in political and economic turmoil. The higher education system almost ground to a halt, resulting in masses of students and professionals crossing the border into South Africa seeking asylum and opportunities to work and study. The South African population was unprepared for this mass exodus. Competition on the already strained job markets resulted in resentment by local South Africans and fear in the foreigners. Other significant figures of foreign students in the sample are from Zambia and Nigeria, both at 12%. It is expected that students from

Zambia would study in South Africa as it is a neighbouring country. With respect to the number of Nigerian students, this may be explained as a general trend in South Africa where, in recent years, there has been a migration of Nigerians into the country. The attitude of local people towards these foreigners is that they take away their employment opportunities and introduce elements of crime (drugs) into the country (pers.com). Although both Swaziland and Botswana are neighbouring countries, their populations are relatively small. In the case of Swaziland, the population is also very poor. This could possibly be the reason for the small representation in the sample.

A total of 42% (21 students) from the sample had personal experiences of xenophobia in South Africa. The major reason cited was around issues of language. These issues ranged from lecturers speaking in local languages and excluding foreign students; refusal of services because they could not speak a local language; name calling in public places, being labelled as '*MaKwere-Kwere*'; using local words and comments that are abusive and inhumane; poor service in cafeteria because foreigners do not speak the local language; hostility from staff because of an inability to speak Sepedi; local students deliberately speaking in their mother-tongue to exclude foreign students; people judging students based on their English accent and refusal to communicate with them; local students refusing to speak English when foreign students are present and teasing foreign students when they bring this to their attention; lecturers use of local languages in the class when they are aware that there are foreign students.

Students also experienced discrimination by service-staff of the university. These occurred in areas such as accommodation/residences and security. One student reported that he experienced problems gaining access to postgraduate accommodation: 'I could not secure postgraduate accommodation because I was told that some students were not willing to stay with a Zimbabwean'. Another student said that his residence application 'went missing' and the accommodation officer (who he claims was drunk), criticised international students by saying that 'we are given more attention than other students'. Another concern was that 'in their formulation of policies on residences, there is no consideration for international students ... for allocation of rooms at the beginning of the year'.

Some students' experiences of xenophobia centred on issues of security, both on and off the campus. For foreign students, fear is a part of their daily experiences. One student cited an incident involving the local police who refused to assist a group of four girls after they indicated that they could not speak the local language. Foreign students also experienced discrimination by being called various names and by being teased. Name-calling was almost always associated with the language issue discussed previously. Local students often label foreign students. A name cited by students was '*kwere-kwere*'; this means 'a foreigner' in the local languages. Other studies have also cited the use of name-calling as a xenophobic act (Sookrajh *et al.* 2005:6; Tsai 2006:3). They have also cited '*kwere-kwere*' as the name used. It seems to be a derogatory term used to invoke some sort of marginalisation. Name-calling can be demeaning, leaving the foreign student emotionally vulnerable. Language, in this context, is used to socially exclude foreign students from the 'normal' university experience. It also causes conflict during lectures where local languages are deliberately used to exclude students. This link to social conflict theory shows that students do not necessarily have to be separated into working and upper class to experience conflict; their social circumstances also contribute to xenophobia.

	Name-calling	Class discussions in local language	Local cliques	Accommodation	Non-inclusion in residences	Blamed for violence
Number of Yes responses (n=50)	26	21	22	29	9	10

**Table 2 – Summary of xenophobic experiences**

Table 2 shows a summary of the xenophobic experiences of the sampled students. Of the 50 students surveyed, 52% experienced name-calling in the local African languages. This implies that this practice is fairly widely used. It is important to note here that some of the respondents do not believe that

name calling constitutes xenophobia because in their initial response, only 42% stated that they experienced xenophobia. Whilst name-calling may seem less significant compared to violent acts of xenophobia, according to psycho-social theory, this has psycho-social effects on the foreign student, especially in an environment where intellectual capital is valued. It was also apparent from the foreign students' responses that a significant percentage (42%) was excluded from class discussions because they were conducted in a local language which was not understood by the foreign students. It is important to note that the local language is used deliberately here with the intention of excluding foreign students. Such behaviour alienates the foreign student, creating a sense of 'not belonging'. Through the formation of cliques, 44% of the sampled foreign students felt excluded from class discussions and social interactions. Cliques form when one group is usually trying to gain domination. Cliques are related to power struggles (Seedat *et al.* 2010). The target is usually someone who is in a position of 'weakness' or a minority group, in this case, the foreign student. Students who are in a 'position of weakness' within a social community may also experience power struggles as explained under social conflict theory.

A significant percentage (42%) of the sample also experienced some form of discrimination in relation to allocation of residences. The sentiment expressed by respondents was that postgraduate residence allocations favour local students. This allegation would need to be verified against the records of the university as postgraduate accommodation is usually in high demand. However, the findings indicated that students in residences felt a sense of acceptance in the residences with only 18% reporting feeling 'excluded' from the residences. Also, a small percentage (20%) indicated that they were implicated when incidents of violence occurred in the residences or the surrounding community.

From the interviews conducted, the data is presented and discussed under the following headings: personal xenophobic experiences; other foreign student's xenophobic experiences; safety concerns of foreign students; hostility towards foreign students; suggestions and comments from foreign students on xenophobia.

The following are some of the personal xenophobic experiences of selected students in the study:

- In first year, I wanted to get to know a female classmate so we could form a study group; she told me she can't befriend a kwere-kwere.
- Generally my South African classmates show a great dislike of my presence, which is often characterised by local comments and words which I have come to learn are abusive, inhumane to such an extent I can't write them let alone imagine them.
- Was once told to my face that Zimbabweans should be removed from activities of the international students because they are not international based on their appearance.
- I could not secure postgraduate accommodation because I was told some students were not willing to stay with a Zimbabwean.
- I had a hard time being registered in my first year, together with my colleagues from Zimbabwe and Nigeria, due to the fact that we were not South African citizens.
- The police station officers in town would not help us (myself and 3 other female students) even after we made it clear to them that we do not understand what they are saying.
- On campus, I once got stabbed mostly because I could not relate to 6 Shangani guys (identified by a passer-by).
- I have been told in a lecture hall to go back to my country.
- Reaction of certain people (especially vocally) based on their stereotype beliefs about Nigeria and Nigerians at large.

From the personal experiences cited above, it is clearly evident that foreign students experience mainly non-violent forms of xenophobia. Social conflict, as previously explained, may be subtle; however, the effect is still substantial on the foreign student. In an academic and intellectual environment, these

experiences are almost expected because violent forms of xenophobia are generally not tolerated in such an environment. However, Frustration-Aggression theory, as espoused by Soyombe (2008), is evident in such xenophobic practices. The perpetrators are aware of their environment and its policies, so they express their frustrations on unsuspecting foreign students. The foreign students, on the other hand, may not be physical victims of xenophobia but they bear the emotional and psychological scars of xenophobic encounters.

Sampled students also cited xenophobic experiences of other foreign students that they were aware of.

- She had an encounter with a residence manager when she went to her office consistently to complain about the sockets in her room which were out of order. She (residence manager) reached a point of uttering poignant words that this is not Mugabe's university and she should not bring her Zimbabwean tendencies in her office, but her complaint was justifiable.
- She was denied services at a public hospital simply because she could not speak Sepedi.
- South African colleagues refused to take food from her saying she'll poison them.
- A cousin had visitors from Zimbabwe who were brutally chucked out of her residence on allegations of co-letting regardless of them producing identification with the same surname as her.
- A group of guys had targeted a Zimbabwean student for a long time. One day when he was coming from studying, they attacked him. They did not even steal anything from him.
- Knife attack which happened last semester.
- Mostly asked why we are here in South Africa, don't you have universities?

- She was excluded from attending a conference in Eastern Cape (masters student).
- One guy was denied an affiliation form to join the soccer league by fellow students (South Africans).
- Students have been stereotyped as thieves because they come from Zim.
- Jokes are made about how poor, ugly or remote some of our countries of origin are.
- A student from Nigeria was called a crook and drug-dealer, just for being from Nigeria.
- A friend of mine has been imprisoned on campus twice with charges on both occasions being dropped after threats to take up a legal case.
- One of my houseboys, who was a lecturer, was not given a new contract because he was a foreigner. His job was given to a less qualified student.
- My friends experience resentment, in the residences trash/refuse is often dumped on your door.

From these quotations of xenophobic behaviour that foreign students experience, it is evident that foreign students and their friends experience such incidents on an on-going basis. What is also evident is that their general campus-life experience is marked with such incidents from time to time. It is also apparent that local students and service providers generally target them in relation to poor service delivery. This shows a broader picture of social conflict as it points to how the broader university community engages in xenophobia.

When foreign students were asked about their safety concerns, a very interesting scenario emerged; 42% felt unsafe as a foreign student in South Africa, 54% felt safe as a foreign student in South Africa and 4% felt both

safe and unsafe. Of the students who felt unsafe, their explanations were as follows: they take precautionary measures, especially at night, as they are not sure about South African reactions to foreigners; locals have xenophobic mind-sets; the crime rate is high in the local community; students carry weapons with them; and negative discussions about Zimbabweans by locals.

Conversely, majority of the students felt safe as foreign students in South Africa. They gave the following reasons for feeling safe: locals are left alone because South Africa is their country; South Africans accept them and are eager to learn their languages; people are generally friendly; they get good reception at the international office; living on the university premises is safer than living outside; South Africa has laws that protect foreigners; permission in the form of a legal passport ensures freedom and safety; they have made friends with local students who have taught them the local culture; and they have defence skills in martial arts.

Of the two respondents who felt safe and unsafe, both stated that they felt safe within the campus, however, they felt unsafe outside the campus (On campus yes but out on the streets no because of the high rates of violence in this country). The safety concerns of the foreign students are linked to their experiences and perceptions of xenophobia. Personal attitudes towards safety and the precautions taken also affect their feeling of being safe. Interestingly, many students made specific mention of their feelings of safety within the confines of the campus as opposed to living and interacting with people outside the campus.

Foreign students were also asked to reflect on their experiences of hostility from South African students. Again, their responses were divided with 50% feeling that South African students were hostile towards foreign students and 42% felt that there was no hostility; 8% felt that some are hostile whilst others are not.

The final section contains suggestions and comments from foreign students on xenophobia. This section was included in the interview to allow respondents to raise issues on xenophobia that they felt were pertinent. It also allows for differing views to be considered from the experiences of the students. The following are selected suggestions and comments made by the students: the student population should be encouraged to find out, learn more or travel to other countries so that they get a clear perspective of different people before they stereotype international students; xenophobic attacks are

not only through violent attacks but also through words; there should be campaigns and mass education on highlighting how it is wrong to be hostile to foreigners; xenophobic experiences are mostly prevalent between uneducated and hostile students and staff; university by definition is a place of learning, the university students should co-exist irrespective of race, cultures, gender; locals must accept foreign students, since they are all Africans; South African students do not have knowledge about their foreign counterparts; some students/people should just accept that foreign students come to learn, not to cause trouble; South Africans at large should just accept the fact that the world has changed and even if they do not like to travel and explore other people's culture, the world and its populace is now global and people from other parts of the world will come to their country to experience South Africa; the university should craft policies which protect the foreign student; the staff (non-academic as well) should communicate with students in English as opposed to their native languages; students have to be taught/educated on how to co-live with internationals just like they would with locals from a different tribal group; administrators, housing staff and people in the finance department need particular attention; workshops and seminars should be organised to facilitate training; locals and foreigners should be mixed in the allocation of rooms so that they learn one others' lifestyle; campaigns and workshops of oneness should be hosted; and acceptance should be promoted.

The suggestions and comments by foreign students indicate a maturity in their views on this subject. Their suggestions indicated that they understood the nature of xenophobia as they experienced it. Their broader perspective on the issue also stems from the fact that they have had the experience of living in a foreign country. The review of the literature and associated theories, the experiences of xenophobia by students and the suggestions that they made are consolidated into the next section which makes recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

- The entire university community needs to be educated about the presence and treatment of international students from a xenophobia perspective. This includes staff, students, non-academic departments

(finance, accommodation, security, catering), community service providers (hospitals, clinics, police) and the general community (taxi industry, community leaders, religious leaders).

- Awareness must be created about the university's policies concerning international students and general policies on language, staff conduct, residences and complaints procedures. This awareness will enable better interaction and communication for all students at the university.
- Students must make use of the university hotline to report complaints anonymously. This allows students affected by xenophobic practices to make the university management aware so that measures can be put in place to prevent xenophobia amongst students.
- In order to recruit and retain international students, adequate accommodation should be made available for these students. The greater the number of international students at a university the more exposure the university receives on a global level. This creates positive spin-offs for the university (funding, students, international rating).

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# **The Complexities of Being a Foreign African Student in a South African Tertiary Institution**

**Janet Muthuki**

## **Abstract**

This article is based on a study which focuses on the experiences of foreign African students as they became ‘insinuated’ into new gendered contexts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban South Africa. UKZN is not only global and universal as can be observed by the number of foreign or international students but is also integrated into a given society and region as well as social, political and economic system. As a result of immersing themselves in this context, foreign African students must negotiate this new social and cultural environment. For instance, by immersing themselves in a new South African context, the students by their very status as African foreigners became vulnerable to xenophobia a phenomenon they assert is not common in their home countries. This article begins by giving the background of UKZN and locates it in the broader South African social-political and economic context. Using data elicited by the use of in-depth interviews within a qualitative paradigm this article thereafter examines the varying shades of xenophobia experienced by these students as African foreigners. The article also looks into the gendered nature of xenophobia.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, Afrophobia, Xenophilia, foreign African students

## **Introduction and Background of the Study**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is as a result of the merger between the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville in

January 2004. The South African government higher education restructuring plans led to this merger whose objective was,

To promote access to learning that will expand educational and employment opportunities for the historically disadvantaged and support social transformation and redress of the devastating legacy of apartheid education (Makgoba 2004:3).

It is instructive to highlight that other African countries played an enormous role in the anti-apartheid struggle either by pressurizing international bodies in condemning apartheid and by supporting the military struggle.

The post-apartheid system of education in South Africa had previously been elitist and exclusionary. However, with the change to a democratic government, the number of international students increased steadily. Moja (2002) proposes that a balance be struck between responding to inherited problems of the legacies of apartheid and new demands of internalisation of South African education. International students or foreign students are an integral part of an internationally recognised institution and it is important to recognise the academic, cultural and financial benefits to be gained from these students. UKZN advances that its commitment to internalisation is embedded in its stated intention ‘To be a world class university and an active global player’.

Ramphela (1999) describes the university as global and universal as well as local and regional with the issue of foreign or international students depicting the global nature of university education. This then means that universities are integrated into a given society and region, social, political and economic system. Geographically, in terms of place, the UKZN is embedded in concentric local contexts namely; in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, in KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa and in the global South each of which is a viable geographical context. Durban where the interviews in the study took place is one of the four major urban industrial centres in South Africa and is located in the province of KwaZulu- Natal (KZN). KZN also known as the Zulu Kingdom is one of the most densely populated provinces in South Africa and is home to the isiZulu speaking group of people.

The specificity of Durban as compared to other towns in South Africa is the mix of cultures and races. Alongside Black Africans and the

white population, Durban has a large Indian population, the largest outside of India (Bhana 1990). Despite the close proximity of these different groups however, they are marked by huge disparities in resources and opportunities and are highly racialised. From a socio-political perspective arising from South Africa's national history, the legacy of apartheid is a society that is deeply fragmented and divided. Pattman (2007) in his article, *The significance students attach to race at the University of KwaZulu-Natal* notes that despite the UKZN merger, race continues to be an important marker of student identities and group affiliations.

These time-space relations are a major factor in the constitution of societies according to Gregory (1994). Giddens (1984) advances that people not only make histories but also make geographies. This is useful in transitional societies that are charting different courses from processes such as colonisation and apartheid in the case of South Africa. In these regions, the history and geography of the place are essential to understanding political, social and economic changes occurring there. It is against this backdrop therefore that foreign students of African origin immersed themselves in a new different South African context.

The term foreign has however increasingly acquired negative connotations in the South African context. The issue of foreignness has been a source of much tension between a group of largely black South African students and foreign students of African origin. South African students feel deprived and invoke their South African citizenship in the wake of competition from foreign students for local resources in order to make ends meet. The situation is further problematised by the promotion of equity in terms of race to which the South African government has committed itself which is seen as open to abuse by foreign students of African origin who stand to gain from its undifferentiated use. Of great significance is the reality that these students are better equipped since they were spared the Bantu education and can therefore compete on merit for undergraduate, postgraduate and staff positions (see Ramphela 1999). The frustration of the South Africans who were excluded from the formal South African educational system under the apartheid system when they perceive a group of foreign nationals as a threat with regards to the opportunities they fought for, is understandable.

Foreign students of African origin are however not a homogenous

group since they come from different countries such as those in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. Language barriers especially for those from Francophone Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC hereafter), ensure that they do not get the same job opportunities as those from Anglophone Africa. Further, despite the opportunity structures in place such as the UKZN Graduate scholarship offering fee remission for postgraduate students and the opportunity to be tutor or contract lecturer, foreign students also felt constrained as foreign nationals in terms of accessing other opportunities which were available to local students. The foreign African students were keenly aware that they were foreign nationals due to lack of access to other scholarships and lower remuneration rates at their work places. The negotiation of being of a foreign African national in a South African tertiary institution was further problematized by the phenomenon of xenophobia<sup>1</sup>. Xenophobia is typically defined as the ‘dislike’, ‘hatred or fear of foreigners’ (Harris 2002: 169). Importantly, however, as Harris (2002: 170) correctly emphasises, xenophobia is ‘not just an attitude as the standard definition of the phenomenon implies, it is also an action.

The findings of this article are based on a qualitative study which sought to examine the discursive and social practices through which the foreign students of African origin come to perceive South African gender norms and how these new gender norms either challenged or supported their own gender norms. In conducting in-depth interviews over a period of one year from March 2008 to March 2009, I used open-ended questions to enable the students to reflect on and give detailed accounts and perceptions of the myriad contradictions and complexities of their experiences of renegotiating the new geopolitical and social context in South Africa. The study sample comprised of twenty two foreign African students (both men and women) hailing from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda,

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophobia is derived from the Greek words *xenos* (foreign) and *phobos* (fear) and can be defined as the attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perceptions that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity (UNHCR, International Labour Organisation and International Organisation for Migration, 2001).

Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Liberia.

The study employed social identity theory to examine the ways in which foreign African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal constructed and modified their social identities in relation to the identities of other groups in the South African context. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan 2002). This can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity, which refers to self-knowledge that derives from the individual's unique attributes. An important aspect of this theory is that it recognises that different social groups vary in terms of the power and status they have in society. Social identities are always constructed and modified in relation to the identities of other groups: mainstream and subordinate, proximal and spatially distant (see Dolby & Cornbleth 2001). Social identities are in motion in multiple ways, not only in relation to other groups and their enactment of selves but also in relation to the dynamics of geographic place. Social identity theory enabled me to examine how foreign students of African origin negotiated the complex geopolitical and social context in South Africa.

### **Varying Shades of Perceived Xenophobia**

With the advent of democracy, the legacies of the apartheid system combined with new forms of discrimination, such as xenophobia toward African refugees and immigrants, have played out through the country's period of political transition. A national survey on South African attitudes on immigration in 1997 revealed that South Africans were more hostile to immigration than citizens of any other country for which comparable data was available. Foreign African nationals are perceived by local South Africans as an economic threat and as people who have come to take their employment opportunities (Crush 2008).

At the time of conducting this research, xenophobia had reached unprecedented proportions in South Africa with violent attacks against foreign African nationals in May 2008 in Gauteng Province. Xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals were also reported in the Western Cape Province immediately after the FIFA 2010 World Cup. Xenophobic prejudice is manifested in various ways and is sometimes subtle and

sometimes obvious. Given the background of hostilities by local South Africans towards other African nationals, any form of discrimination against these foreign African nationals is perceived as being tinged with xenophobia.

According to the foreign African students, one of the ways in which they experienced xenophobia was when local students and sometimes staff members would speak to them in local languages such as isiZulu. The fact that they did not speak isiZulu created a gap between them and the black South African students and they had to contend with being called names such as *Makwerekwere*<sup>2</sup>.

Even whilst carrying out their work duties foreign African students contended with being misunderstood. Norah from Cameroon gave an example of how a misunderstanding ensued between her and a student in a tutorial while they were discussing factors affecting migration to South Africa. According to Norah the misunderstanding may have occurred on the basis that she was a foreign national and seemed to be insinuating that South Africans had HIV/AIDS. The discussion was centered on factors leading to migration in South Africa and how the broad based pyramid<sup>3</sup> was increasing. When HIV/ AIDS emerged as a factor that could lead to the decrease of the pyramid, the student interpreted this to mean that Norah as a foreign national was insinuating that it was only South Africans who had HIV/AIDS. Norah on her part expressed that the student may have been of the opinion that it was foreign nationals who were responsible for the transmission of HIV/AIDS to South Africans. This situation is indicative of the tensions existing between foreign African students and local South African students due to the perceived hostilities of local black South Africans towards foreign African nationals.

Another area of contention was in the documentary requirements at the level of admission and registration. While foreign students of African

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<sup>2</sup> The word *Kwerekwere* is a derogatory word denoting one who cannot speak or understand the speaker's language.

<sup>3</sup> A population pyramid with a broad base suggests a population with a relatively high birth- rate or a high volume of migration. A decrease in the pyramid may be occasioned by fluctuations in the number of births or volumes of migration or a rise in the number of deaths as a result of war or epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.

origin acknowledged that they did not expect to get the same treatment as local students since they were not South African citizens, they felt that the requirements expected of them were very stringent. These requirements were in various forms such as the payment of the International student levy for foreign students of African origin alongside students from Europe and America who students felt were more financially endowed.

The distinction between foreign African students and local South African students also appeared to have taken a new dimension at the UKZN Human Resources department as is amplified in the following excerpt by Koffie from the DRC:

To me I understand I'm a foreign student and I don't expect to be treated as a local. What makes me now look at it is when South Africans own the African identity. They now differentiate between foreign and African. It is obvious I'm a foreign national. The only problem that I have with it is when the African identity is given to a South African and you call me foreign because I'm not South African. On my side I don't know what the idea behind it is and when you come give me another identity I have a problem with that (Koffie, DRC).

Koffie was referring to the race section in the UKZN remuneration forms from the Human resources department where a distinction was made between 'foreigner' and 'African' in the race section. While this may not have presented a problem for foreign students from outside Africa, it was problematic for foreign African students. The term 'foreigner' in this case is used as a distinct category and serves to exclude the foreign students of African origin from identifying themselves as African and confines the African identity to 'black' South Africans. This presents a paradox in the sense that on the one hand there is an assertion by South Africans of Africanness in order to differentiate the new identity from the erstwhile white South African identity. On the other hand, a sense of South African exceptionalism promotes nationalist chauvinistic tendencies, ostensibly targeting foreigner Africans (see Thakur 2011) as explained in a subsequent section.

At the State level, there has been increasing stringent immigration controls from the department of Home Affairs in terms of the following: study permits, visa acquisition and renewal and repatriation requirements.

These requirements are understandable but the only challenge is that visa renewals frequently happen at the end of the year when students are in the last stages of writing their examinations or their theses in a bid to meet the submission deadlines. Koffie from the DRC, decried the bureaucratic process involved in acquiring a study permit and expressed that the International Students Office should be more pro-active in assisting foreign students to renew their study permits

I think in South Africa, it is not the policies that have much of a problem though there needs to be some changes. I would say mostly it is the attitude of the personnel. For example you can go to home Affairs and spend the whole day waiting for visa renewal. You can even be told to come back on another day. I think the processes need to be made easier. I think the international student's office needs to have foreigners in their staff because it is only a foreigner who will understand foreign students. The staff members there are South Africans and you can even ask them which counter you go to renew your visa and they would not know (Koffie, DRC).

Some of these processes are administrative on the part of South African institutions to ensure immigration control and ensure that local South Africans are not denied opportunities due to them as citizens. These stringent processes and requirements are however perceived as being punitive and as governed by xenophobia by foreign African students.

### **Sentiments on Xenophobia and the Philosophy of Ubuntu**

In terms of social interactions, most students expressed that black South Africans were largely hostile to their presence which was contrary to the experience in their home countries where people were open and hospitable to foreign nationals. This can be observed from the following data excerpts:

As Malawians we are very friendly to foreigners. It was instilled in us by the former president Levi Mwanawasa that when a foreigner comes we must ask where they are from, where they want to go,

what can we do for you and all that. That is why Malawi is called the warm heart of Africa because it is really warm (Purity from Malawi).

It is here that they treat foreigners differently. At home we welcome foreigners and treat them very well. It is so strange here that people treat foreigners differently and these are people who come once in a while and so you should treat them in a way that they come more often. South Africans and especially the blacks make us not want to stay here (Norah from Cameroon).

The hostility of South Africans towards foreign African nationals was baffling to many of the foreign African students who found it contrary to the *ubuntu* philosophy which South Africans purported to embrace. In the words of the South African Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu a person with *ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such a person is open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole (Panse 2006).

The foreign African students further felt that South Africans exhibited a sense of superiority towards them. Maina from Kenya and Koffie from the DRC expounded on this in the following manner:

Being a foreigner is disadvantageous because there is a very negative perception about foreigners especially amongst the black locals. There is this perception of superiority here where South Africans keep asking you, ‘You come from Africa?’ I think that is quite negative. Most of them are very negative and that is why I say that this is a hostile environment (Maina from Kenya).

South Africans – I don’t know whether it’s because of being exposed or it’s their type of society that makes them consider that they are no longer Africans. As much as they keep on saying *Ubuntu*- they don’t have it (Koffie from the DRC).

The sentiments from the above excerpts concur with Crush (2008), who

advances that the rise in xenophobia in the 1990's cannot be isolated from the country's apartheid past of racial and class segregation and attitudes of uniqueness and superiority towards the rest of Africa. Even though spatially located in Africa, the Apartheid regime had consciously situated itself ideologically, temporally and dispositionally in the western, white world. Fanon (1990) identifies xenophobia as a form of fragile sense of national consciousness by the national bourgeoisie to mimic its western counterpart.

## Xenophobia or Afrophobia?

The use of the term xenophobia may imply that all foreigners in South Africa are likely to be mistreated. However in the South African context, xenophobia is not directed at just anyone. It is largely directed at people of colour. This means that the mistreatment is more directed to their being black rather than being foreign. Gqola (2008) in fact argues that the predominant nature of the violence directed against foreigners in South Africa in May 2008 was more than simply a case of xenophobia. It was also negrophobic in character (Gqola 2008; Fanon 1990). Fanon (1990) describes this kind of violence as often directed at the self or at the self as reflected in the 'Other'. In explaining Afrophobia, Gordon (1997) has explained that in black gang wars, black people re-enact white violence against each other as a result of internalized self-hatred due to issues of hunger, hopelessness, and poverty. While poverty triggers violence, mental colonisation has been said to be at the heart of Afrophobia.

Olomide and Kabilia from the DRC in concurrence with this position highlighted that it was not just that South Africans were hostile to foreign Africans but that it was not unusual for Africans to be hostile to one another. Olomide and Kabilia reflected on their experiences back home in the DRC and expressed that the principles of *ubuntu* were no longer practiced by Africans and the mention of *ubuntu* was just a matter of rhetoric. Olomide from the DRC said that he was undaunted by xenophobia since he was still at home in Africa and that xenophobia in South Africa was not much different from the situation back home in the DRC.

The DRC has experienced war due to a number of complex reasons including conflicts over basic resources such as water, access and control over rich minerals and other resources as well as various political agendas.

The five year war which involved the armies of five other countries, officially ended in 2003 and democratic elections were held in 2006. However, the fighting involving a plethora of armed groups continues, especially in the east of this mineral-rich country. The fighting in North Kivu, eastern DRC, has forced tens of thousands of refugees to flee their homes. Olomide who sees himself as more of an African than a Congolese takes the issue of African hostility against fellow Africans as a phenomenon that goes beyond the confines of South Africa. Kabila also from the DRC took it a step further by advancing the following:

When I consider the war in the DRC and the xenophobia in South Africa, I do not think that as Africans we love each other, the philosophy of *ubuntu* is a lie. People do not practice it they just speak about it (Kabila, DRC).

Clearly, violent attacks against fellow Africans has to do with unequal distribution of resources. While the anger of the disenfranchised is legitimate it needs to be directed to the oppressive government and the wealthy elite. Afrophobia can then only be dealt with by ending hunger, homelessness and redistribution of wealth.

## **The Gender Dimension of Xenophobia**

Migrants are, by their very status as foreigners vulnerable to xenophobia and in the case of the South African context Afrophobia. Violence against foreign nationals and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but are normalised in ways in which the South African society interacts with minority and vulnerable groups. Foreign women in South Africa therefore face a double jeopardy since they are at the intersection of these two groups that are so vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence. The women students interviewed expressed their vulnerability in South Africa in that they could be more easily taken advantage of and even be raped as compared to their male counterparts. Sexual violence is well documented in South Africa as a means to control and punish women. While it may be argued that this is applicable to all women in South Africa, in a country where sexual violence is pervasive in everyday life, it is difficult

to distinguish between rapes motivated by xenophobic attitudes from those perpetrated because the general atmosphere of violence and lawlessness has allowed for it. In both cases, foreign African women students face a form of violence because of their gender.

Men's experiences of xenophobia however highlighted different gender dynamics. Men expressed that they experienced xenophobia not only because they were perceived as coming to take away opportunities from the South Africans but also because they were taking the South African women as well. This is illustrated by the excerpts below:

The South Africans are xenophobic especially to men. I think they (foreign men) are better to women. There tends to be this notion amongst ladies that they like foreign guys. Maybe they tend to be inquisitive and they tend to think that we are much better than South African guys in terms of handling situations such as treating them better in relationships (Zebedee, Zimbabwe).

The men are ... I have heard from others, they tend not to be too open to foreigners. I have heard that South African women like going out with foreign men because they are more kind and they know how to treat a woman (James, Cameroon).

From the excerpts, it appears that it is South African men who were xenophobic towards foreign African men because of the perception that these men treated women better than South African men. While this generated hostility from African men in South Africa and has been cited as a factor in contributing to their xenophobic attitude, foreign men asserted that they treated women with greater respect than Zulu men. They constructed Zulu men as deeply patriarchal and disrespectful of women. It is interesting to note that foreign African men described Zulu men as deeply patriarchal while they were also from patriarchal backgrounds and were unwilling to give up the patriarchal privilege that accorded power and prestige to men. Constructing themselves as less patriarchal could have been a way of reasserting their perceived superiority over Zulu men.

South African men were portrayed as less progressive than the South African women who were the ones supporting the men and the families.

Apartheid policies in many forms directly impacted on family cohesion and reinforced the destructive influences that urbanisation and industrialisation had on the family. Thus, one consequence of the legacy of apartheid is the high number of single parent families, resulting largely from pregnancy outside marriage and from divorce. As a large proportion of the nation's children grow up in female-headed households with little financial support, the African family in South Africa has continued to suffer considerably greater disintegration than families have in the rest of the continent (Preston-White 1993).

The notion that South African women are more attracted to foreign African men exemplifies an intriguing facet of South African women by amplifying the little studied phenomena of xenophilia. Xenophilia is the love for the foreign national that is also part and parcel of the encounter between foreign Africans and locals (see Sichone 2008). Sichone(2008) further shows that friendships and marriages between foreign men and South African serve to sustain male migrants and promote re-Africanisation, as some of the migrants teach their South African partners to cook dishes from central and West Africa. South African women are said to be attracted to foreign African men based on the perception that they treated women better and were less prone to violence. This attraction may also be due to the fact that they were foreign, new, spoke a strange language and they expressed their love in new ways. This then served to elevate the foreign African men in the eyes of South African women while they were vilified in the eyes of African men from South Africa.

## **Conclusions**

This article has provided a nuanced analysis of the complexities experienced by foreign African students at UKZN as a result of immersing themselves in a new context in South Africa. Various shades of xenophobia as perceived by the students were explored alongside the specificity of xenophobia in the South African context. Sevenzo (2010) has advanced that xenophobia in South Africa has emerged potently in form of 'Afro-phobia'. According to Thakur (2011), the xenophobic discourse has the same notions about 'Black Africa' as its predecessor regime under Apartheid propagated and hence the hatred for the African 'other'. While focus continues to be directed at South

Africans' hostility towards foreigners, this study has shown how African foreigners on the other hand perceive South Africans and especially the Zulus in a negative light and in many ways seek to show their superiority over them. This struggle for superiority is encapsulated by the insights of two students from the conflict ridden DRC who now question whether the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is a reality in Africa. Of great significance was that it was the foreign African men who sought to establish dominance over the Zulu men and women in general.

The article has further examined the intersectionality of xenophobia by highlighting the double jeopardy faced by foreign African women in the form of violence as foreign nationals and violence as women. On the part of the men the study revealed that while they faced hostility from South African men there were opportunities of hospitality from South African women in the form of relationships and marriage under the little mentioned phenomenon of xenophilia. Clearly, the reaction towards African nationals by South Africans is nuanced and complex. Xenophobia in the South African context is diverse and as advanced by Thakur (2011) its understanding calls for an intervention that aims to understand the difficulties experienced particularly by the marginalised in South African society, not only through the present, but also through the past. This understanding in turn needs to be examined in terms of how it influences South Africans' responses to African foreigners and the rights of the latter in South Africa.

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# ***'They call us Makwerekweres'* – Foreign Learners Speak out against Xenophobia**

**Nirmala Gopal**

## **Abstract**

While a number of studies on xenophobia have been conducted in South Africa, very little has been done to establish the effects of xenophobia on foreigners in schools. To help remedy the dearth of studies in this area, this article aimed to provide emic perspective on xenophobia from a select sample of Grade 12 foreign learners. Through the use of interviews, the study explored how these learners experience their host country, South Africa, five years after the widely publicized xenophobic violence. Thematic analysis of responses indicated, profoundly, learners' thoughts and feelings on xenophobia. Participants described their emotional and physical exposure to various forms of xenophobia perpetrated either at the level of the community and/or the school. Participants felt that South Africans who do not take responsibility for their behavior shift blame to foreigners, hence fuelling xenophobia. Although learners perceive South Africa as a beautiful country with much to offer, they prefer migrating to countries with better opportunities. This research provided a baseline for further research into this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Learners, Xenophobia, Perceptions

## **Introduction**

Views on xenophobia appear divided with some scholars arguing that

xenophobia is rooted in history, others that modernization intensifies the unevenness of the global economy. Nyamnjoh (2006) blames xenophobia on an inconsistent set of global processes, marked with closures in the borderless flows and boundless opportunities accentuated by free movement of capital, creating economic disparities between countries and regions. The ‘human development outcomes of xenophobia for both migrant and host populations are negative, pernicious, and damaging’. Attacks on non-nationals signify a threat to social order and justice which typifies lawlessness. When social conflict ensues, human rights are violated in the process as discrimination and ill-treatment of foreigners becomes socially acceptable leading to anarchism as was the case in the 2008 South African xenophobic attacks which made international headlines. This was a time when black foreigners living in informal settlements, particularly, were criminally attacked by local groups of Black Africans who accused foreigners of displacing them economically. This is a relevant example of how Xenophobia exacerbates the vulnerability of migrant groups, exposing them to regular harassment, intimidation, and abuse by citizens, employers, and law enforcement agencies. Crush (2000) argues that South Africans’ negative attitudes towards non-nationals are largely oriented towards other Africans, although there are increasing reports of discrimination towards new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent.

## **Looking at ‘Xenophobia’ Internationally and Nationally**

Mayfield (2010) comments on the xenophobia in Europe perpetrated through the xenophobic right. According to Mayfield the chief reason behind the rise of the xenophobic right in the European Union (EU) is *not* the economic alternatives it offers, but rather its hostility towards unrestricted immigration from Africa, Asia, and the Balkans. Xenophobic parties in Europe range from simply wanting tighter border controls, to calling for a ‘whites-only’ immigration policy, to demanding the wholesale deportation of minorities.

In the EU although xenophobia is focused on Muslim immigrants, especially Moroccans, Indonesians, Arabs, Somalis, Afghans, and Pakistanis, as well as African blacks it is often equally harsh against other European or ‘white’ immigrants, particularly Albanians, Bosnians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Poles, Balts, Romanians, and Russians. In Italy, the

center-right *Lega Nord* is more xenophobic towards Southern Italians than towards Muslims (Mayfield 2010).

Foreign nationals, including learners, residing in South Africa are protected in the South African constitution and by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) from xenophobic violence. Even the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) has pointed out in its Braamfontein Statement that '*No one, whether in this country legally or not, can be deprived of his or her basic or fundamental rights and cannot be treated as less than human further reinforces protection of foreign learners*'. The South African Constitution seeks to construct a society where 'human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms' are abiding values. The implication of this is clear; xenophobic attitudes and practices violate the spirit and letter of the South African Constitution. Despite national and international legal protection for non-nationals, xenophobic attacks or xenophobia has a long history in South Africa. Reitzes (in Richards 2009) in examining the history of South Africa's immigration policy suggests that the policy is rooted in South Africa's racialised past and the political economy of the country. She highlights the racially discriminatory nature of South Africa's immigration policy, from as far back as 1913 through to the passing of the country's Immigration Act in 2002. She argues that South Africa's immigration policy has contributed towards conceptions of South African national identity and the construction of 'others', comprising migrants who are non-South African, indirectly perpetuating racial exclusionary practices and adding fuel to xenophobic sentiments and violence against foreign nationals. Misago (in Richards 2009) notes that xenophobic and anti-'outsider' violence have been a long-standing and increasing feature in post-apartheid South Africa. Negative attitudes to foreign nationals have also emerged through surveys. For example, in 1997 a survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) concluded that 25% of South Africans wanted a total prohibition of migration or immigration and 22% wanted the South African government to return all foreigners presently living in South Africa to their own countries. 45% of the sample called for strict limits to be placed on migrants and immigrants and 17% wanted migration policy tied to the availability of jobs. More generally other studies (Sooklal, Gopal & Maharaj 2005; Osman 2009) have shown that xenophobia is a global problem that has been experienced in

both industrialised and developing countries and impacts adults and learners alike.

As early as 1995, a report by the Southern African Bishops' Conference concluded that 'There is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country .... One of the main problems is that a variety of people have been lumped together under the title of 'illegal immigrants' and the whole situation of demonizing immigrants are feeding the xenophobia phenomenon.' In late 2000 there was a spate of xenophobic murders in Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu, followed by attacks in Milnerton and Bellville South, and a total of 12 such murders were reported for 2000. In 2001 nine Angolans were murdered in Cape Town, including two Angolan brothers who were burned to death in a shack in Langa. Later in the year, locals in Du Noon, Western Cape, drove foreigners out of the settlement; and a mob of locals violently chased Zimbabweans from Zandspruit informal settlement, Gauteng, before torching their homes and businesses, with more than 800 Zimbabweans fleeing their homes – 112 shacks were gutted and 126 dwellings looted. In January 2002, police backed by soldiers descended on Milnerton, Western Cape, where violent clashes between locals and Angolan refugees left three Angolans and a South African dead, and a house gutted by fire.

Undergirded by a background that has stimulated the discourse on xenophobia this article emphasizes specifically how a group of Durban secondary school learners perceive themselves as victims of xenophobia. The aim of this study is not to understand individual constructions of xenophobia but instead to probe the discursive views through which participants give meaning to xenophobia.

Given that xenophobic attitudes are strongly entrenched in South African society it is not surprising that on 11 May 2008, South Africa was shaken by the outbreak of a wave of violence characterized by an intensity and fierceness previously unknown in this young democracy and instead reminiscent of apartheid bloodshed. The most severely affected groups were Africans from neighbouring states, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but migrants from more distant countries, such as Nigeria and Somalia, as well as a few South Africans were also victims of these attacks. Almost 35,000 people had fled their homes and camped out in temporary shelters, churches and police stations. Thousands more returned to their countries of origin.

Despite this the South African government through their Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula maintained that '*the violent xenophobic attacks on foreigners have not been so widespread to constitute a 'crisis'.*'

## **Xenophobic Constructions**

For Bekker, Eigelaar-Meets, Eva, and Poole (2008) xenophobia means '*the hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers*'. For Kollapen (1999) xenophobia is an inextricable link of violence and physical abuse. He further argues that 'xenophobia' as a term must be reframed to incorporate *practice*. It is not just an attitude: it is an activity. It is not just a dislike or fear of foreigners: it is a violent practice that results in bodily harm and damage. More particularly, the violent practice that comprises xenophobia must be further refined to include its specific target, because, in South Africa, not all foreigners are uniformly victimized. Rather, black foreigners, particularly those from Africa, comprise the majority of victims. It is also important to explore why 'the unknown' represented by (largely Black) foreigners should necessarily invite repugnance, fear or aggression. Xenophobia manifests itself in various forms and its roots are equally varied (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh & Singh 2005).

## **Xenophobia and Schooling**

Schools exist primarily to ensure that effective learning takes place, so that children are socially and intellectually prepared to become responsible adults who actively participate in, and make a positive contribution to, society and the economy (Burton 2008). If learners are exposed to xenophobic violence then consistent with expectations, children who have been exposed to violence have been found to be more likely to manifest a variety of psychiatric problems including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Shields *et al.* 2008; Seedat *et al.* 2004; Ward *et al.* 2001; Ensink *et al.* 1997), with exposure to violence having been found to impact negatively on children's academic performance (Reddy *et al.* 2010; Boqwana 2009; Human Rights Watch 2001 quoted in Mkhize, Gopal & Collings 2012). Such undesirable outcomes have not, however, been found to be inevitable.

Exposure to violence or violent threats could exert greater pressure on the academic performance of foreign learners making it even more challenging for them to succeed in a country that is already foreign to them and where they may feel unwanted.

While we have insufficient assessment of the impact of xenophobia on foreign learners in South Africa, Dryden-Peterson (2010) argues that xenophobia not only furthers the social exclusion of non-nationals but also increased their economic barriers by reducing their ability to pursue livelihood activities in their host-country. Horst (2006) and Jacobsen (2005) supported this, agreeing that the limited livelihood opportunities available to non-national migrants due to their legal status result in increased poverty levels and a greater inability to cover education expenses. While some information on how foreign national learners are affected by the South African schooling system is available (Sookraj, Gopal and Maharaj 2005; Osman 2009) literature searches have exposed the dearth of literature and studies that specifically show any nexus between fear, intimidation and exposure to violence and academic performance.

## **Method**

This article is concerned specifically with the meanings of xenophobia as understood by a group of secondary school learners in the contemporary period where xenophobia remains an issue for both South Africans and foreign nationals either as perpetrators or victims. The primary aim of this study is not to understand individual constructions of xenophobia but instead probe the discursive views through which participants give meaning to xenophobia. This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 24 respondents in KwaZulu-Natal who were selected through snowball sampling across the greater Durban area. There were 12 males aged between 18 and 20, and twelve females aged between 18 and 20 who participated in the interviews (see Appendix One for a demographic profile of interviewees). Interviews were conducted at a mutually arranged venue and each interview lasted on average an hour. This study is about the individual respondents in the first instance, but is an exploration of their discursive positioning in relation to Xenophobia. Questions were facilitated by a semi-structured interview schedule which focused on issues regarding their

understanding of Xenophobia, and their recollection of the 2008 xenophobic violence that plagued South Africa. Interviews took a conversational form with individuals sharing information with great enthusiasm. Utilising a working model of thematic analysis, data were analysed through a step-by-step procedure which began by searching through the transcripts of the interviews for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006 quoted in Gopal 2013). In the second part of the analysis, codes were produced to highlight emerging patterns. Each interview was coded, and these codes were matched across the 24 interviews. A thematic map was then produced where themes (discussed in the analysis section) were further refined in relation to the data from all respondents. It is critical to note that while the majority of research on xenophobia in South Africa has focussed on the nature, extent and description of the phenomenon, this study concentrates on the dominant themes generated from the interviews, which are centred on the perceptions of learners on xenophobia. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and informed that information provided would be treated with extreme confidentiality. The only identifying data obtained from participants were age, grade, and ethnicity. Written informed consent was obtained from participants who were 18-years of age or older, with written parental consent and participant assent being obtained from younger participants. Since participation in the study was dependent on availability and willingness, the study may be limited in terms of the views of the respondents. It is also limited in that the results are not generalizable owing to the sample size. Another limitation is that the snowball sampling technique excluded participants who may have had experiences not captured in this study.

### **‘Broad’ Learner Constructions of Xenophobia**

In describing how they understood xenophobia S1 and S20 maintained ‘*it is trouble between unsatisfied people*’. According to S2 ‘*It is South African people looting foreigners for easy things*’ and for S4 ‘*It is the inhumane act of dehumanizing immigrants because of issues surrounding job opportunities and skills shortage that any country might be going through. Then start*

*attacking foreign nationals for occupying these positions'. S5 and S6 respectively asserted, 'It is when people take things from us that doesn't belong to them' and 'I think it is the fighting between people of South Africa and people that are of other countries'. For S9 'Xenophobia is an attack on us foreigners by South Africans who are not happy with us foreigners being successful,' and for S13 –'It is when people without facts start a war against people they believe invaded their space'. S14 maintained, 'It is an attack on foreign nationals' while S15 noted that 'It is an attack of unhappy South Africans against people not born in their country'. S16 and S17 shared similar views such as -'It is war on refugees by unhappy South African people'.*

S18, S19 and S23 added that xenophobia '*is when South African people take the law into their own hands and steal and kill foreigners' and or 'attack defenceless foreigners'*'. Some respondents for example S21 and S22 expressed their understanding of xenophobia as a somewhat extreme construction such as, '*Well xenophobia is the killing of foreigners by South Africans' and 'It's when people don't understand why they are not prosperous and blame foreigners for stealing from them'*'.

Responses suggest that foreign learners are aware of what constitutes xenophobia although some articulate xenophobia in elementary language.

## **Recollections of 2008 Xenophobic Attacks**

Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh, and Singh (2005) argue that South Africa's long history of racial politics and stratification has had an important, if difficult to quantify, effect on how citizens perceive non-nationals. Foreign nationals living in South Africa have been exposed to discriminatory behavior not just by South African citizens but also by state departments such as the Department of Home Affairs and the South African Police Services (SAPS). The SAPS together with criminals have a history of exploiting foreigners' vulnerabilities. Consequently, foreign nationals are possibly less likely than South Africans to feel secure in public spaces, during the day or in the evenings. Leggett's (2003) findings from a study conducted in Johannesburg were that 81% of the respondents felt unsafe compared to 38% of South Africans). A study conducted by Crush and Williams (2003) demonstrate similar percentages across the country. These feelings of being unsafe seem

justified. The Wits University survey in Johannesburg, for example, showed that 72% of migrants mentioned that either they or someone they lived with had been a victim of crime in the country, compared with 56% of South Africans.

As indicated above, the 2008 attacks were preceded by a long history. However, Misago (2009) comments that the May 2008 attacks were extraordinary in their ferocity, intensity, rapid geographic space and the harm they caused. S1 recalls '*people burning and stealing from foreigners without a reason*' and a time that '*people was chasing and killing people from other countries*'. S4 re-collects '*hearing from my friends that we were under attack by the South Africans. Reason being we were taking their jobs and women. I was advised to avoid being outside after dark hours at night. I later saw on TV what was going on and it was very scary to imagine that all foreign nationals were under attack*'.

S5 recalled, '*South African people beat us and stole from us with no reason*'. Similarly S9 remembers '*being in Cape Town at the time and seeing the news of how foreigners were being attacked and then I got a call from my brother in Johannesburg telling me that another brother of ours was injured in the attack and I thought to myself, Hell no, I didn't come here to South Africa to die, but to have a better life*'. S6 recalled '*praying very hard that the attacks don't affect me and my family by locking us up and sending us back to our country*'.

For S10 the 2008 xenophobic attacks forged greater solidarity among foreign national learners, '*During that time I remember how much closer foreigner learners had to stand together and how my fellow brothers and sisters could not even sleep*'. S11 remembered that '*my family was panicking because they thought we will be killed by South African people*', S12 recalled '*During the attacks people were saying that all foreigners must go back home and black South Africans were killing foreigners*'. S13 remembers specifically that she was '*on my way to school when my friends said I must go back home because South African people were beating and killing foreigners and I remember being very scared*'.

As indicated above the May 2008 attacks were unmatched by previous forms of xenophobic attacks or episodes. When respondents were asked for the causes of the attacks, not surprisingly one respondent S17 claimed '*All I remember was people being killed and robbed by South*

*African people for no reason and during that time I was scared to go to school and even wear my foreign clothes, because I did not want to be easily recognized. It was the scariest moment in my life,*’ while S15 mentioned, ‘*All I knew is that South African black people attacked foreigners blaming foreigners for their poverty*’. Some respondents recollected suggestions to try and keep safe as expressed by S16 who remembers ‘*hiding myself under the wardrobe when Black South African people came knocking at my door, because they would beat us or kills us as we were not South Africans*’ and by S18 who recalls, ‘*being told by my parents to be extra cautious when I was going to school because the South African people were attacking foreigners and during that time it felt like I was a prisoner*’. Respondents S21 and S23 recalled ‘*seeing horrible images on ETV of foreigners being killed*’.

From the findings above it is clear that most respondents were able to vividly recollect the nature of the 2008 South African xenophobic attacks. There is fear for some that it may persist given the nature of the violence during those attacks.

## **The ‘Relationship’ between Locals and Foreign Nationals**

International medical humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders (DWB) in 2010 expressed grave concern for the health and lives of thousands of survival migrants and refugees entering and living in South Africa. According to (DWB) sexual violence, appalling living conditions, police harassment, threats of xenophobic attacks, and a lack of access to essential health care still define the desperate lives of thousands of these vulnerable people.

DWB elected in 2010 to provide health care to survival migrants and refugees at its clinics in the border town of Musina and in Johannesburg (Doctors without Borders 2010 press release). Another example of the nature of the relationship between foreign nationals and South Africans was reported in June of this year (2013) when there was a deadly upsurge in violence against foreign nationals that spread through the country. The South African government insisted these acts of violence ought to be treated as criminal in nature, rather than xenophobic. Following these attacks Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamed expressed his concerns about the treatment of Somalis in South Africa (The Daily Maverick accessed on 8

June 2013). On the same matter Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, expressed government's 'strongest condemnation of the recent attacks and killing of Somali and other foreign nationals in our country'. The minister reiterated that 'The looting, displacement and killing of foreign nationals in South Africa should not be viewed as xenophobic attacks, but opportunistic criminal acts that have the potential to undermine the unity and cohesiveness of our communities,' she said. 'There is no cause to justify this heinous crime'. Perhaps it would be appropriate to note how Sabelo, (2009) describes citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa 'A true citizen of South Africa was to be an 'Azanian' fully compatible to the right of African people to self-rule and the reclamation of all of their ancestral land (Halisi 1997; Driver 1980). As S1, in describing his political relation with South Africa maintains, '*We are always called names like makwerekerewes and South Africans think we are people that just fell from the sky*'. Similarly, S2 refers to their status, '*when you want to apply for bursaries, you have to have a South African ID to apply. You cannot do it with your refugee status*'. S3 mentions '*sometimes when I go to hospital some nurses don't treat me well, they give me attitude*'. Other comments included for example those of S4, '*I feel like I will never be treated like a local due to the fact that I come from another country, also feel like this mistreatment is due to the misinformation given to local people due to political ambitions or to discredit the name of a country*', and those of S5, '*, when you go for a job, you are paid less because you are a foreigner*'. S6's comment focussed on extra financial pressure for bribes, '*because we as foreigners are always attacked by people here and when you go to report the matter I must have money to give the cops before he can hear my story*'. Another respondent S10 reported, '*Yes we are treated very differently by South Africans. They feel that we are here to steal their jobs and women. They show us no respect as they would their fellow South Africans*', S12 and S13 highlighted the issue of language, '*People treat me differently because I am a foreigner. Most of the time when I am in a public place, they don't trust me because of my English*', S13 reported, '*There are times when I am appreciated by the public for my good skills and there are times when I am undermined because I am a foreigner*'. Learners also spoke of discrimination as obstacles to their learning, S19, '*I am treated differently as a foreign national, for example when you go to borrow books at public library, you*

*cannot take it away because you don't have an ID only a status which does not qualify me for a card and this makes life difficult for me' and S21, 'South Africans treat foreigners differently at schools,' S22 reports, 'I don't get the same attention from school as South African learners do'.*

In terms of understanding how respondents perceive their 'political space' in South Africa, generally responses spanned from being discriminated against by the South African home affairs, the public libraries, the South African Police Services and being discriminated against for the language they speak and for being foreign nationals.

## **Feelings of Safety**

The 2008 South African xenophobic attacks prompted the South African cabinet to establish the Inter-Ministerial Committee headed by the Minister of Police to deal with cases of xenophobia. When respondents were questioned on feelings of safety in South Africa, S6 claimed '*I feel unsafe as I was once attacked by people, who knew I was a foreigner, on my way back from school,*' while S10 stated '*I don't feel entirely safe because here in South Africa you are never safe after this xenophobic attack. Today you can smile at your South African neighbors, and tomorrow he may want to kill you.*' S11 maintained: '*I don't feel safe because of crime in South Africa every time when I go to school my parents always tell me to watch out and to avoid talking to anybody for my own safety. They want me to associate myself with other foreigner kids*'. Feeling unsafe could also affect academic outcomes as indicated by Gopal and Collings (2012). Although the statements on safety as expressed by the learners may not seem serious, deeper interrogation may show how these feelings impact the academic and cognitive development of learners.

Some respondents spoke of the possible anxieties around safety that they harbour eg.: S13 mentions '*I can never be sure when people can go crazy and start an attack on foreigners*' or S17, '*I only feel safe when I am at school, home or church, but when I am on the streets I am scared, because I always hear stories of girls being kidnapped and murdered and because I am a foreigner, I feel I am an easy target to South Africans,*' or S19- '*No because xenophobic attacks takes place every day is some way or another, so I never know when it's going to be mine turn*'.

All respondents expressed concerns for their safety. This stemmed from either being foreign nationals or because of their perceptions that South Africa in general is an unsafe country. Some worried about the possibility of being attacked ‘unannounced’. Other respondents expressed fear of the people they knew (for example neighbours) who could perhaps strike when they were travelling between school, church and school.

### **Learners - A Future in South Africa**

Harris (2001:5) find that a culture of violence prevails in South Africa, ‘where violence is seen as the legitimate and normal way of solving problems in the country’. Xenophobia must therefore be understood in relation to the high levels of violence that persist in South Africa.

What happened in May 2008 reflects deep tensions and dysfunctions in contemporary South African society and politics. If not addressed, the fractures and incentives that led to the 2008 killings could have grave consequences in the months and years ahead’. The scenes of hate that played out against foreign nationals in 2008 were ‘extraordinary’ in their ‘intensity and scale’, but not in their manner, as xenophobic violence has become a constant bed-fellow of post-apartheid South Africa.

The xenophobia indelibly stained South Africa’s reputation as a country that respect the dignity of foreign nationals and was an acute embarrassment to the African National Congress (ANC) government, which relied on the hospitality of African states during its opposition against apartheid.

Learners demonstrated both positive and negative notions of future life in South Africa for example S1 *‘I can live a better life in South Africa- a life that I always dream about’*; and S3, *‘Yes I would like to live in South Africa because it is a beautiful country, more beautiful than my country’* S4 *‘I would love to live and help build this country through educating the African child about his / her neighbours and also contribute to the helping of the poor society’*. Other respondents spoke of wanting to remain in the country for future prospects *‘I would like to live and pursue my studies in South Africa’* *‘African always makes it hard, to cope with everyday living’*. Still others such as S5, mentioned: *‘Although I would love to live here for a long time, but I am scared because of all the attacks,’* and S6 *‘If I can have a chance to go to*

*another country then I won't want to live in South Africa for a long time'.*

A minority of respondents (S7'; S9) for example commented on wanting to 'remigrate' to greener pastures: '*My father always tells us that South Africa is not our country so I must not forget where I come from. He told me when I finish my studies and if my country becomes stable, I have to go back to my country, so I don't see myself staying a long time in South Africa*' and '*Yes I would to live in South Africa for a long time, so I can give back good things to this country*'

Many respondents spoke of the dualities of wanting to stay but of potentially being blocked by extrinsic forces for example S10: '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time but my South African brothers and sisters don't make it easy*' and S11 '*Because South Africans don't like us foreigners I don't like to live in South Africa for a long time*'. Similarly S12 '*South Africa is a beautiful country I would like to be in this country for a long time but I am very scared about my life anything can happen at any time to us foreigners*'. Other respondents similarly reported such as S15 '*This is a developed country compared to mine so yes I would like to live here for a long time,*' and S14-'*Yes I like to learn about different cultures and people,*' and S16 '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time and one day own my own business*'. and S17 '*If the people of South Africa can live in unity with foreigners then I would love to live for a long time in South Africa*'. S18 '*Yes, I would like to live in South Africa for a long time, but South African people make life difficult for us foreigners, in this beautiful country*'. One respondent shared that although South Africa is a beautiful country and '*anyone could like to live in this South Africa but since 2008 I am really scared to stay in South Africa. If I get a better opportunity in another country, I am ready to leave South Africa*'. For another respondent (S20) *I would like to improve my life and South Africa does not offer me such opportunities as a foreigner*'.

When respondents were questioned about their views of a future in South Africa, their opinions varied. Most respondents recognised the economic benefits of living in South Africa and compared them to their country of origin while others felt that they would love to live in South Africa for a long time if they could be accepted by the local people for example one respondent commented, '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time but my South African brothers and sisters don't make it easy*'.

This comment also suggests the notion of wanting to be assimilated into the South African society if it was less hostile.

### **How South Africans are Perceived by Respondents**

For many victims of xenophobic violence, the battle does not end when the crowds disperse and they are re-integrated into communities. Instead, many victims of violence are left vulnerable and exposed. South Africans are viewed through negative stereotypes. Besides the feeling that South Africans are prejudiced and parochial, a prominent perception was that South Africans, especially black South African men, are extremely violent: Informants often depicted South African men as lazy, adulterous and not nurturing of their partners. Often, laziness and crime were interlinked ... South Africans were portrayed as unenterprising and wasteful ... poorly educated and ignorant (Morris 1998: 1127 - 1128). Some respondents (S1) think '*South African people in the city are very friendly and kind but people in the locations just think that they want to steal from them,*' or S2 thinks that '*they must stop accusing foreigners of all the bad things and start making opportunities for themselves,*' S3 maintains '*Ummm South Africans are good (laugh) but they are also bad.*'

A few respondents perceived South Africans positively as seen by S4, '*I believe South African people are lovely people. They have tolerated other Africans in their country and also intermarried with them. They have allowed us to live in harmony with them and even invested in business ventures in partnerships with foreign nationals,*' and S7 '*Some are good and others are not good,*' and S8 '*I think South African people are good but at times can be very rude to foreigners.*' Negative perceptions of South Africans were far more prevalent such as those by S6, '*They are evil people living in denial*' and those by S9 who thought '*South African people are self-centred and are too proud for nothing,*' S10- also thought '*South African people are lazy and depend too much on the government to provide for them,*' while S11 claimed that '*South African people are not good people the majority of them hate foreigners.*' Other respondents described South African more harshly for example (S12) perceived South Africans as people like other people but '*they are more selfish than other Africans. They want everything for themselves*' and S13 commented on communication skills by

stating '*I think South African people lack communication between people and they fight for everything*'. Similarly S14 thinks '*they are frustrated because they feel that the government only cares about foreigners and not them, which is not true*', and S16 thinks that '*South African people can be kind if they want to but they are very stubborn and don't forgive easily*'.

One respondent S17 thinks '*South Africans can be egotistic and with that kind of attitude it will always make them unhappy people*' while another respondent S18 thinks that '*they must learn to respect everybody and stop blaming foreigners for their unhappiness*'. Another respondent S20 suggested '*South African people are good but need to be educated about foreigners*'.

From the responses above it emerged that the majority of respondents hold what may be termed negative perceptions of South Africans for example one respondent claimed, '*South Africans can be egotistic and with that kind of attitude it will always make them unhappy people*' while another respondent commented that '*they must learn to respect everybody and stop blaming foreigners for their unhappiness*'.

Other respondents described South Africans either as lazy, selfish or not taking responsibility for their lives but instead using foreign nationals as 'scapegoats' in internalizing their social and economic plight.

## **Conclusion**

Although children and youth living in South Africa are protected by national and international legislation this study has shown that foreign learners continue to be violated by local South Africans. Analysis of the findings also suggest that issues influencing xenophobic attitudes are around the views South Africans have of foreign nationals in terms of their own social and economic deprivation. Foreign nationals are perceived as hard working and dedicated individuals hence depriving locals of employment opportunities. The findings further demonstrate the 'social exclusion' of children and youth through the threat of violence and intimidation which should be addressed by the state and civil society at large. South Africa must ensure the protection of the rights of foreigners through engagement with all critical formal and informal role-players. Educating South Africans in accepting that South Africa like any other country will always be host to foreign nationals and that international policies protect their rights, may assist in helping South

Africans to reduce their antagonism and xenophobic attitudes towards foreign nationals. The South African government has an important part to play in ensuring that foreign nationals are not seen to be ‘robbing’ local people of jobs, economic and other state benefits.

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## Appendix 1: Demographics of Interviewees

Respondent	Q1: Age	Q2: Gender	Q3: Nationality	Q4:Country Of Birth	Q5: Age When Attacks Occurred
S1	22	Female	Rwandese	Rwanda	17
S2	20	Male	Burundese	Burundi	15
S3	18	Male	Mozambique	South Africa	13
S4	22	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	17
S5	20	Female	Burundese	Burundi	15
S6	21	Male	Rwandese	Rwanda	16
S7	21	Male	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	16
S8	21	Male	Burundese	Burundi	16
S9	19	Male	Kenyan	Kenya	14
S10	20	Male	Kenyan	Kenya	15
S11	22	Male	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	17
S12	20	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	15
S13	19	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	14
S14	20	Male	Rwandese	Rwanda	15
S15	21	Female	Rwandese	Rwanda	16
S16	18	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	13
S17	20	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	15
S18	20	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	15
S19	18	Female	Ugandan	South Africa	13
S20	20	Female	Ugandan	Uganda	15
S21	21	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	16
S22	19	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	14
S23	20	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	15
S24	20	Female	Burundese	Burudi	15

# **The May 2008 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: Antecedents and Aftermath**

**Goolam Vahed  
Ashwin Desai**

## **Abstract**

This article revisits the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa in order to grapple with key questions around the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, measures that can be taken to address xenophobia and ways in which diverse but inclusive communities can be built. A particular focus of the article is how state institutions reinforce anti-foreigner sentiments especially against those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. In a context where poor South Africans are struggling to find work and find promises of service delivery empty, it is African foreigners with whom they live side by side who become the targets for anger and frustration. The challenge for those wanting to confront xenophobia is how to build coalitions that transcend foreigner/local boundaries. This is made difficult because foreigners tend to coalesce into tighter groups as forms of protection which only exacerbates their outsider status. The prognosis in the short term for movements confronting xenophobia is the struggle to change attitudes, build defence units against violence, while agitating for better living conditions and decent housing. This is a difficult terrain to organise in because there is the perennial danger that the struggle for a better life can translate into attacks on foreigners.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, racism, immigration, refugee camps, South Africa, state of exception

## **Introduction**

Somalian Abdullahi Wehliye opened a shop in Phillipi Township outside Cape Town after losing his shop in neighbouring Khayelitsha Township during the 2008 xenophobic violence. Speaking to a reporter, as he served customers through a metal grill, Wehliye said that his new shop had been robbed seven times since opening in 2010. In 2012, his brother was killed during a botched robbery. Almost all 60 Somali shopkeepers in the neighbourhood have been robbed, mostly at gunpoint. Ward Counsellor Thobile Gqola said that in his area 60% of residents were unemployed, while foreign nationals owned over half the businesses. ‘The problem starts’, he said, ‘when it comes to business.’ Most of the violence in the area is directed at Somali-owned ‘spaza’ shops (Hiraan 2013).

In 2008, Somali shopkeeper Abdul Aziz Husein also faced a tough choice: stay in Dunoon to try and save his shop or leave to save his life. With the help of a neighbour, he escaped. ‘In five minutes’, he recalled, ‘my shop was empty. They even took the fridges.’ This was during the night of 22 May 2008, the same night that African National Congress (ANC) MP Lumka Yengeni was due to speak to the community of Dunoon in order to subvert possible xenophobic violence. The meeting never took place, due to a crowd of locals who went on the rampage. They killed one Somali man, injured many, looted shops, and displaced thousands. Husein returned to his shop but found that people were stoning it. He tried to reason with the agitated crowd, as many were his neighbours and customers, but was advised by the police that they could save his life, but not his goods, and that he should leave. He took refuge at the Blue Waters ‘camp’ in Strandfontein where ‘conditions were tough’. It was winter, the camp was near the sea and all he had to keep warm at night was one thin blanket. ‘It was a troubled life there.’ Hussein returned a few months later when locals pleaded with him to do so but still lives in fear of another outbreak of xenophobic violence.

Mohamed Osman, another Somali shopkeeper, is also based in Dunoon. He conceded that the local community did not like Somalis but patronised their businesses because they sold good quality merchandise at cheaper prices than elsewhere. He said, ‘every day’s a fight. Sometimes they say we have no stability. They say we must go home’ (Samodien 2013).

Samodien and Hiraan’s reports on which the above accounts are based were published to mark the fifth anniversary of the May 2008

countrywide xenophobic attacks that attracted international headlines. Ironically, barely two weeks later, there was a recurrence of these attacks. In the last week of May 2013, residents in Diepsloot, a township near Johannesburg, rioted against Somalis, while other incidents occurred in Booysens Park, outside Port Elizabeth. The trouble in Diepsloot started on the evening of Sunday, 26 May 2013 when a Somali shop owner, Bishar Isaack, allegedly shot dead two Zimbabweans after an altercation at his shop. Following his arrest, his shop was stoned and looted. Eighteen other Somali shops were looted and burnt down. In the wider Vaal area, police received more than a hundred complaints about looting of both local and foreign-owned shops. Reporter Siyabonga Sithole visited some of the shop owners after the violence (*City Press* 2 June 2013):

This week's violence left many foreign shop owners with nowhere to sleep. Some loitered at the local police station for three days, while others returned to their looted shops, some of which had been burned. Among them was Issa Jimale, who has run his shop in Diepsloot for three of the 16 years he has lived in South Africa. 'I have nothing, nowhere to go, and we sleep here at the police station without food'. His last meal was scooped up off the floor of his looted shop, situated two streets away from the police station. Nearby stood Pakistani shopkeeper Asim Nawaz, who has run his cell-phone and electronics shop in Diepsloot since 2007. He had to flee during the xenophobic attacks of 2008 and lost everything then. This time he has lost 'everything' again – between R45 000 and R50 000 in stock. 'It is difficult to build a shop like this from scratch because as you can see, the equipment is expensive', he said. 'Even if I were to come back and rebuild, it would take me eight months or more to recover'. Diepsloot's Ethiopian shop owners decried the looting, saying they did nothing to deserve it. 'We are a peaceful nation. We do not carry guns. We do not kill South Africans, but our shops are looted', fumed Desalegn Foge Gande, who moved to South Africa in 2004. He opened his grocery store in Diepsloot last year after fleeing attacks in Atteridgeville in 2011. The Ethiopian Community Association in South Africa said 80% of their members ran spaza shops or worked as door-to-door salesmen in townships. 'It has

become dangerous to conduct business in South Africa. We appeal to the South African government to protect us', said Fanna Dereje.

By the following Monday evening, the conflict had spread to Port Elizabeth's Booyens Park. Residents petrol-bombed police vehicles, blockaded roads with rocks and burning tyres, and burnt down Somali-owned shops. By Thursday, all the Somali shop-owners in the area had packed up and left (IOL News 31 May 2013). This description of the murder of a Somali man in Port Elizabeth is particularly harrowing:

An anonymous bystander in Booyens Park filmed the savage attack on Somali shopkeeper Ahmed Abdi. Abdi was chased down by local residents who have been attacking Somalis and looting their shops since Wednesday. The footage shows Abdi lying naked on the road and appearing to have already suffered a beating. A man in a light-blue shirt picks up a cement block and throws it on Abdi while a crowd cheers in the background. From the side a boy in school uniform - probably between the ages of 10 and 12 - runs and jumps on Abdi. Another boy - presumed older than the first boy - hurls a rock at Abdi's genitals. The two then stamp on the weak man who tries in vain to protect his head, which is kicked at least 20 times. Abdi is hardly moving by this stage. The final blow came when the young boy in the blue jersey picked up a rock from the victim's chest and smashed it onto his head (Censor Bugbear 1 June 2013).

The scale and intensity of violence in 2013 did not reach the levels of the 2008 xenophobic attacks. However, while government claims that South Africa has moved on from the 2008 attacks, which they portray as an aberration, the 2013 incidents show that attacks on foreign nationals are a feature of South African life and can be sparked at any moment. A report by journalist Nicklaus Bauer in the Mail and Guardian (28 May 2013) cited the following instances of major xenophobia-related incidents since 2008:

- June 2009: Business people from four of Cape Town's impoverished communities held several meetings to discuss ways of ridding their communities of foreign-owned shops.

- June 2010: A group of eminent global leaders called the ‘Elders’ claim xenophobia may erupt in South Africa after the Fifa 2010 World Cup as jobs become more scarce. Fortunately, this does not occur.
- October 2011: Alexandra-based group, the ‘Alexandra Bonafides’, call for foreigners to vacate Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses in the township within seven days.
- July 2012: More than 500 foreign nationals are displaced in xenophobic attacks at Botshabelo in the Free State.

In the same report, Gosiame Choabi, national programme coordinator of Anti-Xenophobia Action South Africa, said that government was failing to attribute the violence to xenophobia, but rather treated it as part of the crime problem. In most cases, he said, it was ‘xenophobia disguised as crime - not vice versa’. He called for policy interventions: ‘We can’t stand by and simply say this is part of our crime problem. Foreigners are easy targets and are being victimised – we can’t sit by and do nothing.’

Many explanations have been put forward to account for these attacks. They include the absence of a clear immigration policy, porous borders, corrupt police and Home Affairs officials, socio-economic inequities in the country, and even the ANC’s poor service delivery record which is resulting in ordinary South Africans venting their frustration on foreign nationals.

This article revisits the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in order to grapple with some thorny questions. What are the causes of xenophobia in South Africa? What is required to fight xenophobia in South Africa and how can we build diverse yet inclusive communities? Is it possible to produce an alternative vision of an inclusive citizenship, just as South Africans did in 1994? Can points of similarity be found between refugees / migrants and locals? How do researchers / academics express empathy for foreign nationals, represent their experiences, and encourage them to make their voices heard, while at the same time taking cognisance of the circumstances of locals?

## The 2008 Attacks – The Camps in Gauteng<sup>1</sup>

### **River Road Camp**

Following the May 2008 attacks, most of the refugees in Gauteng were herded by the authorities into makeshift camps. The River Road refugee camp overlooking Alexandra was one of many that became ‘home’ for a short while to foreign Africans who had been hounded out of various townships during the xenophobic attacks that swept South Africa. A visit to the camp in July 2008 revealed that it was fenced in and overlaid with barbed wire. Guards kept an eye on ‘inmates’<sup>2</sup>, while access was closely monitored through a single gate. These images were made all the more troubling by the fact that the inmates had, until recently, been living within the very communities that had expelled them to these camps. In other words, they were not refugees who had directly escaped some foreign trauma to seek shelter at these camps but had been, by and large, neighbours, renters, commuters, consumers and, if not citizens, then, to all intents and purposes, fellow township dwellers.

Migrants and refugees, like many others in present day South Africa, occupy a liminal space between their homeland and what might become ‘home’. Their experiences of leaving their home countries and making their way to South Africa where they wait nervously, often surviving illegally on the margins, to be granted permanent residence and the rights enjoyed by citizens, locates them in a transient space physically and emotionally. Anthropologist Victor Turner, who has written widely on the concept of liminality, describes it as a stage of being between phases. While Turner was writing about rituals, the concept is relevant for foreign migrants and refugees who are no longer members of the countries from whence they came, nor yet members (citizens) of the group (South Africa) to which they

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the research material on camps was drawn upon in Ashwin Desai, 2008. Xenophobia and the place of the refugee in the rainbow nation of human rights. African Sociological Review, 12, 2: 49-68 (particularly around pages 54-57).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Inmates’ is a term frequently used in the literature to describe refugees in camps.

aspire to belong: ‘liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between’ (Turner 1969: 95).

Many of the ‘victims’ of the May 2008 xenophobic violence were ‘insiders’, in the sense that they lived amongst South Africans but were regarded as ‘outsiders’ and treated as such during a particularly traumatic moment of crisis. Their camp experience was another moment of liminality that has come to mark the lives of foreign African refugees and migrants in South Africa.

Sibonile Mabhena left his homeland of Zimbabwe in 2004 at the age of 19 because he was ‘starving’. On the night of 10 May 2008, a crowd, including his immediate neighbours, gathered outside his shack in Alexandra and chanted for him to ‘vacate the shack immediately’. Sensing that his life would be in danger if he did not comply, he bundled what he could together and slept with his family in an open veld. The following day, he sent his wife and three year old child to Vereeniging while he went to sleep at his place of work, a panel beating business that belonged to a fellow Zimbabwean. On 12 May 2008 the business was attacked by people from Alexandra who, according to eyewitnesses, were brought there by taxi. Equipment was stolen while vehicles were stripped to their bare shells. The panel beating shop now serves as a makeshift parking lot for taxis. Sibonile arrived at the River Road camp without documents, family, home, or work.

Violence soon spread across Johannesburg and into the East Rand. In the Brazzaville informal settlement near Atteridgeville, Chamunorna Kufondada was beaten and set alight, the fourth person killed during attacks in the area, which culminated in 25 businesses being destroyed and 50 people injured (Sosibo 2013: 2). In the Madelakufa Section of Tembisa, a fight between two youngsters resulted in the death of one. When a sectional meeting was called to discuss the incident, the perpetrator was identified as a Mozambican (McBride 2008). Following the meeting on 18 May 2008, two Mozambicans were murdered. The first unidentified victim was stabbed 49 times while the second victim, Phineas Ndlovu, had barely arrived back from work when he was pulled out of his shack ‘in front of his wife/girlfriend (44 years old) and their child (three and a half years old) and slaughtered while both his wife/girlfriend and child were watching’ (McBride 2008).

*Jonathan Crush*, Director of the Southern African Research Centre at Queen's University, reported that 62 people were killed during the May 2008

xenophobic attacks across South Africa. According to official reports 342 shops were looted and 213 were gutted, while 1,384 people were arrested (Crush *et al.* 2008: 11). Loren Landau, Director of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, notes that as a result of the violence:

the government's legitimacy and the post-apartheid order were called into question by a world watching horrific images of families fleeing from buildings and men who had been set alight. ... the essence of citizenship was at once revealed and subtly defined.... [The violence] exposed a demon: a society capable of horrific violence.... In this violence we see the imperative to exclude and the means of achieving that exclusion: hand-to-hand, street-level violence.

Many South Africans greeted the attacks with horror as they wondered how this could happen in a country with an international reputation for reconciliation whose people were dubbed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu the 'rainbow nation of God', in recognition of their seemingly 'miraculous' ability to overcome three centuries of racial division and oppression. South Africa is also widely acknowledged for its founding constitution and emphasis on human rights, supported by a relatively well-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC).

Whilst pursuing a strategy of fairly quiet diplomacy, the ANC government blamed unidentified 'Third Force' elements, a reason proffered by many anti-apartheid activists to explain the fighting between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and ANC in the run-up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. The most outlandish claim was probably that of the then Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, Manala Manzini, who linked the violence to people seeking to disrupt the 2009 elections: 'We believe that as South Africa prepares for another national election early next year, the so-called black-on-black violence that we witnessed prior to our first election in 1994 has deliberately been unleashed and orchestrated' (M&G Online 23 May 2008). There was little acknowledgement that xenophobic violence has been a feature of post-apartheid South African society, a point that is taken up later in this article.

### **Glenanda Camp**

Prior to arriving at the makeshift camps, most refugees had been living on the margins of the system, trying to get their children educated, earn a living and find shelter. This sometimes required that they change their appearance to blend in with the locals. Following the attacks, camp occupants who barely knew one another quickly united around issues such as schooling, defending the camps against attacks and food distribution. Turner's point that liminality produces *communitas*, that is, a feeling of comradeship (Turner 1982: 44), is relevant for camp inmates. While there was a broad division between those from Francophone and Anglophone African countries, for the most part, leadership within the camp represented all inmates.

The state's response to the plight of the refugees was harsh. At Glenanda, south of Johannesburg (Rifle Range Road camp), the state initiated a registration process for inmates to obtain temporary permits. The official notice to inmates left them with no choice: '[f]ailure to register [will] have negative consequences including the termination of assistance and protection by government, and may lead to your removal from the Republic of South Africa' (AI 11 2008). As Amnesty International (AI) noted, the consequences of camp residents' signing the 'Individual Data Collection Form' were not explained to them. One of the provisions was that those who registered could not apply for social grants, government housing, South African identity documents, or passports (AI 2008 11). This removed an important right as many of the residents of the camps, who had originally entered the country as refugees and asylum seekers, were entitled to register for social grants and could remain in the country for longer than six months. Afraid of losing these rights, many of the camp residents decided not to register (AI 2008: 11 - 12) and were consequently deemed to be 'troublemakers'.

On 16 July 2008, five unidentified men entered the camp and were confronted by inmates on security alert. The police arrived in force and in the ensuing stand-off, 23 inmates were shot by rubber bullets and some were charged with 'kidnapping' the five intruders. On 22 July, police re-entered the camp, forced inmates into waiting police vans and herded them to the notorious Lindela Holding Facility. Those with valid asylum-seeker or refugee permits were allowed to leave. They had nowhere to go and set up camp on the side of the R28 highway, using the opportunity to attract media

attention so that the state would not summarily deport them. On the fifth day, with around 400 inmates still on the roadside, the state acted decisively. Two hundred and eight men were arrested for contravening the National Road Traffic Act while women and children were taken to the Riet Family Guidance Centre (Algotssohn 2000).

While in custody, the men were pressured to surrender their rights as refugees and asylum-seekers and sign affidavits expressing their desire to return to their countries of origin. They were promised that in return, charges against them would be dropped. They refused and on 6 August, they were transferred to Lindela and put through an ‘accelerated asylum determination procedure’. As AI pointed out, this was done improperly as the men did not have legal representation and the consequences of signing the documents were not explained to them - it would terminate their refugee or asylum-seeker status and lead to deportation as opposed to voluntary repatriation (AI 2008: 19).

Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) managed to consult with almost all the detainees but by the end of September, only 42 of 208 remained at Lindela. Most were returned to their home countries in defiance of the law (LHR 2008; in AI 2008). Scepticism amongst Glenanda inmates about the temporary permit, which allowed a lawful stay of up to six months, was to prove well-founded. Government authorities announced in August that the permit did not preclude the right of the authorities to deport inmates (AI 2008: 12). The Glenanda camp was closed at the end of September. Journalist Kanina Foss described the scene: ‘It was a time for gathering possessions and wondering where the night would be spent... By mid-afternoon, large piles of packed belongings were the only indication that the plot of land on Rifle Range Road had been home to thousands of xenophobia victims for five months’ (*The Star* 1 October 2008).

While inmates of the camps had won a reprieve to keep the camps open until at least 20 November, Glenanda inmates accepted the equivalent of a month’s rent from Unicef and UNCHR to leave early. Many could not return to their homes in Johannesburg and sought accommodation in the inner city amongst other African migrants, where they felt safer. Finding jobs was an entirely different issue.

### ***Akasia Camp***

One of those displaced by the May 2008 violence was Abdul, a twenty-two year old refugee, who was born in Kismayo, Somalia. Abdul was a child soldier who endured great hardship before he made the treacherous journey to South Africa to escape his life of ‘horror and sadness. I always used to see dead people in the streets’. Abdul stated that he did not enjoy a childhood as he was ‘carrying an AK since I was fourteen’. The bullet wound on his leg is testimony to his struggles. His seven year old brother was shot dead. In Somalia, he convinced a man from a local mosque to sponsor him so that he could get an education, but he failed to complete his course due to the ongoing conflict in the country. He hoped to continue his education in South Africa, but his primary task became ‘to save my life – to stay alive’. He was also confronted by the challenge of obtaining proper documentation. ‘Even when your papers are valid’, he said, ‘South African authorities will make it difficult for you to get anything done.’

Abdul runs a tiny ‘spaza shop’ amidst the flats in Newtown, Johannesburg, with his uncle, selling goods cautiously through a grated window. He has also been subjected to violence in South Africa. He is often robbed by locals but dares not report it for fear of being assaulted. ‘All you think about is how to make it not happen again. That’s all you can do.’ He was once robbed of airtime and cash by a customer called Tshep who, ‘to this day, still comes to my shop. He smiles at me. He greets me. I greet him. He knows there’s nothing I can do. I’m Somali. I have no rights. And the owner of the shop that we are renting, his son is a policeman! He knows what’s going on and he does nothing about it.’ The worst moment of Abdul’s life came in May 2008, when around 800 Somalis were displaced by the violence and placed in a temporary camp.

According to Abdul, the Akasia camp ‘was in a bush, man, just a bush.’ He stayed there during June and July. Eight big tents were provided for the women while the men stayed in shacks made of boxes and blankets. It was the middle of winter and they had no ‘hot water [and] temporary toilets that they don’t even clean. We had to go into the forest to ‘toilet’. It was zero humanity in those camps.’ While much is written about the role of volunteers in the aftermath of the violence, there is no mention of the role of the Somali Association of South Africa (SASA), mainly run by volunteers, which Abdul is a member of. He facilitates anti-xenophobia workshops in communities,

sponsored by the Nelson Mandela Foundation,<sup>3</sup> an organization involved in a myriad of activities from research to raising money for a children's fund, with its primary focus on *ubuntu*, or reconciliation, and has worked hard to solidify networks with other refugees and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). According to Abdul, due to the difficulties that they are experiencing in South Africa, Somalis are looking beyond clan and regional rivalries to build networks of support that not only traverse South Africa but move through Somalia into Europe and the United States.

Despite his situation, Abdul has no choice but to remain in South Africa. However, his life is one of fear, as the state and police are no help. According to Abdul:

The worst problem is the police. I am a member of the Community Policing Forum in three areas: Newtown, Brixton and Johannesburg. After one meeting I got a lift back to Mayfair. On the way, I saw a Somali guy being chased at night. He was carrying cash. The robbers knew he was going to buy stock for the next day. There's nowhere to go for help. They (police and other authorities) know that everybody there (8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Newtown) is Somali and you don't deserve to be served. Same with the justice system – there's no pressure to pursue criminals or facilitate court processes. The attitude is: don't worry. It's only f---in' Mkwerkeres [derogatory term for foreigner]. The police watch incidents happen and don't do anything about it. In fact they also assault and rob people. You've got to pay money to them all the time.

Abdul bravely continues the fight to survive, deepening his networks with other Somalis and finding cracks in the system. Unfortunately, his story is not uncommon.

## **State Assault on the Camps**

In its report on the camps, published at the end of September 2008, AI con-

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<sup>3</sup> This was set up in the aftermath of Mandela's one term presidency and was involved in a myriad of activities from research to raising money for a children's fund, with its primary focus on *ubuntu*, or reconciliation.

cluded that there was a concerted effort to force inmates to leave the country, particularly from July onwards. This was confirmed by the accelerated asylum system without procedural safeguards in Gauteng, which created the possibility of forcible return to countries where the person may be at risk of persecution (a rejection rate of 98%); misuse of criminal charges, unlawful detention and threats to deport individuals who failed to co-operate with administrative procedures at camps; obstruction of access to humanitarian, legal and other support organisations; threats of the premature closure of camps and a reduction in the level of essential services, including access to food (AI 2008: 2).

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) reported that by the end of June, children at the Blue Waters Camp were ‘unable to attend school because of a lack of transport... Residents have little contact with the outside world, and they have feelings of isolation and abandonment’ (SAHRC 2008: 6). The SAHRC was of the view that ‘the camps created to house non-nationals are inhumane’ and recommended that they be closed to minimise trauma and that non-national residents be either ‘reintegrated, repatriated, or resettled, based on their informed decisions’ (SAHRC 2008: 7). Fatima Hassan of the AIDS Law Project (ALP) said after visiting various camps that ‘the situation is worsening and it’s a deliberate ploy to make sure that people will be forced to leave the camps, that they will have no other choice’ (News24.com 18 September 2008).

Marti Weddepohl, camp coordinator of the Blue Waters camp near Muizenberg in the Western Cape, told reporters that the government expected her to make ‘things as unpleasant as possible - if not impossible - for the refugees to stay here and I can’t do it anymore.’ Weddepohl felt that she was expected to run ‘a concentration camp’. She painted a picture of sickness, disease and malnourishment: ‘Every day I see people with sores around their mouths and increasingly people have to be medically treated’ (*Mail & Guardian* September 26 to October 2, 2008).

During the last week of September, the infamous Red Ants, a private security company known for its ruthless approach to evictions, forcibly removed tents from the Akasia camps in Gauteng, using coercion and intimidation. Their methods included ‘removal of identity cards from residents, removing their property including clothes, arresting residents for ‘trespassing’ and then withdrawing the charges after a weekend in detention’

(*Mail & Guardian* September 26 to October 2, 2008). On 6 October 2008, the Red Ants effectively destroyed the Klerksoord refugee camp, north of Pretoria. Hundreds of women and children were left without food and shelter. Bishop Jo Seoka of the Tshwane Faith Forum described the withdrawal of food and water as inhumane and called on South Africans to treat migrants and refugees justly, ‘Foreigners are human and their dignity must be protected by all of us by treating them as we would like to be treated if we were in that situation’ (*The Citizen* 8 October 2008).

## **The Makings of a Xenophobic Environment**

The violent 2008 xenophobic attacks were generally greeted with shock by South Africans. However, numerous studies showed that xenophobic attitudes had deeply penetrated South African society. These studies also revealed that organs of state like the police had strongly embedded xenophobic attitudes.

Politicians themselves made reference to high migration figures and these sentiments coalesced with metaphors in the media which invoked terms such as ‘floods’ and ‘waves’ when referring to African migrants. While the dawn of democracy removed the last vestiges of apartheid, this did not signal openness to African migrants. During December 1994 and January 1995, African foreigners were attacked in Alexandra and their homes were destroyed when their neighbours marched to the police station to protest against them. The mobilisation was named ‘Operation Buyelekhaya’ (‘go back home’) (Minnaar & Hough 1996: 188-99). In Olievenhoutbosch near Pretoria in Gauteng, groups of South Africans attacked foreign Africans living in the Choba informal settlement in December 2005, burning their shacks and looting their businesses. Over the next two years, ‘attacks on foreign nationals escalated in their brazenness and brutality.’ During 2007, more than a hundred Somali nationals were killed and many businesses and properties were looted and burnt (Crush *et al.* 2008: 21).

The May 2008 attacks did not take place in a vacuum. Surveys have regularly pointed to strong xenophobic attitudes. A 2006 survey by the South African Migration Project (SAMP) found that 50% of those surveyed supported the deportation of foreign nationals, including those living legally in South Africa; 75% were against increasing the number of refugees; and

50% supported refugees being placed in border camps (Crush *et al.* 2008). The SAMP carried out another survey using the same set of questions and reported in June 2013 that 50% of South Africans want foreign nationals to carry their identity documents on them at all times; 63% support electrified fences on the country's borders; 50% believe that migrants should not receive police protection without proper documentation; 41% support mandatory HIV testing of refugees; 30% want a total ban on all migration to the country; and 14% believe that all migrants enter the country to commit crime (Crush 2013).

Physical attacks on foreign nationals are often accompanied by a heightened language of hysteria and a demeaning ‘Othering’ of African migrants. The most obvious manifestation of this is ‘normalisation’ of the word Makwerekwere which, as Francis Nyamnjoh, an anthropologist based at the University of Cape Town points out, refers to ‘one who also hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa... In terms of skin pigmentation, the racial hierarchy ... Makwerekwere are usually believed to be the darkest of the dark-skinned, and even to be less enlightened’ (Crush *et al.* 2004: 39).

While xenophobic sentiments against African immigrants are pervasive at various levels of South African society, what distinguished the May 2008 attacks were their breadth and scale. Thousands of foreign Africans were displaced: approximately 15,000 Mozambicans were forced to leave the country in a convoy of buses, while thousands of others sought sanctuary in camps and makeshift shelters.

## **Policing and Xenophobia**

An HRC study of police methods in 1999 revealed that ‘there was substantial failure of law enforcement officers to comply with even minimal requirements’ of the law (HRC 1999: xx). This is the case, for example, regarding people’s ability to provide identification to law enforcement officers. South Africans are not required to carry identification documents (IDs) and police policy has been to accompany individuals to retrieve their IDs ‘if an officer suspects that they are illegally in the country but they allege they have valid documents’ (HRC 1999: xxi). The HRC found that people were usually not afforded this opportunity and were instead arrested

immediately; when an ID was produced it was sometimes torn up (HRC 1999: xxvi).

It appears that from the top down, police believe that they can act with impunity against foreign Africans. An AI report dated 3 March 2010 on attacks on Ethiopian refugees in Siyathemba Township, 80 kilometres south east of Johannesburg made the following observation regarding police attitudes:

Over 130 adults and children were affected by the violence on 7 and 8 February [2010]. They lost their livelihoods when an armed crowd of several hundred people looted and destroyed their shops. The South African Police Service (SAPS) failed to prevent the violence from escalating and delayed seeking emergency back-up from organized police units with crowd control capacity.... In South Africa there is a persistent culture of impunity for crimes committed against refugees and migrants. For this reason they are particularly vulnerable to attack. Xenophobic attitudes amongst South Africans, including police and immigration officials, fuel the violence.

Roni Amit, a senior researcher at the Centre for African Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, attributed part of the blame for xenophobia to ‘ineffective’ policing. There were reports of police officers standing idly by as mobs looted and burnt down Somali shops. Hussein Omar, a spokesman for the Somali Association of South Africa told reporter, Darren Taylor: ‘In some areas the police are doing nothing and the criminals are just moving freely, while the traders can identify who comes to [attack] them, how they look and all that, and we’re not seeing the police doing anything.’ Amit added:

Unfortunately the South African police aren’t taking a very effective stance in terms of their response. These shops will be looted and the police will view their responsibility as saving lives but not saving property. [Foreigners] get intimidating letters saying ‘leave your shops by a certain day or else’ and the police don’t respond to that. Or they’ll respond by ordering the migrants to leave their shops and this just reinforces the efforts of the people who are attacking the

migrants' businesses. They feel they can attack the migrants and it's legitimate because nothing is being done to stop them (in Taylor 2012).

Omar cited instances where the police ordered Somali traders to close their shops in the evenings, the most profitable time for business, while South African-owned shops remained open. If Somali shop owners refused, the police tear-gassed them. Local government officials and the police also harassed Somalis with threatening letters and by-laws that targeted them specifically. Despite multiple incidents, Amit added, 'there are almost no prosecutions' (Taylor 2012).

The language of demeaning African immigrants is not confined to the townships but is evident in the media, and in parliament and state institutions, particularly the South African Police Services (SAPS). For example, Western Cape Police Commissioner, Arno Lamoer 'bemoaned the number of foreign nationals arriving in Cape Town.' Patel (2012) notes sarcastically that 'he was of course not referring to the American backpackers paying their way through Cape Town by waiting tables at Cape Town's more swanky spots' (Patel 2012).

As part of the fabric of South African society, SAPS members are likely to share the prejudices of their fellow citizens as they deal with migrants and refugees on a continuing basis, which possibly exacerbates their biases (Hall *et al.* 1978: 49). Many observers believe that this explains the 'barbaric' incident on 26 February 2013 when Mido Macia, a 26 year old taxi driver and Mozambican national, was handcuffed by police officers to their van and dragged for several hundred metres through the streets of Daveyton, a township east of Johannesburg. He was later found dead in a police cell. The state charged nine police officers for his murder only after widespread domestic and international outcry.

## **Immigration Officials and Xenophobia**

It is known that officials in the Department of Home Affairs and at various points of entry into South Africa tend to 'drag their feet [about the treatment of foreign migrants], partly because of political sensitivity over the rights of foreigners' (Murray 2003: 453). Immigrants seeking refugee status are

initially given the status of asylum seekers and it could take up to six years for applications to be processed by Home Affairs (Harris 2001: 14). Turner's concept of liminality is captured powerfully in this waiting game, as refugees live in limbo, unsure what is to become of them. Between 2002 and 2008, around 30,000 people applied for asylum per annum (Vigneswaran 2008: 5). There is a massive backlog in processing applications at Home Affairs and thousands are unsure whether they will ever be attended to.

Home Affairs spokespersons often reinforce the perception that African immigrants overwhelm South Africa, thus denying a better life for South Africans. The Department of Home Affairs 1999 White Paper accused migrants and refugees of weakening 'the state and its institutions by corrupting officials, fraudulently acquiring documents and undeserved rights, and tarnishing our image locally and abroad' (quoted in Harris 2001: 20). The White Paper also introduced the idea of local communities becoming involved in the 'detection, apprehension and removal of 'illegal aliens'.' In introducing the Bill to Parliament, the Minister of Home Affairs was quoted as saying that South Africans who considered themselves 'good patriots', would 'report' illegal (many activists prefer the term 'undocumented') immigrants (Valji 2003: 11). After the 2008 attacks, government spokesperson Cleo Mosana advised that failure 'to take action against illegals would be setting a bad precedent' (Sosibo 2011). Williams rightly reflected more than a decade earlier that 'it is likely that the actions of South Africans will not be limited to mere reporting. There is a danger of South Africans taking the law into their own hands, even considering it their patriotic duty to take action against 'illegal aliens' (1999: 2). This forecast came to fruition in 2008.

An indication of the deep-seated prejudices against foreign Africans is also provided by the example of immigration officials at O.R. Tambo International airport who refused 125 Nigerians entry into South Africa in early March 2012 for alleged possession of fake vaccination cards. The passengers were deported. This sparked public outcry in Nigeria and the Nigerian government retaliated by turning away 131 South Africans. The government was forced to apologise to Nigeria and institute new immigration procedures to end the diplomatic row. South African immigration officials now require a foreign ministry official's consent before turning away large groups of travellers. Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Ashiru accused the South

African authorities of targeting Nigerians: ‘What you see playing out is what we call xenophobia by South Africans against all Africans - not just Nigerians - including even those from their neighbouring countries’ (African Spotlight, <http://africanspotlight.com/2012/03/south-africa-unveils-new-immigration-measures-as-nigeria-accepts-apology/>).

The backlash against foreigners in South Africa in 2013 prompted a number of appeals from African leaders to protect their citizens in South Africa. The Prime Minister of Somalia, Mr Farah Shirdon, sent an open letter to President Zuma: ‘I appeal to the government of the Republic of South Africa as a matter of urgency to intervene and contain this unnecessary and unfortunate violence against Somali business communities’ (*Business Day Live* 4 June 2013).

Landau makes the critical point that unlike citizens, in the case of non-nationals, ‘exclusion is both bureaucratically institutionalised and socially legitimate.’ It is not only the physical marginalisation such as imprisonment and denial of services that counts, but also ‘the nationalist discourse evoked to legitimise and explain them’ (2011: 8). State policy is designed to protect advantaged insiders and its bureaucrats are trained to do so. This desire to control explains South Africa’s reluctance to embrace the policy imperative of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to facilitate the free movement of people.

## **Coordinated Elimination of Foreign Nationals?**

Roni Amit attributes part of the blame for xenophobic attitudes to indirect consent from those in authority. Many Somalis interviewed by Amit believe that influential political and business figures support the violence against them (in Taylor 2012). For example, former National Police Commissioner, Bheki Cele announced that foreign-owned ‘spaza’ shop owners had ‘economically displaced’ South Africans and warned that locals could ‘revolt’ unless things changed (Taylor 2012).

In *New South African Review* 1, Landau, Polzer and Kabwe-Segatti (2010: 225) make the point that in areas witnessing group-based violence against foreign nationals:

There is a culture of impunity that makes people who attack foreign

nationals feel that there will be no negative consequences for them.... There is a political vacuum or competition for community leadership so that unofficial, illegitimate and often violent forms of leadership emerge. Such leaders then mobilise residents of the area against foreign nationals in order to strengthen their own power base.

While those in authority may not condone violence per se, inflammatory statements can influence locals to believe that it is acceptable to attack foreign nationals. According to Landau (2011: 1), in many townships across South Africa ‘community leaders have continued to issue threats, and draft ultimatums demanding that foreigners get out. Where words are not enough, business associations and gangsters kill foreign shopkeepers, residents and other purported competitors.’

In many parts of South Africa, migrants face the persistent and daily threat of violence. Writing in the Sunday Times a few months after the attacks, Victor Khupiso observed that ‘on Friday nights in Ramaphosa squatter camp, it’s time for what locals call their “Kwerekwere-Free (Foreigner-Free) Society’ campaign”’. Gangs of young people spread out over the camp to hunt down foreigners. One of the youngsters told Khupiso that he could ‘proudly say foreigners had decided to leave our area because they know what would happen to them if they are found. They would burn. Hell is waiting for them. We have stored some tyres’ (*Sunday Times* 26 July 2008).

The experiences of those who were displaced by the May 2008 attacks are instructive in terms of how difficult it is for foreign migrants to survive in their adopted country, South Africa. Francisco Nobunga, who fled the Ramaphosa shack settlement in Ekurhuleni during the attacks, returned to his dwelling and his South African born wife, Sylvia Nosento, but was killed three weeks later. He produced a South African identity document as demanded by his attackers but, fatally, it contained his Mozambican address (*The Star* 22 July 2008).

However, the problem does not rest solely with local communities. Some of the proposals made by academics and researchers to address xenophobia are cause for concern. An HSRC study, for example, called on the government to restrict RDP housing to South Africans and move foreign migrants to private accommodation or house them in temporary

accommodation in designated areas until they are able to move into private residences (HSRC 2008: 9-10). Rather than solving the problem, this is likely to lead to further ghettoisation of African immigrants as most are too poor to acquire private rental housing.

While South Africa has one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, the question is whether or not it provides protection for immigrants and refugees. In light of the xenophobic attacks, Nyamnjoh questioned the ‘purportedly liberal, South African constitution’ because it leaves little room for the rights of migrants, as citizenship is ‘defined narrowly around the rights, entitlements and interests of nationals .... [This] is clearly at variance with all claims that South Africa is building a “culture of human rights”’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 4041).

Nyamnjoh argues that instead of being protected, migrants are subjected to police brutality, deportation and violence from fellow South Africans. It may be argued that the problem in South Africa is that the creation of a culture of human rights requires massive funding to feed, house, provide health care and provide social grants to all South Africans, including immigrants, in a context of massive underemployment and a small tax base. While the obligation of citizenship has huge financial and legal implications, this is no comfort to those who are victims of xenophobic attacks.

## A Coalition of the Willing?

There is no magic wand to solve the problem of xenophobia against foreign Africans in South Africa. One important constituency in the fight against xenophobia is township residents who, while forming key social movements to unite in service delivery protests, also operate in an environment of scarce resources in which African migrants are seen as competitors. Strong xenophobic attitudes persist even amongst members of social movements. Noor Nieftagodien of the University of the Witwatersrand, for example, has recorded that the Alexandra Homeless Youth and Families (AHYF), an organisation that began as a radical voice in the struggle for housing, ‘began to direct their anger against local foreigners and vowed not to allow them in their houses’ (Nieftagodien 2008: 73).

Resentment against migrants is deep-seated. In June 2012, Songezo Mjongile, provincial secretary of the ANC in the Cape, told a journalist that

it was ‘unnatural that almost all shops in townships are owned by foreigners.... It creates tension.’ Loyiso Doyi, a member of a retailers’ association in Khayelitsha Township in the Cape felt that foreign nationals were parasites since they did not ‘empower locals as they employ their own. There are over 600 foreigner spaza shops in Khayelitsha. Can you imagine how locals could survive? They are killing locals’ (in Taylor 2012).

Pointing to these local developments and broader economic prescriptions, Trevor Ngwane observes that South Africa’s historically uneven economic development and the commodification of the basic essentials of life inherent in neoliberalism have intensified competition for scarce resources (2009).

For many ordinary South Africans, the citizenry of the country does not constitute all who reside within its borders, but those who reside in localised entities such as Diepsloot or Booysens Park. This is what they seek to defend. It is in these localised spaces that they want to exercise their economic and political rights and keep out ‘illegitimate others’. Foreign nationals have no guarantee of protection just because they have documents legitimising their stay in South Africa. Many township residents do not want to share the little they have with foreign nationals irrespective of whether they are legitimately or illegitimately in the country. Judging by various comments in the media and on call-in programmes on radio, their concept of citizenship is a normative one that should bestow on them the fruits of their decades-long struggle against white minority regimes - jobs, houses, basic services, education, amongst others. As Patrick Craven, spokesperson for the trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) stated:

The demons of violence and of xenophobia frequently appear in community service-delivery protests. While we must condemn such violence, especially the destruction and looting of foreign-owned businesses, schools and libraries, we must understand people’s frustration at the quality, or even absence, of basic services in poor areas (*Business Day Live* 30 May 2013).

While there are some counter-tendencies in civil society who assist foreign migrants in times of need, ‘the message of love and tolerance’ of these

organisations and the middle and upper classes who denounce xenophobic violence, ‘will have little traction’, if, as Suren Pillay (2011) points out, ‘it is not accompanied by a political struggle against structural violence that places vulnerable people in situations of poverty and inequality, and leads them, sometimes, to do awful things to each other.’

This brings us to workers who, like many township residents, believe that migrants are taking their jobs or reducing wages where jobs are available. Many Africans migrants are employed as low wage casual labour, some illegally. As Reitzes and Simpkins point out, ‘one reason why foreign migrants enjoy a competitive advantage is because their unprotected status makes them more exploitable’ (1998: 22). This brings foreign migrants into competition and conflict with organised labour as well as unemployed South Africans.

Organised labour should take seriously the idea of uniting with organisations of African immigrants in an anti-xenophobia movement to petition for the legalisation of African migrants who are illegally in the country in order to reduce the likelihood of them taking low paid work. Speaking at a seminar hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand’s African Centre for Migration and Society on 10 May 2013 to commemorate the May 2008 xenophobic violence, ZwelinzimaVavi, the (suspended at the time of writing) general-secretary of Cosatu, said that the exploitation of foreign workers by South Africa businesses and farmers was increasing xenophobic tensions.

Business is taking advantage of foreign nationals, especially illegal ones, to use them as a buffer against South African workers. This forces workers into a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of wages and working conditions. It creates insecurity and anger. Mass unemployment creates conditions for the demon of xenophobia, which we remember today, five years after the disgraceful episodes when worker fought worker, African fought African ....

Vavi insisted that problems such as xenophobia, corruption, and gender-based violence are rooted in unemployment, poverty, and inequality. He urged South Africans to stop blaming workers from other African countries for these problems and, instead, to work to address the ‘capitalist system of

production, distribution, and exchange' (Vavi 2013). The paradox in the post-apartheid period, which Vavi referred to, is that the economic policy adopted by South Africa opened borders to trade (but not to workers), which resulted in South African companies moving production to foreign countries where labour was cheaper. This led to the shedding of many manufacturing jobs.

Given that most migrants are not legalised and hence do not have access to basic services and grants, denying those who are deemed 'illegals' of the opportunity to earn a living may well exacerbate problems such as crime and violence. This is not to suggest that employers should disregard the law and illegally hire foreign migrants. Rather, it is time that the state finds creative solutions to the problem. One possibility is to legalise migrants and afford them the protection of labour legislation, and offer amnesty to long term residents.

There are precedents for such measures. At the beginning of the democratic transition, a flexible approach was taken on the question of South African citizenship. Migrant workers who entered South Africa legally before 13 June 1986 were regarded as 'ordinary residents' and received voter registration cards and South African IDs (Harris 2001: 22-23). Following the 1994 election, amnesty was granted to some foreign miners working on contract in South Africa, as well as Mozambican refugees living primarily in the rural areas of the country near the Mozambican border (Crush & Williams 1999: 2-3). This represented flexibility that went beyond indigeneity as a basis for citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

How should South Africans respond to xenophobia in the short term and close the gap between migrants and citizens? Writing about liminality, the anthropologist Victor Turner postulated that rather than focusing on the anxieties of those who appear to be neither 'here nor there', as appears to be the case with refugees and many migrants, liminality provides the possibility to reorganise society and therefore has potential for 'future developments and societal change' (1982:45). Sociologist Mathieu Deflem also observed that liminality provides observers and participants with an opportunity to 'reconsider their situation and undertake a revolutionary re-ordering of the

official social order,' including moral and legal rules, social structures, and individual roles (Deflem 1991: 11).

The key issue is whether, given the current socio-economic climate, this is possible or likely, or whether it is simply academic idealism. Is the scenario painted by Turner and Deflem a realistic possibility? There is a strong and powerful sentiment in the country that 'the law is the law' and that 'illegal is illegal'. Should laws be determined only by practical concerns or should humanitarian considerations influence decision-making? An approach that focuses solely on the 'law' will not resolve the crisis around foreign migrants in South Africa. At various points in South Africa's history, white women, Africans, Indians, Coloureds and those who did not own property were denied full citizenship rights. Yet they were eventually granted such rights. Granting undocumented or illegal migrants full citizenship may seem inconceivable at this point in time, but it should be remembered that laws are social constructions and attitudes can change.

While the presence of foreign migrants, legal and illegal, appears difficult to manage economically, politically, and socially, these individuals cannot be eradicated as a group. Several measures can be implemented. Landau, Polzer and Kabwe-Segatti suggest that in the short term, steps should be taken to 'strengthen local conflict resolution mechanisms such as conflicts over scarce resources, maintain respect for the rule of law and reduce vigilantism by effectively and publically prosecuting perpetrators, and supporting and monitoring accountable local leadership' (2010: 226).

However, such measures alone will not get to the root causes of the problem. Government needs to improve service delivery, as xenophobic attacks are often directly or indirectly related to frustration over poor service delivery. Xenophobia attracts support in poor, under-educated and economically stressed areas. In the comments made in the media by ordinary South Africans following xenophobic attacks, a point made repeatedly is that government only listens when people become violent; in other words, such attacks are an expression of popular democracy and the 'will of the people'. As Landau (2011: 3) puts it, the 'politically entitled by an economically deprived citizenry took on the obligation to alienate and exclude those standing in the way.'

Xenophobic attacks also demonstrate the need for government and even the private sector to conceive of programmes that address economic

deprivation and development in South Africa as well as in the region, as the country will continue to receive migrants and refugees fleeing neighbouring countries for political and especially economic reasons. This will continue to exacerbate existing tensions between ‘locals’ and foreign Africans, whether legal or illegal.

A final point to consider is that restricting immigration into South Africa is unlikely to solve a problem that is an international one, as witnessed in Mexicans’ attempts to enter the United States, Indonesians trying to enter Australia, Bangladeshis making their way to such faraway places as Brazil and South Africa, and North Africans trying to make their way to Europe. When over 400 people drowned in one week in October 2013 when the ships taking them to Europe capsized, the Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat made a plea: ‘We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a cemetery.’ The problem of illegal immigration is a consequence of global interactions affecting low wage workers everywhere, and is unlikely to be resolved at the national level while dominant global economic institutions are enthusiastic about the mobility of capital but not labour.

Like the poor and the marginalised of this new global world, xenophobia is going to be with us throughout the twenty-first century. Most organs of civil society are geared to mitigating its effects rather than ending xenophobia. Given the increasing unemployment rate and deepening inequality in South Africa, xenophobic attitudes are likely to persist and increase. The task of those confronting xenophobia is thus mainly a defensive one in order to prevent attitudes from turning into violence. In the short term, it is hard to see how to turn this around.

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# **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 neighbouring 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 where 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 Experience**

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 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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# **Crime, Fear of Crime, and Xenophobia in Durban, South Africa**

**Yasmeen Vahed**

## **Abstract**

Crime, violence, and a corrupt police force are some of the issues preoccupying South Africans in the contemporary period, judging from the work of fiction writers, media headlines, and websites of various policing forums. Xenophobia is another feature of contemporary South African society, with foreign nationals across South Africa subjected to on-going violent attacks, and perceived to be the cause of crime and fear of crime. This article examines these two issues, crime and xenophobia, in the context of Ward 33, a mixed income suburb in Durban, focusing on how residents and police view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community and the social, economic, and political factors shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals. This study found that demographic change, particularly foreign nationals moving into the neighbourhood, is one of the factors leading to greater levels of distrust and generating stereotypes (drug peddlers, prostitutes, unemployed foreigners / potential criminals) about newcomers. From a policing perspective, the crime threat is seen to emanate from urban decay and the presence of 'undesirable' elements, particularly foreign nationals. The narratives associate crime with race and nationality. The 'unpredictable stranger' remains the target of generalised as well as specific anxieties, for which there is no short-term solution. The significance of this study, focusing on middle class elements in society, is that xenophobia is not confined to a 'lunatic fringe' of South African society. Urgent government intervention is therefore needed at multiple levels to address the problem.

**Keywords:** fear of crime, policing, moral panic, Durban, violence

## **Introduction**

Crime, violence, and a corrupt police force are some of the issues that preoccupy South Africans in the contemporary period. The works of Anthony Altbeker and Jonny Steinberg, amongst others, address crime, policing and criminal justice in post-apartheid South Africa. Altbeker's best-selling works, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: A true story of murder and the miscarriage of justice* (2010), *The Dirty Work of Democracy* (2005), and *A Country at War with Itself* (2007), speak to issues of crime, violence, and policing in South Africa and how to address these problems, which resonates with ordinary South Africans. Jonny Steinberg's *Midlands* (2001), *The Number* (2003), and *Thin Blue* (2008) are award winning explorations of crime, violence, the police, and the judicial system in South Africa. The popularity of these works underscores the concerns of many ordinary South Africans regarding these issues.

Xenophobia is another feature of contemporary South Africa. A combination of the Greek words, *xenos* (foreign) and *phobos* (fear), the term 'xenophobia' is defined by most dictionaries as a 'hatred or fear of foreigners.' This manifested most violently in South Africa during May 2008 when more than 60 foreign nationals were killed and thousands more were displaced or subjected to mass looting and the destruction of their homes and businesses countrywide. While there has not been a repeat of these mass attacks, foreign nationals continue to be targeted in various ways. In 2011, for example, around 50 people were killed, 100 seriously injured and more than 1,000 displaced (Daily Maverick 31 May 2013). A 2012 survey found that 60% of South Africans believe that 'people from South Africa are superior to those from other parts of Africa' while 60% regarded themselves as South African but not African. Foreign Africans were also seen as robbing South Africans of jobs and being responsible for criminal activity. Eighty percent of those surveyed believe that foreigners are preferred to South Africans because they are prepared to work for lower wages while 55% believe that 'most criminals in South Africa are foreigners' (Kuper 2013).

In the week that I was writing this article (the end of May 2013), mainly Somali-owned shops were attacked and looted by residents in Diepsloot, Johannesburg and Booysens Park, Port Elizabeth. At least 15 shops were ransacked and two Somali nationals killed (*The Mercury* 31 May 2013). This article seeks to marry these two issues, crime and xenophobia, by

examining the perceptions of residents in Ward 33, Durban of whether and how foreign nationals are contributing to crime in the neighbourhood. Specific questions include: How do residents view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community? How do the police view foreign nationals? Are they seen as contributing to urban incivility and higher rates of crime? What are the factors shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals? (Bauman 2000). The first part of the article provides an outline of the study site, a brief explanation of the methodology employed and the extent of the fear of crime in the area (Hartnagel 1979); the second part focuses on attitudes towards foreign nationals and the relationship of these attitudes to crime.

## **Study Site**

Ward 33, the site of this study, comprises of three suburbs – Umbilo, Glenmore and Glenwood – which are diverse in terms of their residents. While parts of Glenmore and Glenwood would be classified as ‘middle class’, Umbilo is a largely working class or lower middle class area. Glenwood is one of Durban’s oldest suburbs, with colonial-style mansions higher up in the vicinity of the University of KwaZulu-Natal as well highly priced apartment blocks. The area has bustling business activity with the presence of the Glenwood and Davenport Centres and St. Augustine’s hospital. In the Bulwer, Ferguson, and Davenport Roads area, a number of homes have been converted into restaurants, boutiques, coffee shops, medical practices, and guest houses. Glenwood High, Durban Girls High, tree-lined streets, and parks all add to the image of order and affluence. There are many pedestrians and shoppers during the day.

Glenmore is located to the south of Glenwood, making it further from the Berea. The area comprises of free standing homes for middle to upper income people as well as cheaper priced apartment blocks. Unlike Glenwood, however, Glenmore does not have the same level of daytime retail business activity. Umbilo is a mainly middle to lower income suburb, further from the university and closer to the harbour area. The area has many free standing homes, which probably date to the 1940s and 1950s. Umbilo also lacks the daytime business activity of Glenwood and the homes and grass verges are not as well maintained. However, the area had / has many businesses, particularly factories, in the Umbilo / Sydney Road areas and this

adds to its feeling of being derelict and not as well maintained as Glenwood.

Respondents underscored the changing demographics of Ward 33 over the past two decades as a result of residential deracialisation and the influx of foreigners. These residents are not imagining demographic change. A comparison of the 2001 and 2011 Census figures shows that there has been significant change in Ward 33.

**Table 1: Population, Ward 33**

	2001	2011	Difference	% Change
Black African	7280	11525	+ 4245	+ 58.31
White	16455	11778	- 4677	- 28.42
Indian or Asian	2191	2659	+ 468	+ 21.36
Coloured	1078	1421	+ 343	+31.81
Other		298		
Total	27,003	27,681	+678	+2.5

Source: Census 2001 and 2011, Department of Statistics.

There has been a dramatic decline in the white population which dropped from 60.93% in 2001 to 42.54% in 2011. In contrast, the Black African population increased from 26.95% to 41.63% over the same period. This census data most likely does not take into account another change the presence of students during the academic year, who may not have filled out the census form, either due to tardiness or because their parents did so in their areas of residence, as well as foreign refugees and migrants. This ‘blackening’ of the ward is important because of the link that is often made between race and crime in the post-apartheid period (Letka 2008).

## **Methodology**

This study is based primarily on qualitative research methods which were deemed the most efficacious way to probe responses to the crucial questions outlined above. Key informants interviewed ( n=12)for this study included members of the police force and Community Policing Forums (CPF), as well as ordinary residents. In addition, I attended several meetings of the Umbilo CPF and took field notes. Qualitative research means different things to different people but in its most general sense it is ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible’. Such research may include the use of life stories, interviews, observation, case studies, visual texts, and so on. Together, these sources of information may be used to describe the ‘routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 4-5).

In research on fear of crime, qualitative techniques were originally employed by feminist researchers in the 1970s who felt that quantitative surveys failed to account for experiences such as sexual harassment and domestic violence. Qualitative methods allow researchers to get closer to the respondent’s point of view through ethnography and interviews. Qualitative researchers can also appreciate the constraints on the everyday lives of their subjects because their research focuses on the details of specific cases (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 17).

Qualitative research is, however, potentially problematic. It is not a neutral process because interviewers wield power over the process by interrupting informants by asking questions when they are speaking and even editing the recorded transcript, possibly to support their own arguments (Abrams 2010: 129). The assumption that the interviewer and interviewee have shared understanding of the questions asked and the responses given is not necessarily true, while interviewees may not provide an honest assessment of their feelings. As Gadd and Jefferson point out (2009: 132):

subjects are ... psychosocial subjects with a split consciousness, constantly unconsciously defending themselves against anxiety. This affects what and how anything is remembered, with painful or threatening events being either forgotten or recalled in a safely modified fashion; it also affects how such memories are

communicated to any interviewer, given that the context of the interview may be more or less threatening. At both stages, the act of remembering and the act of communication, meaning is rarely straightforward – and never wholly transparent. The interviewer too is a defended subject, and so the same applies; the meanings – of the questions asked and how answers are understood – will also be affected by the interviewer's dynamic unconscious with its own 'logic' of defensive investments.

Once the data are collected and analysed, the researcher has to interpret the material. Qualitative interpretations are then constructed. This interpretive practice is both 'artistic and political', as there is no single interpretive truth but rather 'multiple interpretive communities' (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 35).

Despite these potential problems findings can be tested for their reliability and validity. While qualitative studies do not use formalised sampling methods and the operational procedures used to assess validity and reliability in quantitative research have no corresponding operations for qualitative research (Trochim 2006), this is done through testing for transferability instead of external validity, dependability instead of reliability, and confirmability instead of objectivity (Golafshni 2003: 600-602). While a strong argument can be made that objectivity can never be achieved, validity can be determined by answering such questions as 'Are these findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implications? Would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them?'

Guba and Lincoln (2008: 271-275) identify several criteria of 'valid' inquiry: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to balance, that is, that all stakeholders' views, concerns, and perspectives are represented; ontological and educative authenticity refers to the raised level of awareness by individual research participants and by individuals with whom they come into contact; and catalytic and tactical authenticity refer to the ability of the research to prompt action on the part of the research participants and the ability of the researcher to provide training in particular forms of social and political action.

## **Crime and the Fear of Crime**

Crime Statistics for Ward 33 were obtained from the website of the Institute for Security Studies' Crime and Justice Hub at the website '<http://www.iss.co.za/crimehub/pgcontent.php?UID=1000205>'. The Institute has developed a 'crime map viewer' where information can be accessed on the different types of crimes that occur in specific localities. This data are gathered by recording the crime statistics for each police precinct within the country as recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS). This provides an opportunity to compare the different crime levels of police precincts for specific categories of crime as well as a means to compare the annual changes in specific crime categories since 2003. Statistics for Ward 33 are based on data recorded at the Umbilo Police Station. These statistics are for the whole area, thus making it impossible to distinguish between the three suburbs that make up Ward 33. If people from the area report their experiences of crime at other police stations, these might not be reflected in these statistics. Conversely, if people from other areas report crimes at Umbilo Police Station, these will be reflected in statistics for this ward. However, such instances are not expected to affect overall trends and the inferences that we draw from them.

The 'Ward 33 Crime Statistics 2005-2011', which run to several pages and cannot be included here, show that incidents of crime per 1,000 people for Ward 33 increased in cases of assault, sexual crimes, residential robbery, and carjacking (that decreased from 2009 to 2011); while they declined in cases of common assault, residential burglary, culpable homicide, general theft, murder, aggravated robbery, theft out of motor vehicles, common robbery, and attempted murder. Notwithstanding the statistics, interviewees are adamant that they are besieged by crime, in particular serious crimes such as carjacking, residential housebreaking, and street robberies. The perception that crime is rampant, and that white South Africans in particular are targeted, is a national phenomenon even though, as De Wet (2013) shows, 'the risk for rape, aggravated assault and robbery, as well as murder and attempted murder is considerably greater for the poor black township dweller than say, a rich white person.'

Why is the perception of rampant crime so strong if it is not supported statistically? To get to the heart of this problem we need to ask, as Hall *et al.* (1978: viii) do with respect to Britain: 'How has the 'law and

order' ideology been constructed? What social forces are constrained and contained by its construction? What forces stand to benefit from it? What real facts and anxieties is it mobilizing?' The role of the media (Heath & Gilbert 1996), police, and social networks suggests that, in addition to actual victimization, the construction of fear of crime has a social as well as a statistical or legal basis. According to Hall *et al.* (1978: 52), agencies of public significance such as the police and media do not simply 'respond to 'moral panics'. They are part of the circle out of which 'moral panics' develop. It is part of the paradox that they also, inadvertently, amplify the deviancy they seem so absolutely committed to controlling.' Information about criminal activity or potential criminal activity received through the media, social networks, government agencies, citizens' groups, and the police increases residents' perceptions of levels of crime in the neighbourhood and their anxiety over it. Such information, at the very least, reminds residents that being a victim of crime is very likely in the neighbourhood and that they should be aware of potential risks.

Aside from the media, marginality is another factor possibly generating fear. Criminal activity and reaction to it, does not occur in a vacuum. The relationship between the majority of respondents in this study and those perceived to be the cause of criminal activity has a long and acrimonious history that very likely has a bearing on present perceptions. Feelings of marginalisation among minority groups in South Africa around issues of politics, economics, sport, education, work, and so on are contributing to a general feeling of being 'under siege'. The moral panic around crime is part of a wider crisis of 'belonging' and should be seen in relation to insecurities which include personal anxieties as well as national and international concerns which, cumulatively, are producing 'anxiety which might find an outlet in crime talk' (Enders & Jennett 2009: 202-203). The root causes of the fear run deep and finding solutions is not as simple as beefing up physical security measures around homes.

While statistics may indicate that residents' perceptions of crime risk are not objectively warranted, does it really matter whether fear of crime matches the reality of crime? Many residents are so consumed by fear of crime that it is an everyday topic of conversation and even influences the kinds of preventative measures they are taking, including areas or persons to be avoided.

## **Foreign Nationals and Fear of Crime**

One of the factors associated with rising crime and fear of crime in the ward is the presence of foreign nationals. Mary, who has lived in the ward for several decades, related her experience of being a victim of crime:

Robbers came and broke into our house. You know, the 30 second thing before the alarm company comes and they just came, five of them, and smashed the doors down and grabbed everything and ran. This is three months ago. It was June [2012]. They came, smashed, got in, smashed the front door, tried to make off with everything, my laptop and tried to grab everything within the time but they were chased. We have a very strong neighbourhood watch in the area and they were chased by the neighbourhood watch.

In Mary's case, fear of crime resulting from victimization has resulted in her taking steps to reduce the likelihood of being a victim in the future. It subsequently emerged that the perpetrators of the crime were 'illegal immigrants'; she feels strongly that 'the issue of illegal immigration has to be clamped down on' as they are negatively impacting crime in the ward.

The role of foreign nationals in causing crime was also emphasised at an Umbilo CPF meeting on 12 November 2012 when Brad, a security consultant and guest speaker that evening, spoke of the nefarious influence of 'Nigerians and the like' in the ward, expressing xenophobic sentiments that reflect negative stereotypes widely held in the ward. When a member of the audience complained about the presence of a nightclub in the area, Brad said that every area had a similar nightclub with 'drug dealers and prostitutes' because the police were 'thinly stretched,' lacking the resources and 'courage to do anything, and the local security companies don't have the teeth to do the things we would like them to do - like raid these clubs or try and close down drug dealers.' The result is that 'foreigners have flooded in here. How are they making money? Out of drugs and buying stolen property ... [and] prostitution.'

Several interviewees complained that prostitution was rife in the ward and they linked this to crime. For example, Sarah said, 'I tell you right outside your gate, when I see them I see red [because] it definitely brings unsavoury characters into the area.' At the same CPF meeting, several

speakers linked prostitution to crime. As Brad explained,

These women have a drug dependency or alcohol dependency problem, so they attract the Nigerians, and all of a sudden you have got everybody attracted here just because of the prostitutes. If you get rid of the prostitutes I guarantee you, you will get rid of the rest of the bulk of the petty crime, because it all follows.

The literature does not point to a clear relationship between crime and prostitution. Some studies suggest that where prostitution is illegal it can result in increased crime and violence, and that there is a reduction in crime when it is legalised (Liberatory 2004). However, judging from the response of those who attended the CPF meeting in Glenwood, residents of Ward 33 as well as interviewees, view the presence of prostitutes as proof of the overall decline of the area into one that attracts unruly elements, including drug dealers. Such perceptions are contributing to the overall ‘moral panic’ about crime in the area.

Naomi, who moved to Durban from Cape Town in 2005, noted a significant ‘decline’ in the ward over the past six years. By ‘decline’, she was referring to an increase in ‘levels of crime and grime’ due to ‘a lot of, excuse me, Blacks moving into the area’ who are ‘not very worried about litter. You see them walking, and they are eating something and [they] throw it on the ground. When we first moved in here, it was so beautiful.’ With regard to crime, Naomi is convinced that ‘as much as the police say it’s not increasing, I don’t know whether it’s because we are so aware now that we are hearing about everything, but crime is definitely on the increase here in Glenwood.’ Naomi identified an area known to locals as ‘Whoonga Park’, situated under a bridge on a railway line where Che Guevara Road meets Maydon Road, as problematic:

They call it Whoonga Park, I think its Albert Park, I am not sure, under the bridge where the railway line is, down Moore Road, where you turn off to go to Maydon’s Wharf and to south coast, there are about 200 people that are there and they are all foreigners. And the amount of prostitution!!! It was in the Sunday Tribune. They call it Whoonga Park and, of course, that is where all the crime is. They run

there and they hide amongst the people and I have found that the crime, as much as the police say it's not increasing, I don't know whether it's because we are so aware now in the last year, two years that we are hearing about everything, but crime is definitely on the increase here. The police say it's not but I don't believe it.

Place is important in crime and criminal activity; within neighbourhoods, certain spaces are more prone to criminal activity and are usually avoided by locals (Eck & Weisburd 1995: 1). Warwick Chapman, former longtime Democratic Alliance (DA) councillor for the ward, provided another example:

About halfway up to the Berea Centre on your left hand side is a tiny little lane called Morans, it's one way, from Berea to Moore. And on the right hand side of Morans for almost the entire length is a park. Drive past it and hang your camera out of the window. It's a dumping ground. It's a taxi rank, it's a construction yard and when I say hang your camera out the window, hang it out carefully because there is also loads of undesirables hanging around. But it's worth having a look at that public open space. And then say to yourself what impact does that have on the local community? You know, you have got a couple of gangs living there, you have got foreign nationals there.

Councillor Chapman was concerned that gangs and foreign nationals are taking over parts of the ward, leading to the perception of urban decay and the collapse of 'law and order'. Academic research supports the notion that people feel confident and safe visiting certain places and associate other places with the threat of physical harm and avoid those even though criminal activity can take place anywhere (Wolfgang 1985). Locals usually avoid the places mentioned by Councillor Chapman and other informants. As noted, crime statistics, news reports, and word of mouth help to establish a psychological link between the likelihood of a crime occurring in a particular place and a person's fear of being a victim.

Visual cues based on a place's geography can influence perceptions of how bad crime is - or is not - in a neighbourhood. Areas that are densely

populated, have physically deteriorated, have a substantial number of transients, and contain ‘less-than-desirable’ commercial establishments are associated with high crime and deviant behaviour (Stark 1987: 894). According to our respondents, parts of Ward 33 fit this profile and cause them to associate the ward with crime. The ‘broken window’ thesis, as this perspective is known, argues that neighbourhoods characterised by decay generate fear of crime among residents and indicate to potential criminals that residents are unlikely to act in the event of criminal activity. Perceptions are important because people are less likely to walk in areas that they regard as unkempt and which are associated with danger, and more likely to walk in well maintained places. Outsiders also perceive such environments as dangerous and this fear has a snow-ball effect. Urban flight can lead to abandoned buildings which, in turn, in the opinion of residents, may attract more of the kinds of people that compound the crime problem. In this context, crime can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## **Policing and Foreign Nationals**

According to Captain Patrick of the Umbilo SAPS the arrival of foreign nationals, as refugees, migrants, and illegals, is affecting the demographics of the ward negatively as they are ‘not being housed properly and there is no proper structure to deal with them, they have also contributed to the crime.’ Warrant Officer Percy is also concerned about foreign migrants and refugees, and places the blame squarely on South African foreign policy:

If you look at our foreign policy it’s like the biggest detriment to this country because I don’t think there is any country in the world where they allow a person to come here seeking refugee status with no place to live. You understand, like in England if you apply for refugee status you get registered with the Home Affairs Department or whatever, they put you, they give you a subsistence to live that you will be able buy a loaf of bread and you will be able to live. Here, in South Africa, it’s like those pictures I showed you. Those are all foreigners. They all have got refugee status so that is a potpourri of people from all over Africa. So the only thing, the only recourse, they have got, they sell drugs and there is prostitution and

there are common petty crimes to feed themselves.

At the CPF Area 1 meeting on 4 October 2012, which I attended, Captain Marais of the Umbilo SAPS reiterated this discourse when he said that many foreigners were living in abandoned or partially demolished buildings in the area. They ‘steal anything to make a buck, be it copper or bins’. Unemployed and homeless, they ‘walk around all night scrounging in the bins for food’. From a police perspective, foreigners, whether refugees or migrants, and whether legal or illegal, are contributing to crime in the ward.

‘Whoonga Park’ presents special problems for the police. The park is named after whoonga, a local marijuana variant containing rat poison, HIV medication, heroin, crystal meth and detergents such as bleach or ammonia. Also known as Nyaope, this street drug came into widespread use in the townships of Durban around 2010. The park is seen as a key supply area. A front page report in *The Mercury* (23 May 2013), titled ‘Criminals go underground to flee through stormwater tunnels’, pointed out that criminals were using ‘an intricate web of storm-water tunnels extending for kilometres beneath Durban’ which they used to escape after committing crimes. The two metre high tunnels run from the Durban Harbour to the area known as Whoonga Park, near Albert Park. From there, the tunnel splits into three, with one stretching up Berea Road and the other two running through the lower Berea area. Further splits take the tunnels through to Umbilo and Glenwood. Police Inspector Eugene Msomi was quoted as saying that the police would inspect all the tunnels and find ways to close them to the public. Previous attempts to fence the tunnel openings failed as criminals jumped over the fences. Hoosen Molla, a senior manager at the Inner City eThekweni Regeneration and Urban Management Programme (iTrump), said that the tunnels could not be closed because of the need for stormwater flow. This made it impossible to prevent residents of Whoonga Park from using them for criminal activity. According to the newspaper report, while police were inspecting the tunnels, ‘South African and foreign nationals who live in Whoonga Park and appeared to be high on drugs, sang and shouted insults at the police and media.’

Xenophobic tendencies are apparent in the ward and often relate to being a victim of crime. Both Captain Patrick and W/O Percy pointed to what they viewed as an irony; Premhid pointed out that the foreign nationals

who are seen as a ‘problem’ rent accommodation from white landlords. ‘Who else is going to pay R5000-R6000, to stay in a scrawny old Umbilo house where you have got borer coming out of the floor, the place is all dilapidated?’ The same landlords, he added, belong to the Umbilo Business Forum (UBF), CPF, Umbilo Action Group (UAG) and other civic organizations that complain about crime, drugs and police inaction in the ward. It is unclear whether this is based on perceptions or fact, but the Captain felt that residents were contributing to problems for which they blame the police. At the CPF meeting on 4 October 2012, Captain Glen Eagle of the Umbilo SAPS made the same point.

Police work has a social and structural context, and at the present time there are strong feelings of xenophobia in the country at large. As noted earlier, xenophobia is a national problem in South Africa. Members of the police force are part of South African society and, as such, may not be immune to such prejudices. The fact that the police deal on an on-going basis with migrants and refugees may, in fact, exacerbate their prejudices (Hall *et al.* 1978: 49). Some commentators attribute the ‘barbaric’ incident on 26 February 2013 when a 26 year old taxi driver, Mido Macia, a Mozambican national, was handcuffed by police officers to their van and dragged several hundred metres through the streets of Daveyton, just east of Johannesburg to such prejudice. He was later found dead in police cells. Nine police officers have been charged for his murder. African National Congress (ANC) secretary-general Gwede Mantashe responded, ‘if you are a foreigner and killed in our country, it is xenophobic.’ In this case, the roots of xenophobia are to be found within the police force and not among Daveyton residents who offered their full support to the deceased and his family (Kuper 2013). Dennis Matusse of the International Community Unifiers (ICU) issued a statement that ‘actions like this from the police only helps to increase perceptions that lives of other Africans living in South Africa are cheap, thus fuelling Xenophobic attacks’ (ICU 2013).

Captain Patrick is adamant that the Daveyton killing was ‘a once off. You can interview the members, how they felt. And I’m telling you, this is a sorry incident.’ However, it is dangerous when police, without hard evidence, begin to see some part of the population, such as foreign migrants, as potential criminals and a threat to ‘law and order’ because this may determine who they focus on in their day-to-day policing functions. Police

have limited (hu)manpower and resources and, from their perspective, it makes sense to deploy these in areas where they are most needed. A focus on the so-called ‘problem’ group may result in more arrests within that group which, in turn, is likely to increase the crime statistics relating to that group and thus create a ‘crime wave’ around certain kinds of crimes or individuals. In this way, the police may inadvertently create the crime wave itself and through issuing these statistics, shape the general public’s attitude to and fear of crime (see Hall *et al.* 1998: 42). While CPFs are meant to bring the police and community closer together, because the ‘problem’ segment of the ward is not integrated into the local community, the gap between them and the police remains wide and the relationship is one of suspicion and fear.

## **Understanding Xenophobia**

Demographic changes in Ward 33, in the form of more Black people moving into the neighbourhood, and particularly the presence of foreign nationals, are amongst key factors leading to greater levels of anonymity and distrust in the neighbourhood and a feeling that the old order is collapsing, and is generating stereotypes (drug peddlers, prostitutes, unemployed foreigners / potential criminals) about newcomers. These mechanisms are one of the means by which residents categorise individuals and places to make sense of their world. As Sacco (2005: 135) points out:

Increases in levels of ethnic or racial heterogeneity contribute to a sense of discomfort on the part of the neighbourhood residents who feel that their neighbourhood is undergoing a decline. Dramatic increases in the number of ‘strangers’ make the environment seem less familiar and perhaps more threatening.... While it may be politically incorrect to express racist attitudes openly expressions of anxiety about crime and criminals are usually regarded as perfectly appropriate forms of public discussion.

There are many ‘threats’ to the neighbourhood from a policing perspective. Within the neighbourhood, the crime threat is seen to emanate from urban decay and the presence of ‘undesirable’ elements, particularly foreign nationals. As crime and word of crime is spread through various media,

residents' fear of crime increases (Lemanski 2006). The narratives associate crime with race. Although respondents tried not to couch their views in racial terms, the terms 'crime' and 'black crime' or 'foreigners' crime' sometimes appear to be synonymous. The movement of people across neighbourhood, provincial and national borders is likely to intensify in the future as social cohesion is seen to decline (Beauvais & Jenson 2002). In this era of great mobility, Farrall *et al.* (2009: 108) observe that, 'we have less direct knowledge about those around us,' and the 'unpredictable stranger' is the target of generalised as well as specific fears and anxieties. Across South Africa, the number of xenophobic attacks is increasing. In the local context, the term 'stranger' is increasingly associated with South Africans of colour and African foreign nationals.

Increasing xenophobic violence can be attributed to various economic, social, political, and historical factors. One view is that it is a protest against the ANC government's poor service delivery record, with citizens' anger directed at innocent foreigners (Alexander 2010). Another explanation is that foreign nationals are competing with the poorest of the poor South Africans and are seen to be taking away their jobs and life opportunities. The significance of this study, focusing as it does on middle class elements in society, is that xenophobia is not confined to a 'lunatic fringe' of South African society. Urgent government intervention is needed at multiple levels to address the problem.

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# **‘Voices from behind Bars’: Xenophobia and Foreign Nationals Incarcerated in a South African Correctional Centre**

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## **Abstract**

At the dawn of democracy in 1994 South Africa has re-integrated itself with the global community and many have embraced the long awaited constitutional freedom despite numerous challenges. Since its integration into the global community, South Africa has witnessed a surge in migration from the sub-continent in search of opportunities which the new democracy has to offer. This surge of foreign nationals within the country was accompanied by many of the ‘social evils’ that confront a new democratic state, one of which was the increase in the incarceration levels within correctional institutions. The recent spate of crimes, allegedly committed by foreign nationals in South Africa, has prompted some South Africans to blame crime in general on immigrants. This article is based on research that aimed to record the voices of foreign nationals at the awaiting trial section of Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa, on their perceptions and responses to crime and criminality in the country. The article takes a cue from national incarceration statistics which reveals that there is a high level of incarcerated foreign nationals within South African Correctional facilities. Data for this article was utilised from personally administered questionnaires and focus group discussions with incarcerated foreign nationals. Information from this research reveals that the reason for xenophobic violence is multifaceted and that foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system. Their experiences provide evidence that foreign nationals experience many

challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

**Keywords:** South African Correctional facilities, incarceration, criminal justice system

## **Introduction**

Although 1994 marked a peaceful transition in South Africa from a dictatorial and oppressive society to one of free democracy, in 2008 the world watched in shock as South African citizens attacked foreign nationals in different communities throughout the country. Xenophobia is not a new occurrence in South Africa. Xenophobic violence in South Africa has been increasingly brought under the media spotlight since 1994, yet there is a lack of empirical data that reliably discusses and debates the alleged involvement of foreign nationals, in the rise of the national crime rates. South Africa's crime levels, escalating unemployment and the alleged abuse of social services, are repeatedly blamed on foreigners. Such allegations are difficult to prove but contribute to serious strain between South African citizens, law enforcement agents and foreigners. The rise of xenophobia cannot be isolated from the country's apartheid past of racial and class division and hostility, racist immigration policies, a siege mentality and attitudes of exclusivity and superiority towards the rest of Africa. Equally it cannot be isolated from new migration streams, legal and irregular, to post 1990 South Africa (Crush *et al.* 2008). Post 1994 the number of documented and undocumented foreign migrants from all parts of Africa increased tremendously.

Drawing on annual statistics from the Department of Correctional Services concerning foreign detainees within the South African Correctional facilities, this research article reflects on the extent to which foreign nationals have exposed dangerous levels of xenophobia among many South Africans. The main aim of this article is to record the voices of foreign nationals who are awaiting trial at the Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa, on their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality. It seeks to document the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial, in order to add their voices to the debate on crime, migration and xenophobia in South Africa. Their experiences provide evidence that

foreign nationals experience many challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

## **Research Methodology**

Research for this article began in 2008 when there were strong xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa. This study was conducted at the Awaiting-Trial section of Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre, Durban, South Africa. Data for this article was gathered through three methods: firstly, in April 2008, questionnaires were administered to a sample of a hundred awaiting trial detainees. Secondly, observations and group discussions (groups of approximately twenty-five) were conducted with the detainees in order to record their personal stories and describe their experiences as foreign nationals who have come into contact with the South African criminal justice system. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used in order to ascertain the various problems experienced these detainees within the correctional centre. Detainees were asked various questions which were thought to be significant to them as foreigners', some of which were: their reasons for coming to South Africa; their length of stay in the country; whether they entered the country legally; alleged crimes that they were incarcerated for; reasons for the commission of offences and against whom were the alleged crimes committed. Thirdly the principle researcher conducted individual interviews with foreign nationals. Interviews, both telephonic and personal were conducted on several occasions with correctional officials after arrangements were made with them. Officials were cooperative and provided the researcher with detailed information concerning the incarceration of foreign nationals within the correctional institution. The data was captured in the form of transcribed taped interviews and extensive field notes. Voluntary participation in the research was communicated to inmates prior to the interviews. Detainees were required to sign a consent form before participation in the research.

The awaiting trial section, Medium A of Westville Prison was constructed in 1986, at the time of the establishment of the penal institution, and is the biggest awaiting trial centre in KwaZulu-Natal. Medium A has 21 units of which C 1-6 housed awaiting trial foreign national detainees. These units were designed to accommodate approximately 25 people but

accommodated 70-80 (300% overcrowded). This research was administered within in the courtyard of C1-6, an area that housed only foreign nationals who were awaiting trial. At the time of the research, (April 2008), there were approximately 400 awaiting trial foreign detainees in the correctional centre. The total number of awaiting trial inmates at the Westville Prison, of all nationalities was approximately 4000.

Foreign nationals awaiting trial at the Westville Correctional centre were informed about the study by correctional officials and the researcher. One hundred questionnaires were administered to foreign national detainees but only forty-seven questionnaires were returned.

Analysis of the biographical data revealed that five detainees were between the ages 18 to 20 years, 19 between the ages of 21-25 years, 13 between 26-30 years, 9 between 31-35 years and 1 was over 36 years. All were Black African male detainees. Twenty one were from Mozambique, 8 from Tanzania, 5 from Zimbabwe, 4 from Nigeria, 3 from the DRC, 2 from Burundi and 1 each from Malawi, Zanzibar, Cameroon and Kenya. Interestingly enough, 4 had South African citizenship yet they were incarcerated as foreign nationals because of their country of birth. Although the first language of only one detainee was English, most of them spoke the language fluently.

Fifty-two were single, 15 married, 11 widowed and 6 divorced. Six had primary school education, 24 high school education, 5 tertiary education, 9 an unknown foreign qualification and 3 no education at all. Thirty-eight were employed before being detained and 9 were unemployed. Thirty-one migrated to South Africa in search of jobs and a better life, 9 because of political problems in their country, ‘home problems due to politics’, because ‘the trouble is bad in my country’ and ‘for protection’, 4 because they had family in the country and 3 in order to study.

Six were in South Africa for less than a year, seventeen for between 1-5 years and twenty-five for more than 5 years. Twenty four entered South Africa legally and 23 illegally. Fourteen came to South Africa under political asylum, ‘for protection’, and ‘because of trouble in their country’, and 33 were for other reasons. Focus group discussions revealed that 7 of the interviewees lived in South Africa for a long period, more than 8 years, 2 for four years, 1 for 3 years and two for less than a year. Three were asylum seekers whereas others came to South Africa ‘seeking greener pastures’.

## **Contextualisation of Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

The term 'xenophobia' is defined in the dictionary, as a 'hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture' (Collins English Dictionary, 1991, p.1775). A foreign national is defined by The Free Dictionary as 'a person present in a country who does not currently have the right to permanent residency of that country'. There are various types of foreigners that live in South Africa, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and immigrants. According to the White Paper on International Migration (1999: 52) an immigrant is defined as 'those who enter another country in order to make one's permanent life and home there'.

Foreign nationals, whether documented or undocumented, are often considered as an associated category of 'illegal aliens'. 'Illegal aliens' have been accused of 'taking the jobs of locals, lowering wages, increasing crime and spreading diseases' (Maharaj & Rajkumar 1997: 267), and, as a consequence, have become targets of resentment, hostility, and verbal and physical abuse. In line with this xenophobic debates exist around this category and form the basis for hatred, disagreement and hostility between South African citizens and foreigner nationals.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2009), violence against foreign nationals did not begin with the May 2008 attacks. Since 1994, hundreds of people have been harassed, attacked, or killed because of their position as outsiders or non-nationals. For many within and outside of government, earlier attacks were an unfortunate but largely unimportant consequence of South Africa's rapid social transformation and incorporation into the worldwide economy. Furthermore IOM (2009) reveals that there are three ways of understanding the May 2008 attacks:

there is the official definition of crime, which constructs the May violence as criminal; there is a social construction of crime, which sees foreign nationals as criminals and attacks against them as a form of social-law enforcement. Building on the perception that foreigners are an inherent social and political threat, the most nefarious perspective codes the May attacks as a form of control; a legitimate

form of vigilantism designed to protect the South African national territory.

Over the past nineteen years different political parties reacted to the influx of foreign nationals in South Africa. Attempts to stereotype foreign nations became more prevalent and the following responses from South African officials will confirm. For example in 1994 the Zulu-based Inkata Freedom Party (IFP) threatened to take ‘physical action’ if the government failed to respond to the apparent crisis of undocumented migrants in South Africa. In the same year the IFP leader and Minister of Home Affairs affirmed in a parliamentary speech:

if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring in South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme (allAfrica.com 2008:2).

In 1995 a statement from the Conference of Southern African Bishops attests:

there is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country .... One of the main problems is that a variety of people have been lumped together under the title of ‘illegal immigrants’, and the whole situation of demonising immigrants is feeding the xenophobia phenomenon.

In 1997 Defense Minister Joe Modise connected the concern of undocumented migration to the increase of crime in South Africa. In the same year Minister Buthelezi claimed that ‘illegal aliens’ cost South African taxpayers ‘billions of rands’ (allAfrica.com 2008:2-3). In November 2000 appalling images of police violence and abuse against three ‘illegal’ Mozambican immigrants was portrayed on national and international news. (Crush 2001:1).

In 2002 former Director-General of Home Affairs, Billy Masetsha commented on migrants involvement in criminal activities in the following way:

Approximately 90 per cent of foreign persons who are in RSA with fraudulent documents, i.e. either citizenship or migration documents, are involved in other crimes as well ... it is quicker to charge these criminals for their false documentation and then to deport them than to pursue the long route in respect of the other crimes that are committed (IOM 2009).

In February 2008 police were accused of promoting xenophobia after a search on the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. Cardinal Napier confirmed: 'the police action was entirely inappropriate, uncalled for and an unwelcome manifestation of xenophobia. It is not how refugees should be treated' (Swart 2008:4). In 2008 there were numerous incidents of xenophobic violence characterised by assaults on foreigners and the destruction of their possessions (Swart 2008:4).

On the 7 June 2013, five years after the 2008 co-ordinated attacks exploded across South Africa, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) said that xenophobia attacks in South Africa have not ended (Cote 2013). Cote said the reason xenophobia ended was because nothing had really been done to end the attacks, or begin the healing process.

Even more disturbing is the government's denial of the real threat of xenophobia. Hate crime legislation, which would prioritise such crimes, has been languishing in committees for years.

## **Legislation Governing Migration in South Africa**

Immigration policy during the 1990s must be contextualised within South Africa's political transition from apartheid to democracy, which is, from an authoritarian state legislated on racism, to a democracy governed by constitutional equality. By and large hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of immigrants have crossed into South Africa over the past two decades to share in the promise of a new and vibrant nation. Official estimates on the number of undocumented immigrants living illegally in South Africa vary widely, ranging from less than one million to 12 million (Murray 2003:445). The major piece of legislation governing migration policy in South Africa is the Aliens Control Act, enacted in 1991 and consolidated into one piece of

legislation a number of provisions regulating entry and residence (Peberdy & Crush 1998: 33).

As a direct consequence of political change, two groups of people crossing borders for political reasons, namely, returning exiles and refugees became central to South African politics. The development of institutional measures to deal with returning exiles resulted in the simultaneous development of instruments to recognise and accommodate refugees. (Harris 2001:24-25). Although the early 1990s were marked by political change, and institutions such as the UNHCR were admitted to South Africa, immigration policy was generally manipulated by the apartheid state in a bid to 'entrench the policies of the past and set the parameters within which reform and reconstruction would take place' (Peberdy & Crush 1998b:33). Peberdy and Crush (1998b) explain that the 'apartheid government introduced its only major piece of immigration legislation, the Aliens Control Act, as recently as 1991' (33). This act

consolidated the numerous acts controlling the entry and lives of immigrants into a single omnibus piece of legislation. Many of the act's provisions were inherited from existing legislation, which had been passed by governments of the apartheid and pre-apartheid eras to serve racial and other imperatives and to extend the absolute powers of the state, unfettered by democratic checks and balances. The act also entrenched the 'two gates' policy, which distinguished between white immigrants and black migrants. Section 41 retained the exemption clauses, that allowed white farmers and the mining industry, to recruit migrant labour outside the country under special dispensation (Peberdy & Crush 1998b: 33 - 34).

Often hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999).

The Aliens Control Act of 1991 ensured that racism remained entrenched within immigration policy. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, the act maintained racism during the early 1990s and guaranteed that the alien remained a black alien across that period. Secondly, it formed the basis for the 1995 Aliens Control Amendment Act. Despite certain amend-

ments to the 1991 Act, contemporary immigration policy has been built on a racist foundation (Peberdy & Crush 1998b). The 'serious questions' surrounding the Aliens Control Amendment Act of 1995 have resulted in the development of three legislative instruments to redress immigration in contemporary South Africa. These are The Green Paper on International Migration (1997), The White Paper on Refugees (1998) (enacted in April 2000), and The White Paper on International Migration (1999). The Green Paper challenges the existing focus on 'control and expulsion rather than facilitation and management implicit in previous immigration policy' (3). It suggests that migration is managed and planned, rather than reactive, and it offers a human rights-based alternative to the racism contained in the Aliens Control Amendment Act of 1995 (Harris 2001:26).

The White Papers on Refugees (1998) and International Migration (1999) have both developed out of the Green Paper on International Migration (1997). However, in the process of their development, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has made various amendments to the recommendations of the Green Paper. These amendments have been criticised for being conservative and punitive (Cooper 1999; Williams 1999). Cooper (1999) contends that Home Affairs is becoming increasingly hard-lined about foreigners. She explains that the institution has adopted a strong sovereignty principle of governance in favour of international and constitutional emphasis on individual human rights (Cooper 1999). The potential for human rights abuses is strong within both White Papers. This is because the legislation imbues the Department of Home Affairs with vast administrative powers, powers that multiply the potential for corruption and bribery because there is not a democratic system of control over the granting of status in the country, as either a refugee or a legal immigrant or migrant (Harris 2001:26). The legislation also locates responsibility for surveillance and control of foreigners within the hands of the public. It enlists public participation in the 'detection, apprehension and removal of "illegal aliens"' (Williams 1999a:2).

## **Foreign Nationals Incarcerated in South African Correctional Facilities**

In February 2013, Correctional Services Minister Sbu Ndebele (Ndebele

2013) said that South Africa has the highest prison population in Africa. Ndebele was speaking at a meeting with senior leadership of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union and the Public Servants Association of SA in Pretoria. He stated that currently South Africa is ranked ninth in the world in terms of prison population, with approximately 160 000 inmates. Of this figure at least 30% of those detained were awaiting trial. Ndebele indicated:

That our offender population has remained constant, whether you remove pass laws, group areas, or apartheid laws, should make us search more urgently for answers to the high prison population in South Africa.

Drawing on available statistics from the Department of Correctional Services for the year February 2011 indicates that South Africa had a total prison population of 162 162, of which 112 467 had been sentenced, while 49 695 were awaiting trial. Foreign nationals, of whom the majority were Zimbabweans and Mozambicans, made up 8 580 of inmates. A total of 4 868 of these nationals had been sentenced, while 3 712 were waiting to be sentenced. The inmates were being held in 243 facilities operated by the Department of Correctional Services. The average cost of keeping each of these inmates behind bars costs the taxpayer R123.37 daily (Department of Correctional Services 2012).

According to Correctional Services Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula (2011) South Africa shares its land borders with six other states in the region, but by far the majority of foreign nationals serving time in its prisons come from just two of them - Zimbabwe and Mozambique. A written reply by Correctional Services Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula to a parliamentary question on the 26 June 2011, states that more than two-thirds (67.5%) of foreign sentenced inmates come from these two countries. Of this total, 1 913 come from Zimbabwe, and 1 449 from Mozambique. There are a further 3 931 foreigners in prison awaiting trial, a group correctional services refers to as 'remand detainees'. Of this total, 1 887 are Zimbabweans, and 916 come from Mozambique. In contrast, 605 sentenced offenders come from Lesotho, 100 from Swaziland, 11 from Namibia and 10 from Botswana. There are also 426 Nigerians behind bars, of whom 184 are sentenced offenders and 242 in the awaiting-trial category (Nqakula: 2011).

Between 1990 and 2004 Mozambicans had the most number of deportations than any other foreign national group (Department of Home Affairs, 2004-2005). At the end of December 2006 the number of Zimbabwean migrant deportations increased tremendously, approximately 80 000 (Department of Home Affairs 2006).

An important and interesting piece of information that emerged from the research interviews conducted with awaiting trial detainees at the Westville Correctional Centre in 2008 was that xenophobia was prevalent even within the correctional facility. It was learnt that prior to 2006, foreign inmates were incarcerated together with South African inmates. But there were periodic fights between South Africans and foreigners incarcerated detainees. In 2006 there was a major violent confrontation between the South African and foreign detainees where both foreign and local inmates were stabbed. One of the reasons postulated for the rift between South Africans and foreigners within the correctional facility was the perception that foreigners have money and they are involved in gang activities. The South African detainees also felt that the presence of foreigners in their communities was the main reason challenging their economic and physical well-being. They perceived foreigners to be criminals; troublemakers; threats to their livelihoods and carriers of diseases.

Thus since 2006 because of the xenophobic behaviour displayed by South African detainees, the decision was taken to house foreign nationals and the South African detainees awaiting trial in separate sections of the correctional institution. Discussions with correctional officials (3 of them) stated that overcrowding was a serious problem and often severely short staffed, which negatively impacted on the efficient running of the facility. Interestingly enough, the correctional officials in charge of the foreign nationals stated that although inmate on inmate violence was a common occurrence, this section (awaiting trial – foreign nationals) was one of the least problematic sections. The ones consisting of adult South African males were by far the most problematic. One official stated that in the 15 years that he has been working for correctional services, it was the first time that he encountered researchers who were interested in research pertaining to foreign nationals.

During the interviews conducted with foreign detainees at the awaiting trial section in April 2008, it was learnt that the awaiting trial cells

accommodated three times the number of inmates for which they were designed. There were up to 75 inmates in cells that were designed for only 25. Inmates slept in toilets with neither sponges nor lights. They were locked at 2 p.m. and unlocked at 7.30 am— keeping them confined to their cells for more than 17 hours of the day in close proximity to each other with no air flow and with the use of only one toilet and one shower per cell. Overcrowded conditions in the South African correctional facilitate allows an easy spread of communicable diseases among inmates, of which HIV/AIDS has become the most problematic.

The tables below represent the increase in the number of foreign nationals in South Africa's Correctional Facilities over a six year period; i.e. 2006-2011. Detainees were classified in accordance with 5 categories of crime committed, namely economical- some of which are commercial crimes, shoplifting, fraud, etc.), aggressive (of which murder, assault, robbery etc. are included), sexual (some of which are rape, sexual offences, prostitution indecency, etc), narcotics (which includes drugs, possession of drugs, driving under the influence of alcohol, etc) and other (which includes all crimes not mentioned elsewhere within the crime categories stipulated by the Department of Correctional Services).

### **Representation of Incarcerated Foreign Nationals in South African Correctional Facility 2006-2011**

**Table 1: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2006**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	670	1278	<b>1948</b>
Aggressive	755	1416	<b>2171</b>
Sexual	146	228	<b>374</b>
Narcotics	236	400	<b>636</b>
Other	137	312	<b>449</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1944</b>	<b>3634</b>	<b>5578</b>

**Table 2: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2007**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	733	1288	2021
Aggressive	852	1393	<b>2245</b>
Sexual	139	181	<b>320</b>
Narcotics	222	424	<b>646</b>
Other	204	233	<b>437</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2150</b>	<b>3519</b>	<b>5669</b>

**Table 3: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2008**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	881	1415	<b>2296</b>
Aggressive	1117	1458	<b>2575</b>
Sexual	164	181	<b>345</b>
Narcotics	293	434	<b>727</b>
Other	320	719	<b>1039</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2775</b>	<b>4207</b>	<b>6982</b>

**Table 4: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2009**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1294	1700	<b>2994</b>
Aggressive	1629	1719	<b>3348</b>
Sexual	267	231	<b>498</b>
Narcotics	260	512	<b>772</b>
Other	328	271	<b>599</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3778</b>	<b>4433</b>	<b>8211</b>

**Table 5: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2010**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1294	1700	<b>2994</b>
Aggressive	1629	1719	<b>3348</b>
Sexual	267	231	<b>498</b>
Narcotics	260	512	<b>772</b>
Other	328	271	<b>599</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3778</b>	<b>4433</b>	<b>8211</b>

**Table 6: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2011**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1385	1845	<b>3230</b>
Aggressive	1549	1899	<b>3448</b>
Sexual	239	246	<b>485</b>
Narcotics	294	560	<b>854</b>
Other	245	318	<b>563</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3712</b>	<b>4868</b>	<b>8580</b>

**Table 7: Total number of crimes committed by Foreign Nationals (Sentenced and Unsentenced): 2006-2011**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Economical	1948	2021	2296	2994	2994	3230
Aggressive	2171	2245	2575	3348	3348	3448
Sexual	374	320	345	498	498	485
Narcotics	636	646	727	772	772	854
Other	449	437	1039	599	599	563
<b>Total</b>	<b>5578</b>	<b>5669</b>	<b>6982</b>	<b>8211</b>	<b>8211</b>	<b>8580</b>

The above tables, 1 to 6, illustrate the inmate composition of foreign nationals both sentenced and unsentenced by the Department of Correctional Services for the various crime categories in the years 2006 to 2011. Of this population 43, 26% were awaiting trial and 56, 74 % sentenced. The tables reveal that there has been a 54% increase in foreign national inmates, (sentenced and uncentenced combined) for the period 2006 to 2011. The sentenced inmate population increased by 34% and the unsentenced (awaiting trial) by 91% for the same period. Due to the fact that this article records the voices of awaiting trial inmates on their perceptions and responses to crime and criminality in the country, the statistics for this segment of the correctional inmates will be focused upon.

The records from awaiting trial inmates detained for alleged offences for aggressive, economical<sup>1</sup>, narcotics and sexual acts indicate that these offences has steadily increased from 2006 to 2011. Inmates held in relation to crimes of a violent or aggressive nature (unsentenced) is consistently the highest and accounts for more than 45% of the foreign national awaiting trial inmate population. This is followed by sexual and economical offences which accounted for 49% and 43% respectively for the year 2011.

If the total foreign national inmate population, i.e. sentenced and unsentenced, are analysed, inmates held in relation to aggressive offences account for approximately 40% followed by economical offences ,38% ; narcotics 10% and sexual, 6%. This has important implications for correctional centre management and security classification of inmates. The implications of the increase of these statistics on understanding xenophobic attacks are important because it indicates the relationship between crime and foreign nationals in South Africa.

## **The Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

The subsequent results are reported in the arrangement of the written survey and will be supported by answers from the focus group discussions where appropriate. In the justification that follows, the analysis will be an

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘economic’ and ‘economical’ are used interchangeably in this paper as the department of correctional services has a category termed ‘economical’ yet the current scholarly usage is ‘economic.’

integration of both the responses to the survey and group discussions. The inmates direct spoken responses will be presented in Italics. It is of vital importance to demonstrate the findings in this manner, so that the voices of the foreigner nationals could be ‘heard’ and the fundamental meanings in the communication analysed. Data will be further categorised according to three main themes that emerged from the information. Voices of the inmates bring various aspects regarding xenophobia, access to justice, drug peddling and their vulnerability as inmates within the South African justice system to the fore.

When detainees were asked the reason for their incarceration and the alleged offences that they were awaiting trial for, the response were as follows:

**Table 8: Alleged Offences Committed by Foreign National Detainees**

<b>Offence</b>	<b>No Of Detainees</b>
Theft/Damage to Motor Vehicle	14
Robbery/Housebreaking	12
Drugs	5
Fraud	4
Assault	4
Rape	2
No Crime	6

The response to this question revealed that 16 (34%) were awaiting trial for aggressive offences including robbery and assault to cause grievous bodily harm. A further 18 (38%) were in prison for economic offences such as theft, housebreaking and fraud; five (11%) for narcotics related offences such as drug consumption and drug trafficking; and two (4%) were awaiting trial in prison for sexual offences such as rape. Six (13%) alleged that they did not commit any offence. Not one of them was awaiting trial for murder.

**Table 9: Reason for the Commission of the alleged offence by Foreign Nationals Detainees**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No Of Detainees</b>
Claim to be innocent	28
Better life/Money	9
Misunderstanding	3
Mental Illness	1
No Response	6

Table 9 represents the reasons given by the inmates for the alleged offences. Sixty percent of the detainees claimed to be innocent. Reasons given for this claim were various. Some of the comments made seemed like a passionate appeal to me to understand and believe in their reasons and disclosure for being detained. One detainee said to me:

I did not commit the crime but wonder why I am in jail because I didn't even commit the crime. I just pray to God that you take me out of here. Thank you to see you people and just explain my problem to you.

## **Treatment of Foreign Nationals by the South African Criminal Justice System**

Comments made by the respondents on their treatment by the justice system and their alleged crimes shows that often the problems of the social ills of housing settlements, i.e. crime, unemployment and lack of housing have all been attributed to foreign nationals. Thus the foreigner has becomes a scapegoat for antagonism and violent behavior.

One respondent said:

I did not commit the crime but the policeman abused us foreigners because I was just sitting down with my friends and just talking stories suddenly the police came and arrested us.

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Another stated:

I did not commit the crime but the guy who complained and said I robbed him, he paid money to police and they came and arrest me in my house. When I tried to ask them they say I have nothing to say but I will explain everything to the court.

I was walking on road about 5 am, the time I went to help my brother at the garage so from now I don't know what my charge is. Its 7 months until now I'm still in prison.

It's not true. Another Indian man did it. He was my friend. When it was done he pointed me to be the one who did it alone to such circumstances that police pick whoever is there that's why I'm here.

When the detainees were asked if they had any other comments to make, a heartfelt appeal was extended to me:

Only one thing I can just tell you, is that us foreigners we are being too much abused here in South Africa without causing any problem. I thank you to come for visiting me.

Please I use this opportunity tell everyone to treat we foreigners as same brothers and sisters because most of us suffer innocently without being proved. All my valid document are with me to prove but they refuse to listen to me because they view all Nigerians as thieves which is unfair and they should not delay to take any illegal back to their country please here is suffering for nothing waiting to be deported. South African justice is totally against foreigners. We are always taken for granted.

Foreigners have been treated unfairly. Bails have been denied for no reason. Even if you have completed all the requirements which allows one to be granted bail. If really foreigners are committing crime, I will suggest that the government itself is to be blamed,

because they do not take seriously issues of foreigners in this country.

## **Vulnerability of Foreign Nationals**

Some detainees said that they resorted to crime for food and for a better life,

‘because for money for food’. Because South African way of living is very different and even with my standard of education to get employment is impossible so I have to resort to crime

My God Jehovah knows from my heart that I did not commit the crime. I went to home affairs with my passport and the person that stand for me and get me my papers and work permit to work through registration. Because it was not done according to our region I got arrested.

When detainees were asked against who was the alleged crime committed, 61,7% stated that it was committed against a South African, 21,28% against another foreign national or illegal immigrant and 17% gave no response. 8,5% indicated that they worked for a syndicate and 91,5 indicated that they did not work for any syndicates. Some comments were:

I committed the crime with a group of Mozambicans and a group of South Africans. The people who committed the crime were South African, but I was driving the car.

When the detainees were asked if they were in prison before, 32% responded in the affirmative and 61, 70% in the negative. The remainder gave no response. Seventy two percent of the detainees were within the correctional institution for more than 12 months. According to South African Immigration law a foreign national is only allowed to stay for 30 days awaiting trial. From the above it is evident that this is not the policy. The average they are kept for was over 12 months.

## **Foreign Nationals used as ‘scapegoats’**

In keeping with the questionnaires and the group discussions, 4 of the interviewees said that they were framed for the crime, viz, the Nigerians involved in drugs. The foreign national prisoners experienced xenophobia, especially from police officials. One stated:

I want to say that in South Africa the police have intimidation on the Nigerians-they want to put the Nigerians inside. There are a lot of people here who didn't do anything. It's not proper, it's not right.

While detainees are subjected to and become vulnerable to human rights abuses, one of which is being housed in overcrowded correctional cells, interviews conducted with awaiting-trial detainees revealed that when apprehending suspected foreigners, police personnel had assaulted them and extorted money.

One interviewee spoke about the manner in which he was used as a scapegoat for drugs.

Because of hatred, they hate us. I am not the first one here for any reason. They charge you because you are a Nigerian-you have drugs/sell drugs-put drugs in the house, pocket. Police make different dockets- with wrong information-so that it's difficult in court to prove otherwise.

A demand from an interviewee was:

I don't know if you people can help us-Some of our Nigerians have not committed any crime-we didn't do anything-the cops are using the opportunity-they come to you asking for money. If you don't give them money they will just say that you have to suffer. They put their hands in their pocket-I don't know where they are getting the drugs because everyone know that the Nigerians are dealing in drugs, that's why they are using the opportunity to treat us bad. They think that this person is a dealer.

In light of the above statements which document the voices of detained foreign nationals it sheds insight into the perceptions of foreigners contributing to the level of crime and xenophobia in South Africa. According to Peberdy (1999: 296) African foreigners are linked to chaos and disorder. They are also presented as illegal and therefore, as criminal. This suggests that the depiction of African migrants as 'illegals', 'illegal aliens', and 'illegal immigrants' implies both criminality and difference. The persistent use of 'illegals' to describe undocumented migrants suggests a close connection with crime and criminal acts. The SAPS (South African Police Service) also provide the number of 'illegal aliens' arrested in crime swoops, or stop and search operations. Although these figures may improve the arrest rates of the SAPS, the conflation of arrested criminals and arrested undocumented migrants creates forged links between crime and undocumented migrants. Just as African foreigners are criminalised and tainted, so xenophobia is presented as a contaminant in South African society. It appears as an unstoppable and irrational fear or plague, sweeping across the country. Through metaphors of disease, floods and the laager mentality, xenophobia is pathologised. That is, it is represented as a pathology, as something abnormal and unhealthy (Harris 2002: 10).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article reflects on the extent to which foreign nationals have exposed dangerous levels of xenophobia among many South Africans. This article records the voices of foreign nationals on their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality at the Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa. It documents the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial, in order to add their voices to the debate on crime, migration and xenophobia within South Africa. Hostility towards foreigners has become one of the most significant features within South African society. The eruption of xenophobic attacks in South Africa during May 2008 was some of the most horrendous action of crime against mankind. Whether in South Africa, or any other part of the world, xenophobic violence is destructive. Although the criminal justice system in South Africa has accomplished much considering the challenges it has faced since 1994, violent crime still remains one of the biggest challenges that it faces and

responses to crime are strongly determined by the attitudes and mechanisms of the Criminal Justice System. The increase in the crime rate in South Africa since 1994 is more often than not blamed on immigrants, without any justifiable proof. Over 5-10 million immigrants in South Africa are judged by the criminal acts of a small number of immigrants who are almost constantly working with South Africans to commit crime. The perpetual negative stereotyping of foreign nationals in the South African media and from popular public figures as 'drug peddlers', 'hijackers', 'violent criminals', and 'job stealers', fuels the negative perceptions and victimisation of foreigners.

This research has shown that in order to combat crime effectively, it is essential to identify and acknowledge the source. The reasons for xenophobic violence is multifaceted. Xenophobic violence emanates from unemployment, a lack of service delivery and accountability by the Government, the criminal element in society, the current economic situation, the lax South African migration policy and a conviction by the poverty suffering South Africans that, migrants were receiving benefits that were owed to locals. Information from this research reveals that the reason for xenophobic violence is multifaceted and that foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system. Their experiences provide evidence that foreign nationals experience many challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

There is a necessity to examine xenophobic crime in South Africa in order to increase the frameworks of analysis and intervention. There should be an examination into the multiple causes of xenophobic behaviour and the study of the association between the micro and macro structures. South Africa will continue to attract economic and other migrants. Gaps in migration policy have to be addressed while at the same time acknowledging that South Africa is a state very dependent on foreign labour. Most importantly, the brutality of the xenophobic violence during May 2008 by South African citizens is indications of very deep-rooted scars that remain from the culture of violence that is an inheritance of apartheid. Nineteen years post-democracy these scars still remain and require urgent consideration by all sectors of the South African nation.

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# **Non-Governmental Organisations and Xenophobia in South Africa: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers (GOTG)<sup>1</sup>**

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Goolam Vahed**

## **Abstract**

This article examines the response of a Non-Governmental Organisation (GOTG) to the 2008 xenophobic attacks and more broadly reflects on the role of NGOs in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and in conflict situations more broadly. NGO responses to emergencies transcend the nation-state in many instances and they need to be sophisticated in their operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists. This study is based on interviews with key officials of GOTG, visits to refugee camps, and an analysis of publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG. While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier report was published by Ashwin Desai, ‘Responding to the May 2008 Xenophobic attacks: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers.’ The report can be accessed at: [http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/all/modules/filemanager/files/12\\_Gift\\_of\\_the\\_givers\\_c.pdf](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/all/modules/filemanager/files/12_Gift_of_the_givers_c.pdf). This case study was part of a larger project on xenophobia in South Africa, which resulted in the publication of a 500 page report titled *South African Civil Society and Xenophobia. Strategies and Tactics*, which was published in July 2010 and can be accessed at <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/report-south-african-civil-society-and-xenophobia>.

xenophobia, this study shows that NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role by providing material help to victims. One of the criticisms of NGOs is that they respond to crises without engaging in long term strategic planning. We show that the ability to respond effectively at short notice is important because many crises require urgent intervention in a context where Government is unable to do so. NGOs also provide a channel for ordinary individuals to contribute in various ways to a crisis. This article does argues though that NGOs can do more by helping to raise awareness of xenophobia and mobilizing civil society to prevent attacks, pushing government to confront xenophobia through clearer policies and stricter laws, and being more vocal in exposing those who indulge in xenophobic discourse. GOTG's position of 'not taking sides' makes it hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience but this has not diminished its contribution.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Organisations, xenophobic attacks, refugee camps, humanitarian aid

As long as your stomach is full, you will know nothing about the condition of the starving; as long as your house is warm, you will not understand the actions of those who live without heat; as long as your own feet are well shod, as long as you have thick clothes to wear, you will have no idea of the state of those who go barefoot and unclad. Satisfy the hungry, so that Paradise may love you. Clothe the naked, so that you may not be bare on the coming day of Resurrection, when all the rest are naked. Become aware of the condition of all those paupers and orphans, for your own wife may become a pauper and your own children orphans. The wheel of fate turns. None of us knows what is to be: what great wealth may be doomed to extinction or how many, now despised, may rise to heights of dignity and honour (Muzaffer Ozak 1992: 233 – 'Inspiration' behind Sooliman's Gift of the Givers organisation).

In May 2008, xenophobic attacks in South Africa left more than 60 African migrants and refugees dead and thousands homeless. Many of the displaced congregated outside police stations, arriving with just the clothing on their backs. It was the middle of Gauteng's winter. One of the first organisations to respond to the crisis was the Gift of the Givers (GOTG). Within a week of the attacks, GOTG moved over R1 million worth of goods to refugee centres in Alexandra, Cleveland, Primrose and other parts of Gauteng. This included tents, blankets and food parcels. Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who founded GOTG, was emphatic: 'To me, the real spirit of South Africans has been shown. We are not a xenophobic nation.' It appeared as if GOTG had anticipated the attacks and was prepared for them. Over the next few months, GOTG constantly provided support and followed the refugees as they made their way to camps across Johannesburg, the ironically named eGoli (City of Gold).

Sooliman had landed at Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo Airport just as the first attacks commenced. He was returning from Malawi where he had gone to inspect projects that GOTG was running in that country. As soon as he was informed of the attacks, he told the GOTG Gauteng head of operations, Allauddin Sayed, to prioritise support to the victims. Sayed lives in Bramley, which is situated quite close to Alexandra Township, the scene of some of the very first and most violent attacks. Sayed immediately arranged for bread and blankets to be sent to the Alexandra Police Station. When he got to the police station, Sayed realised the enormity of the task at hand and the need for far more resources than was initially anticipated.

This article examines GOTG's response to the attacks and more broadly reflects on the role that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can play and are playing in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and their role in conflict situations. This is an important area of investigation given that responding to emergencies has for many organisations gone beyond the nation-state; many NGOs perceive their role as a global one. As we write various NGOs, including GOTG, are involved in countries like Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mauritania. NGOs need to be sophisticated in their conduct and operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists in a conflict. They are also required to display high levels of project management skills, target setting, monitoring, and accountability. GOTG makes a compelling case study in this context (Duffield 2001: 46).

This article is largely based on interviews with key members of GOTG following a visit to a camp in June 2008 where those displaced by the xenophobic attacks were accommodated and provided with food, blankets, and basic goods. Field work included visits to various camps and other projects run by GOTG. Publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG and Sooliman were also analysed.

## **GOTG: The Beginnings**

Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder and present head of GOTG, is a well-known figure in the world of humanitarian missions. He started GOTG in August 1992 as a one-room operation in his Pietermaritzburg home. By the time of the 2008 attacks, GOTG laid claim to being the largest private humanitarian disaster relief organisation in Africa<sup>2</sup>. GOTG followed in the footsteps of private, as opposed to state-sponsored, organisations that have been sprouting since the 1970s and have a global reach. Rony Brauman, one of the founders of Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières), observes that the 1970s witnessed the rise of what James Rosenau has called ‘sovereignty-free actors’ who ‘positioned themselves on the international stage that previously had been reserved for states, but without all the problems of state-controlled national sovereignty in the classical sense.’ Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders / Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), and Oxfam are examples of this kind of organisation. As Brauman points out, there is a dark side to this development:

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<sup>2</sup> At this time it listed the following projects: Disaster Response and Rehabilitation; Primary Health Care Clinics; Water Provision; Hunger Alleviation; Nutrition Supplements; Hospital Interventions; Malaria Prevention; Agricultural Inputs; Skills Development, Entrepreneurship and Job Creation; Bursaries and Scholarships; Education Support; Open Source Computer Labs; Road Safety; Adelaide Tambo School for the Physically Challenged; Winter Warmth; Shoe-ing the Nation; Sports Development; Cultural Projects; Counselling Services; Life Skills; Toy Distribution; Meat Distribution; Wheelchair Distribution; Research and Development; Interfaith Unification.

It is not as if some ethical force suddenly took hold of the world, though: this phenomenon also applies to terrorist groups, to religious movements, to businesses, to revolutionary movements. With urbanisation, instantaneous communication, and the democratisation of transport (invention of charters), we are witnessing a ‘revolution in the abilities and aptitudes of the individual’- to borrow Roseneau’s formulation. It is within this context that private organisations of all kinds have been multiplying and developing at a rate that would have been unimaginable at any other time. This new ‘revolution’ allows private groups to begin establishing themselves in areas that up until now have been reserved for states (Brauman 2004: 406).

NGOs have played an important role in the development field as well as humanitarian assistance since the 1970s. While northern NGOs grew from the 1970s, those in the South emerged from the 1990s. According to one estimate, even omitting food aid, the assistance that NGOs provide to the South exceeds that spent by UN agencies (Duffield 2001: 53). The importance of NGOs can be gauged from the fact that by the end of the 1980s, many donor governments channelled aid through these organisations. In fact, NGOs are implementers of UN programmes in many instances, including in conflict areas (Duffield 2001: 55). As NGOs are usually politically neutral, they have an edge in that they are able to gain access to information and certain areas which are no-go zones for many governments (Duffield 2001: 57).

The immediate inspiration for the formation of GOTG came during a trip Sooliman made to Turkey, but his past experience suggests a natural progression. Sooliman and his wife Zohra were both members of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and the Muslim Youth Movement in the 1970s and 1980s and were involved in community projects aimed at socio-economic redress. After qualifying as a medical doctor, Sooliman opened a practice in Berg Street, Pietermaritzburg, adjacent to the city’s bus rank, catering almost exclusively for the city’s poor African working class population. He subsequently opened a practice in an underprivileged ‘Coloured’ township and juggled his time between these sites. Sooliman was also a member of the Islamic Medical Association (IMA), formed in the late

1970s to provide free medical services in African townships (such as mobile clinics run by volunteer doctors).

The Gulf War in 1990 shaped Sooliman's life in important ways. He was an outspoken critic of the war because of its humanitarian consequences and channelled aid to that country through the Gulf War Relief Fund. Shortly thereafter he got involved in providing relief in Mozambique, where the Kuwaitis were funding a hospital in Nkala in the northern part of the country. When war broke out, the Kuwaitis discontinued their funding and a single Sudanese doctor was left to run the entire hospital. The African Muslim Agency stepped in and asked Sooliman to head a relief project. When a cyclone struck Bangladesh in April 1991 (leaving 135,000 people dead), Sooliman responded, this time under the banner of the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA).

On a whim, Sooliman contacted the South African Foreign Affairs Department for assistance. He persuaded the department that the mission presented an opportunity for South Africa, an international pariah for decades, to change its image in the midst of sensitive political negotiations with the majority African population (non-racial democracy would come in 1994). It was, according to Zohra Sooliman, a 'shot in the dark but the response was unbelievable. They told us that it would be too expensive to provide the three aeroplanes that were required but that they would instead provide a ship. We were overjoyed and accepted the offer.' Sooliman recalled what transpired at his meeting with the South African Navy top brass, as Bangladesh did not have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa.

I was a bit nervous because here was all these admirals and stuff and I was by myself, this lone Indian. But within fifteen minutes, I tell you, we were like old friends. They said 'What do you want?' and whatever I asked, they said 'OK'. I was amazed. But the Bangladeshis ... sent me a long list of what we couldn't do - plus a few things we could. I simply cut out the bits I didn't like, pasted them together, tipp-exed (glued) it to clean it up a bit and showed the navy: 'Here, we're got authorization!' (Schmidt 2006).

This was followed by Sooliman's life changing visit to Turkey:

I went to Turkey in August 1991 and met a Sufi Master. I saw people of all religions, colour, nationality coming to a Muslim place, and he told me that religion doesn't bring friction nor violence; it teaches love and compassion. The formation of the Gift of the Givers was instructed by the Sufi master Mohammed Saffer Effendi in Turkey a year later on 6 August 1992. It was my second meeting with him. All he said is that we will form an organisation whose name will be the Gift of the Givers in English – *Waqful Waqifin*. He said, ‘This will be your job for the rest of your life. Your lesson for the rest of your life will be “The best among people are those who benefit mankind”’ And he said that the emphasis was on the word ‘mankind’, not Muslim. And the emphasis should be on Africa, he insisted. ‘They need it most. You will not be judgemental, you will honour the difficulty of every human being, no matter what their circumstances, and you will serve mankind unconditionally – it doesn't matter if a person is Hindu, Jew, Muslim, or Christian, what his political affiliation or social station is. And don't expect anything in the return, not even gratitude’.

Sooliman returned to South Africa to fulfil the instructions of his Sufi master<sup>3</sup> by combining his spiritual and humanitarian commitment in an organisational form - GOTG.

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<sup>3</sup> Sufism refers to the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. While some Sufis fall outside of Islam and see themselves as constituting a universal movement predating Islam, Sufis in South Africa mostly follow one of the orthodox Islamic traditions but attach themselves to a Shaykh who provides guidance in all aspects of life. He would prescribe certain prayers or dhikr ('remembrance of God') that would allow the follower to turn his or her heart away from everything other than God. The followers of a Shaykh usually consult him on all major and minor issues and follow the advice given. The Sufi tradition has a long presence in the Cape but has been spreading over the past two decades among Indian Muslims in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Adherents compare Shaykhs to physicians. While the latter takes care of the body the Shaykh sees to the maladies of the heart.

Sooliman and Zohra had three children when Gift of the Givers (GOTG) was formed. He was running three medical practices and she was a pre-school teacher who was completing a degree in Social Work and Psychology via correspondence through the University of South Africa (UNISA). They subsequently had two more children and Zohra fondly refers to GOTG as her sixth child since it was ‘born’ in their Pietermaritzburg home. As GOTG’s operations expanded and required their full-time attention, Sooliman gave up his medical practice and Zohra her teaching job. For Zohra, this was not a difficult decision, as she grew up in a household where her parents were always involved in philanthropic work and the lesson she absorbed from them was that philanthropy was an extension of her religious conviction.

More than two decades later, GOTG’s headquarters is still in Pietermaritzburg, but the organisation now has offices in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Malawi, and the Republic of Yemen. According to GOTG’s website, its work has broadened to include 25 categories of projects, ranging from bursaries to humanitarian aid in more than 20 countries across the globe, delivering hundreds of millions of rands in aid. According to Zohra Sooliman, GOTG underwent an important transition around 1998 when a decision was made to be proactive rather than reactive to crises. Innovations included the world’s first containerised mobile hospital and primary health care unit, the high energy protein supplement, Subisiso, and establishing the largest Open Source Computer Lab in Africa. At the time of writing in October 2013, GOTG and Sooliman had received more than 80 national and international awards for their humanitarian work, including awards from the presidents of four countries. In 2010, Sooliman received the Order of the Grand Counsellor of the Baobab: Silver award from President Jacob Zuma for his contribution through GOTG to humanitarian aid nationally and internationally.

While one can label GOTG a private humanitarian organisation, it is different from organisations such as Greenpeace and Oxfam in important respects. GOTG is Africa-based, its main source of funding is South African, and its central focus of operations is Southern Africa. In contrast, most of the NGOs that provide assistance to the South originate in the North and raise their monies in the North (Duffield 2001: 53).

## **GOTG's Immediate Response**

When the xenophobic attacks started, GOTG was in the middle of its winter warmth project in partnership with two popular radio stations, East Coast Radio and Jacaranda Radio, which are based in and have large audiences in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng respectively. This was the beginning of three weeks of non-stop action. Sayed describes what happened:

That night we came with tents. We put up 40 in Alex and six at Bramley police station. We gave the displaced food. By then xenophobic attacks were in full force. At 3:00 am Disaster Management gave 3,000 blankets (donated by us) to Primrose Park and Germiston. People threw stones at us when we arrived at night at the Germiston Municipal Hall. We were not ready for this. It flared up on 12 May in Alex. Third night, Disaster Management came - Nigel, Springs, Kwa-Tema ... all came for help. Germiston district and the police could not cope and the head of Disaster Management contacted Imtiaz. Next day, 2:00 am, we loaded the vehicles we had at hand. Government Disaster Management sent their fire trucks. I've never experienced anything like that. It was a war zone. We emptied our stores – mattresses, food, blankets, everything. There were no camps at that stage. We realised that by the time government wakes up it will be too late. We mobilised churches. Pritchard Street Bishop Paul Verryn from the Methodist Church was great. There were 150 women and children cramped in a foetal position on the floor, and a woman gave birth in that position at 2:30am ... just like that. The Methodist Church in Primrose opened up its doors.

We started having centres. Village Walk was our most successful collection point. Ambassadors from all over made donations in that first week of xenophobia. I got a call from one of the journalists about a girl whose uncle was burnt alive. She ran for miles because they wanted to rape her. She stayed at my place. We got her papers sorted out and sent her back home to Mozambique. Then camps were made – Midrand, Rifle Range, Collett Drive, Springs (near Nigel), Germiston– are the areas where we were involved. Muslim groups wanted halaal (kosher) food – Azaadville people. This was not

working. Many Ethiopians only eat dairy products... Lots of Somalis, who had to be catered for, moved to camps in Pretoria. We sent two to three million rands worth of goods to Cape Town. We set up a clinic in Primrose where we provided gloves, bandages and medical supplies to Doctors without Borders.

Aid packages to camps included tents, blankets, sleeping bags, food parcels, new clothes and shoes, plastic dishes for food, plastic dishes to wash clothes, sanitary pads, disposable nappies, tooth paste, tooth brushes, body soap, soap for washing clothes, towels, and face cloths.

According to Zohra Sooliman, Director of GOTG's Careline, the dangers that could result from local anger against foreign Africans did not enter the equation when they offered assistance:

During the struggle [against apartheid] many of our people got shelter in neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia. They gave us refuge and how could we do this? It is not in the character of South Africans to turn on people who helped us. It was not good for the image of our country for the world to see us killing innocent people. As an NGO we had no choice but to act. We know that some locals were unhappy but we did not look at the politics. We only saw that these were people were in distress. We are only interested in the humanitarian aspects.

As the work of GOTG grew and word spread of its ability to provide on-the-ground support, major corporates became involved for the first time. Some, like Investec (R300,000) and Momentum (R121,000) offered cash. Pick n' Pay Hyper donated cool drinks; A.A. Wholesalers donated foam mattresses; Ossie Tayob of OSGO Wholesalers donated soap and wet wipes; the International Federation of Women Lawyers (South Africa) donated food vouchers; and Independent Newspapers made a contribution of R1.5 million to GOTG's coffers. GOTG's Johannesburg office spent more than R6 million in 2008 in its response to xenophobia.

When people were moved to the camps, GOTG followed them and this soon resulted in cooperation with other organisations and sharing of resources. According to Sayed, GOTG worked with a number of

organisations, such as Doctors without Borders, Government Disaster Management, the Methodist and Anglican churches, the South African Police Service (SAPS), and various women's networks. International partnerships included the United Nations (UN) Development Programme and Oxfam, to whom GOTG provided food parcels until May 2009.

## **The Government's Response**

Government opened its camps in June 2008. According to Sayed, 'that's where GOTG's biggest involvement came. We worked for 24 hours. We never slept as we supplied mattresses and other things.' There were about 50,000 people in total in 200 camps. GOTG did more than simply feed, clothe and provide shelter. According to Sayed, they also got involved in education:

In the Midrand camp there were children with no education so we hired minibuses to transport them to school. We told the Education Department to offer education and we supplied tents where children could be taught. We did the same thing in Rifle Range, our largest camp. The children there were traumatised. We took Kung Fu Panda, the movie, and gave presents. Mothers cried that day as they said that throughout this trauma, this was the first time they were happy. We even brought in child psychologists. We gave the children sweet parcels. We gave books to kids. We made sure the books were inspiring and joyful to raise the spirit – no creepy stories, just fun and entertainment. You can't measure what we achieved in terms of rands and cents when you see the joy.

Perceiving a symbiotic relationship, GOTG's strategy was to work closely with government. According to Sayed:

We are not their opposition. We work within the system. Police escorts are waiting for us whenever we take a trip. We complain about a system in the camp or a police station, we get it straightened out. I was involved with the MEC of Safety and Security during this period and got full access – no limitations to the camps. There were

42 Malawians who were surrounded on a farm somewhere. A White lady phoned and said this was happening. We had full cooperation from the police to rescue them. Government knows that when we land anywhere we land with the South African flag.

GOTG paid for more than 4,000 meals over two months. They bought supplies worth R1 million and thousands of parcels of their food sustenance package, known as Subisiso, were distributed to camp inmates. In 2004, GOTG introduced Sibusiso ('the Blessing'), the world's first groundnut-soya, high energy protein food supplement which is used as a nutrient to tackle debilitating conditions such as malnutrition, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. According to GOTG's website, the product, Sooliman's brain child, is currently used by 230 health facilities in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho, and Botswana.

GOTG was faced with a difficult moral decision – whether or not to assist victims of the attacks to return home (see Jost 2012 on the difficulties migrants face in integrating because of xenophobia). Eventually, GOTG spent a considerable sum of money transporting people back to their home countries. According to Sayed:

The people were panicking in the camps. They wanted to go back to their home countries. They were thinking 'What's gonna happen to our children?' Family members from there were calling them to come back. When they said, 'We want to go!' we hired five buses. You know the Malawians are soft and sensitive. At R48,000 a bus trip, and that's 60 persons in a bus, each one with a food parcel. Two trains left from Park Station (800 people) ... Everyone had a blanket and a food parcel to go with. You will always see a green and yellow Gift of the Givers blanket. That was God. He made his mark. We had good relationships with embassies so borders and papers were sorted out. We even paid for disabled persons to get back home with hired kombis.

For GOTG, helping people to return to their countries of origin was the correct thing to do once it became clear that the government intended closing down the camps. Refugees had two options - repatriate or reintegrate. Critics

may argue that by assisting with repatriation GOTG was inadvertently supporting the intention of the perpetrators who wanted to get rid of ‘foreigners’. Sayed, however, disagrees with this point of view as he believes that providing such assistance was ‘complying with the victims’ wishes’. It was also something that their home governments and families supported.

### **Moyo: Story of an Inmate**

Takawira Moyo arrived in South Africa from Chegutu, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe, on New Year’s Day 2007. He had been chairperson of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the area while working as a clerk at a local bakery, and was on the run from ZANU youth and the Mugabe government’s intelligence officials. ZANU youth had previously frog-marched him out of his house and beaten him, and when he heard that he was to be taken to Harare for questioning, he decided to make for South Africa. After a long trip via Bulawayo, he finally arrived at the Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg.

Already a recognised figure in Zimbabwean exile circles, Moyo decided to lie low for six months before making his way to Springs in Mpumalanga Province where he secured a shack in Paineville, earning a living by painting and welding. Moyo’s business flourished and he employed three other Zimbabweans. He also opened a tuckshop alongside the shack. Moyo returned to Zimbabwe in early 2008 to bring his wife and two young children to South Africa. On the way back to Springs Moyo was robbed of his possessions. He left his wife in a village in Venda and walked from the Limpopo River to Polokwane, a distance of 200 kilometres. He did a few odd jobs until he secured enough money to make his way back to Springs where his younger brother Wisdom had looked after things while he was away. He recounts the events of May 2008:

At midnight I heard a noise at the door. I had on a t-shirt, shorts and socks. I could only wear socks because the long walk from Limpopo River to Polokwane left me with sores on my feet. The banging on my door continued. I opened the door. The first thing I got was a hard *klap* (smack). People rushed in. They ransacked my shack. My fridge and television were the first to go, then my clothes and the

goods in the tuckshop. My brother was stabbed twice in the back. We just ran for our lives.

Moyo went to the local police station where he found around 4,000 people, mainly Zimbabweans. After a week of sleeping in the open, they were housed in a big hall in the town centre. Moyo was elected chairperson of this group of dislocated persons who were transported from the town hall to the Selcourt Camp under the care of a ‘site manager’. They were initially given three meals a day, but this was reduced to two. The site manager refused access to outside help. When Sayed arrived with a representative from Oxfam at the beginning of July 2008, Moyo gathered inmates and met them outside the camp. The support offered by Sayed and GOTG, according to Moyo, came ‘exactly at the right time’. The food that they had been receiving was sometimes rotten and several refugees had fallen sick. GOTG’s food parcels were a lifeline for many inmates.

According to Moyo, health conditions were terrible. Inmates avoided the overflowing toilets and instead used the bush, compounding the health hazard. As children had no nappies, GOTG and the local Trinity Methodist Church supplied these. A big tent was set up for the children’s ‘school’ and GOTG supplied colouring books and toys. Moyo alleged that site manager sold some of the supplies provided by relief agencies to locals. Moyo participated in a series of meetings with Paineville residents to reintegrate displaced foreigners into the community. When residents refused to allow them back, the Ekurhuleni Municipality built shacks for many of the displaced in Extension 10 Kwa-Thema. Moyo moved with his family into a one-bedroom outbuilding in Springs. While his plan was to resurrect his welding and painting business, Moyo understood that the fear of African migrants and refugees were perennial as xenophobic attacks can occur at any time.

On the streets, Moyo and his fellow refugees received the message that after the 2010 World Cup there would be a ‘gnashing of teeth’, that is, all foreigners would be chased out of South Africa. The Somalis in the Cape and Bangladeshis in the Free State, amongst many others, who are continually subject to xenophobic attacks, can attest to this.

## **Life after the Camps: Thembi and Spiwe**

In reflecting on GOTG’s response to xenophobic violence one of the starkest

realisations is how little relief organisations did to support people once they left the camps. While GOTG supported those who wanted to go home, it could do little to reintegrate people into local communities. Many inmates had lost their identity documents, their homes and livelihoods and were leaving the camps in the same situation, as the following two testimonies indicate.

Thembi arrived in Johannesburg on 2 May 2007 from Zimbabwe. She made her way to Nigel where her mother had once lived and worked and obtained temporary accommodation through these networks. She shared a garage in Duduza township with two other Zimbabweans and got a job doing hair braiding. She has a young daughter and elderly mother in Zimbabwe to whom all spare cash is remitted. When Thembi heard of the attacks in nearby Tsakani in May 2008, she and the two people she shared accommodation with, took flight. They went directly to the police station and from there they were taken to the Nigel town hall. Although it was very cold, they were not given blankets or food. There were over 300 people in the hall by the morning, comprising a mix of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and a small contingent of Ethiopians. Thembi was anxious to secure her belongings and went to the garage to collect her stuff but found that it had been ransacked. Volunteers from nearby Duduza township helped to distribute blankets and one meal per day.

They were transferred to the Springs camp after a month. It was there that Thembi became head of the camp's health committee and attended to a host of problems. They were provided with two meals per day but Thembi claims that the food was often 'rotten' and many inmates got sick as a result. The Ekurhuleni Municipality did not provide any support. Her request to the municipality to sort out the over-flowing toilets was ignored. She helped to set up a crèche and distributed nappies donated by GOTG. For Thembi, this made a big difference in terms of the health of the children. Thembi's problems really began once she left the camp. She had lost all her belongings and could not restart her braiding business. She eventually found a job as a security guard in Brakpan, guarding repossessed houses. She worked seven days a week for R850 a month. While she was in the camp, inmates had been asked by Home Affairs officials to apply for asylum. All the applications were turned down. Her passport, which gave her permission to stay in the country for three months, had expired as had the card given to her by Home

Affairs. Thembi was required to go back to the Zimbabwean border and pay R800 to get her passport stamped for an extension. She did not have the money to do this and ‘lived in pain and fear’. She had not seen her daughter, now aged five, for two years.

Spiwe, aged 24 at the time of the interview in 2008, also finds herself in incredible difficulties because of her lack of ‘papers’ (identification documents). She jumped the border in May 2008 to join her husband in South Africa and almost immediately found herself in the Springs camp. Her three children cannot get birth certificates because of Spiwe’s lack of proper documentation. Spiwe has to return to Zimbabwe for a passport, which she cannot risk doing, and she does not have the money to pay for an emergency or long-term passport. Spiwe’s children cannot access formal schooling without proper documentation. Both Thembi and Spiwe said that there were no organisations that could assist in this regard. Both were appreciative of the food parcels and other material support that they received in the camps from organisations like GOTG, but stressed that once they were forced to leave the camp, there was absolutely no support and without documentation it was difficult to restart their lives.

## **GOTG: Bureaucracy and Responses to Xenophobia**

GOTG is run differently from most of the organisations mentioned in this article in that it is associated very closely with one individual. In examining GOTG’s publicity material and talking to its staff, or the public at large, it is clear that GOTG *is* Dr Imtiaz Sooliman who appears to be the originator of projects, makes the major decisions, and leads from the front. This has several implications. One is that without bureaucratic obstacles, GOTG is able to make rapid decisions. Sooliman is open about this. ‘I don’t like bureaucratic systems. I need a decision in five seconds, not five weeks’ (*Hofstatter, The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009). Sayed confirmed this: ‘I pick up the phone, call Imtiaz and say I want to start something costing R250,000. There’s no papers, no proofing. He just says, “Allauddin, go ahead!”’

In his influential analysis of charismatic leadership, Max Weber defined charisma as:

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional power or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Weber 1947: 358-359).

For Weber, opportunities for charisma lessen as societies become more bureaucratised and routinised. However, charismatic leadership tied to an efficient, professional structure persists into the twenty first century. GOTG is, arguably, an example of this. Sooliman's reason for setting up GOTG as inspired by his Sufi master gives his mission a divine quality. The name of the organisation, derived from a saying from the Quran, adds to this. Furthermore, his mission to 'build bridges between people of different cultures and religions' is also derived from a Qur'anic injunction:

O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Almighty is (he who is) the most righteous of you (Sura Hujurat/the Inner Apartments, Chapter 49, Verse 13.)

Sooliman's work is written up in a way that gives him the status of one possessing 'exceptional' qualities. He is undoubtedly a charismatic leader and underlying this is well-oiled, rationalised and technically efficient machinery. This combination makes GOTG extremely effective. Some may argue that GOTG's mission to raise funds and respond to crises in the most effective way on the ground allows a single figure to be associated with the organisation and to dominate decision-making. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, cannot be dominated by individual figures because they represent a constituency and take up issues through collective action and mass mobilisation, often in a confrontational way. This dichotomy does not hold when one considers that organisations like the Treatment Action Committee (TAC) and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) are associated with larger than life leaders who have come to symbolise the

organisation, namely Zackie Achmat and Trevor Ngwane. This demonstrates that leaders don't become prominent simply because they are given importance or a high profile by others, such as the media. Interpersonal power, charisma and centrality to decision-making inside democratic organisations attach themselves to an individual or clique just as often (see Adair 2002; Andreoni 2006; James 2005 for discussions on leaders and leadership in an NGO context).

NGOs can become too large and unwieldy. Sylvie Brunel from Action against Hunger wrote that 'humanitarian organizations artificially swollen by the massive amounts of public funds made available to them become enormous machines, difficult to manage and slower to react' (2001: 337). The response to the May 2008 xenophobic attacks showed that GOTG was able to react with speed and in a sustained and effective manner. This is viewed favourably by other stakeholders. For example, in January 2009, when the St. George's Cathedral made a small donation to GOTG, the Very Reverend Rowan Smith wrote: 'We admire your rapid response to the needs of the people there and want to encourage your being able to move in before the government has made a decision.'

Sooliman is not cavalier just because he is decisive. According to Zohra, he relies on information from a network of people whose judgement he trusts, including community leaders, business persons, local councillors, and other NGOs whose information and input is valued and valuable. He also monitors the news and follows crises that may be developing.

Sooliman usually chooses the target, conceptualises the project and determines the logistics, a point captured by journalist Michael Schmidt:

To watch Sooliman in operation is to watch a force of nature, a good natured *djinn*, whirling dervish-like around stroppy officials until they give him what he wants. And what he wants is usually super-sized: from fleets of trucks and tons of aid to air force transport planes and naval ships. He is constantly on the phone, wrangling some deal or other that would be the pride of the underworld if it were in any way shady, charming military brass from a range of starched collar regimes and twisting their arms until they simply gave in.... Sooliman's benign demeanour disguises his steel spine. He won't take no for an answer from officials, believing Allah will

make a way through any obstacle... Watching him, I'm tempted to believe that Allah truly does make a way for the faithful (*Sunday Times* 2 September 2006).

According to Zohra Sooliman, the decision to publicise the work of Sooliman and GOTG is a tactical one to 'demonstrate to ordinary members of the public that there is a relationship between their giving and the outcome. When they see something tangible happening, it makes sense to them to contribute.' Speaking to both Zohra and Imtiaz Sooliman, it is clear that media exposure is not sought after for self-aggrandisement. Sooliman sees his work as a divine mission and sees no reason to be reticent. Name recognition, for him, is one way of creating 'brand GOTG' which has opened doors with corporates, suppliers and ordinary members of the public who are willing to contribute to the organisation because of this trust. 'Brand GOTG' provides the organisation with protection in conflict zones while allowing it to highlight humanitarian tragedies globally. This strategy has worked well, as GOTG's budget and reputation have grown enormously over the past two decades.

Sayed, who runs the Johannesburg office, comes from a family with a long history of community and political involvement in the Western Cape. He describes himself as a person who 'loves to work on the ground.' While Imtiaz is somewhat withdrawn, Sayed is effusive and full of boundless energy. Now around 70, almost two decades older than Imtiaz, he appears the perfect foil. When Imtiaz wants to visit a project, such as a school in Soweto, Sayed makes the logistical arrangements. As much as the hierarchy is apparent, there is mutual respect and a strong working relationship (see Howell and Shamir 2005).

Sayed was at the centre of GOTG's response to xenophobia in 2008. The attacks brought back sad memories for him. He studied in Pakistan in the late 1950s when Muslims from India were still arriving in Pakistan, 'shivering, having lost everything, still with fear in their eyes'. He says that the 2008 attacks he says were like 'deja vu, people of the same colour attacking and killing one another.' Sayed is clear as to the recipe for GOTG's effectiveness: minimal red tape; having a surplus of supplies; going in 'with the heart, no politics, no taking of sides'; 'credibility' which comes from providing aid across racial and religious barriers; careful planning, which

‘means having a well thought out system’; recruiting the ‘kinds of people where a hundred people can do the job of 300’; and being humble rather than ‘seeing yourself as “The Man”’. Sayed explains that when people are in dire need, it is easy to believe that one’s intervention is that of a ‘saviour’ (see the growing literature on why people give to particular organisations, Verterland 2006; Piferi *et al.* 2006; Ostrower 1997).

## GOTG’s Impartiality

Like many other humanitarian organisations, GOTG insists that its approach is both impartial and neutral and that it is driven solely by the determination to get aid to those in need. Carole Dubrulle of ‘Action against Hunger’ believes that ‘impartiality is the real Hippocratic oath of a humanitarian organisation. This is an operational principle that seeks to match relief to need, in situations in which available resources are always limited.’ This does not mean providing equal assistance to all protagonists in a crisis. Humanitarian organisations carry out an evaluation that is ‘objective and not imposed by governments’ before deciding on who to assist and how much assistance to provide (2001: 224). Dubrulle argues that silence ‘would amount to connivance with the oppressor, to being an accomplice to the injustice committed’ (2001: 225). Humanitarian organisations have a ‘vocation to never remain neutral in the face of violations, especially when these are massive violations of human rights’ (2001: 225).

How does GOTG match these principles? It subscribes to this idea not through its public statements on xenophobia but through its public work in responding to xenophobia. GOTG’s claim to be apolitical does not imply that it has no sense of the political. In the aftermath of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, the organisation not only fed refugees in the camp near Alexandra but continued its weekly feeding programme in the township which catered in the main to South Africans. GOTG’s approach in both South Africa and Malawi is to have a close working relationship with the respective governments and get their endorsement for the projects being run.

GOTG differs from organisations such as the TAC which played a significant role in responding to the xenophobic attacks in Cape Town. Unlike the TAC, GOTG is not seeking to organise a collective response to confront those in power, build a constituency with branch structures that

elect people to positions of authority, be transparent and democratic, or even give voice to the subalterns in society. Like the TAC, GOTG does join those who have political power to roll out services but unlike the TAC, it co-operates with rather than challenges government. Sooliman insists, 'I will work with anyone to deliver humanitarian aid' (*Hofstatter The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009).

GOTG is clearly a major player in the South African humanitarian landscape. Its relationship with the government is important to its work. The 18<sup>th</sup> of July, the birthday of former South Africa President Nelson Mandela, was endorsed by South African President Jacob Zuma as a day on which the world should spend 67 minutes doing something useful to support humanity. GOTG marked the occasion in 2009 by co-hosting a function with The Presidency (Social Development) in Ivory Park, Johannesburg. In the collage of photographs, Sooliman is placed between photographs of Mandela and Zuma. In the blurb on the invitation, GOTG laid out its organisational imperatives:

Our assistance is purely humanitarian and unconditional. We assist irrespective of race, religion, colour, class, political affiliation or geographical boundary. We are entirely neutral in our approach to mankind in need, are non-judgemental and have an open-minded approach to all situations. We work with governments to get our assistance delivered but do not align ourselves politically to any party. We have an excellent partnership relationship with the South African government for the delivery of our local projects, as well as foreign aid delivery.

There is global debate on the nature of humanitarian aid. Is it enough to provide short term relief, important as it is? Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss argue that humanitarian relief should involve a long commitment to projects that promote people's self-respect. This requires moving from immediate humanitarian assistance to providing material and psychological succour to those who are affected to help them reconstruct their lives (in Smillie 1998). While this was difficult in the case of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, an examination of GOTG's projects suggests that it is very much part of their thinking. Since its inception, GOTG has established around 20 Primary

Health Care Clinics, invested in education programmes from early childhood to adult learning in all parts of the country, and is involved in sports development, entrepreneurship, agricultural sustainability, water provision, and a host of other initiatives in South Africa as well as other countries, suggesting that it has a long-term commitment to development and to improving the condition of people's lives. Both Sayed and Zohra Sooliman emphasised that they did not see a difference between humanitarian and developmental work. They are equipped for short term action during disasters but want to have a longer-term impact on the development of the countries where they are involved and in improving people's lives.

## **Conclusion**

Violent acts of xenophobia and hostile attitudes towards foreign nationals are a constant feature of post-apartheid South Africa. Many reasons have been postulated for these attacks, which are discussed by other articles in this volume. Rising anti-immigrant tendencies in South Africa are a worrying trend. Constant vigilance and opposition to xenophobia and racism in South Africa are more than ever a political imperative, as they present a threat to democracy and a challenge to human dignity.

While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting xenophobia, NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role in this struggle by providing assistance and material help to its victims. While this is appreciated by beneficiaries, NGOs can do much more. For example, GOTG could help to raise awareness of increased xenophobia and mobilise civil society to prevent attacks; it could push government to confront xenophobia through stricter laws and clearer policies and ensure that these are implemented; and it could be more vocal in exposing politicians and others in society who indulge in xenophobic discourse. However, as Heins (2008: 166) argues, while NGOs may heighten moral feelings and even outrage, this often leads to:

the paradox of the creation of a moral public of spectators that is more interested in the display of moral excellence than in political effectiveness. NGOs in international society have often proved to be brilliant, Hermes-like players who move ably between places and

geographical scales to dispatch their messages. But they are not good in involving the public in more than superficial ways.

One of the criticisms of organisations such as GOTG is that they are ‘CNNish’, meaning that they respond to crises but do not engage in long term strategic planning. This has been described as having the ‘single-mindedness and problem solving orientation of a fire fighter [rather] than ... the cunning calculations of an experienced military strategist in war zones’ (Hoffman & Weiss 2006: 197). There is a degree of truth in this in GOTG’s case. While Hoffman and Weiss see the absence of careful research and strategising as a weakness, we would argue that the fact that GOTG can move from crisis to crisis at short notice and with such effectiveness, is important because many crises are of short-term duration and require urgent intervention. GOTG does publish regular reports and analysis of how crises were handled and the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted.

GOTG has a clear position of ‘not taking sides.’ Working closely with government, means that the organisation is hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience. However, this does not diminish its contribution. The immediate material support provided to thousands of victims of the xenophobic attacks was critical in assisting them to make sense of their lives. Government bureaucracy means that it is often slow to react to crises and it should continue to support the role of NGOs such as GOTG who have proven their ability to respond swiftly. Ideally, governments and NGOs such as GOTG should be striving to prevent conflict rather than providing humanitarian aid. But neither the NGOs nor government have any meaningful short or long-term programme to address the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, whose core causes are complex, with no readymade solutions in sight.

NGOs have been criticised for mitigating contradictions, acting as the proverbial band aid. There is some plausibility to these claims. But as GOTG’s response to xenophobic attacks in 2008 indicates, whatever their limitations, NGOs have a critical role to play, especially in terms of their impact on ordinary citizens who may care but do not have the time to get involved in such crises. NGOs provide a channel for such individuals to contribute and get the task done (for debates about why people give, see Osili & Du 2005; Lindahl & Conley 2002; Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006: and

Marcuello & Salas 2001). Given that governments and global agencies such as the United Nations have less and less to give, this alone points to the vital role of NGOs and their continued efficacy in the twentieth first century where the nation-state finds its powers to act independently increasingly eroded, while NGOs with a global perspective are able to cut across red-tape and borders to support those in the frontlines of disaster.

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# **Immigrant Workers and COSATU: Solidarity versus National Chauvinism?**

**Mondli Hlatshwayo**

## **Abstract**

The literature on xenophobia in South Africa is comprehensive and covers various issues ranging from describing the nature and form of xenophobia and responses to xenophobic outbreaks. However, this literature has tended to focus on xenophobia at places of residence and trade like townships, cities and towns. While this is understandable as xenophobic outbreaks take place in these mentioned spaces, little is known about xenophobia and the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplace where immigrant workers spend most of their time. By extension, there have not been adequate scholarly debates on how the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which has over 2 million members and 19 affiliates has responded to xenophobia. Based on 50-in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, I argue that COSATU's policies on immigrant workers and xenophobia are contradictory in the sense that the federation claims to be opposed to xenophobia, but some of its policy utterances belong to what can be regarded as xenophobic discourse and national chauvinism. This perhaps partly explains why the federation has not been part of visible campaigns against xenophobia. Some immigrants also contend that COSATU has not used its public standing and relationship with the governing party – the African National Congress - to advance the cause of immigrants. Some immigrant workers interviewed argue that like the South African government, COSATU is only concerned about defending the rights of South African workers and this contradicts the federations' principles of international solidarity and a need to defend the rights of all workers. On the other hand, a tiny minority within COSATU and its affiliates has been seeking to forge links with immigrants by trying to organise immigrant

workers and provide humanitarian aid to immigrants during xenophobic attacks.

**Keywords:** national chauvinism, xenophobia, solidarity, organising, immigrant workers

## **Introduction**

With more than 2 million members and 19 affiliates organising various sectors and being in an alliance with the ruling party – the African National Congress (ANC) - COSATU remains a key player in the South African political and economic landscape. Formed in 1985, COSATU exclaims,

Racism, sexism, tribalism and xenophobia divide the working class (workers and the poor). ... Working class solidarity must transcend these divisive tendencies (COSATU 2009: 15).

One of the principles of COSATU is ‘solidarity’ which basically calls for the unity of the workers regardless of their nationalities. The principle of solidarity seeks to unite workers against the employers and all those who stand on the way of workers realising workers’ rights inside and outside the borders of South Africa (Baskin 1991; COSATU 2013).

Based on document-based evidence and interviews, I submit that while COSATU states that it supports the principles of international solidarity, solidarity with immigrant workers within South African borders and is opposed to xenophobia, the federation in general has not been able to actively campaign against xenophobia, especially during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. I argue that the unions have to accept that the phenomenon of the rise of immigrant workers is going to be a permanent feature of the South African economy and this largely has to do with the policies of the South African state and its multinational corporations acting as an economic power on the continent.

Despite an increase in the number of immigrant workers located within the South African borders, the union movement has not been able to pledge ‘solidarity within the South Africa borders’ with immigrant workers (Hlatshwayo 2011). It appears as if one of the main sources of the strain

between COSATU and immigrant workers is national chauvinism which seems to be based on COSATU's privileging the interests of South African workers at the expense of immigrant workers. As I will show in the article the belief that the unions and the South African state should prioritise the interests of South African workers and South African citizens is also held by shop stewards and COSATU members in general. In contrast, there is a tiny minority comprised of trade union leaders and shop stewards located in COSATU and its affiliates which is organised humanitarian support for immigrants during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 which led to massive displacement of immigrants and killings. This minority also tried to help immigrant workers to access their rights.

### **Locating this Article within the Literature on Xenophobia**

The literature on xenophobia in South Africa has exposed the violation of human rights of immigrant communities extensively (e.g. Crush 2001; Hawabibi 2008; Sigsworth *et al.* 2008; Verryn 2008; Landau 2008; Everatt 2011; Landau *et al.* 2011). Most of the exposition of xenophobia and violation of rights of immigrants in the literature is about violation of the rights of immigrants in places of residence, towns, cities and place of trade (Bruce 2002; Everatt 2010; Landau 2011 *et al.*; Sinwell 2011; Amisi *et al.* 2011).

Another strand of literature which seeks to examine social agency among immigrants in places of residence and trade is also emerging (Amisi 2010). For example, Polzer and Segatti (2011) have examined social agency of organisation of immigrant organisation in the Gauteng Province after May 2008. While the two authors conducted an excellent study document on various strategies used by immigrant organisations to push back the frontiers of xenophobia, they did not look at the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions in a context of the workplace where immigrant workers spend most of their time. The investigations into the specific conditions of immigrant workers and the relationship between these workers and trade unions, especially COSATU have lagged (despite some notable exceptions; e.g. Hlatshwayo 2011; Di Paola 2013). Therefore this article is a contribution to the thin literature on the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplaces – a space that plays an important

role in determining survival of immigrants in South Africa. I seek to understand how COSATU responded to xenophobia and the increased presence of immigrant workers, especially in the post-apartheid era. For the sake of seeking some balance, the article also provides immigrant communities, their organisations and immigrant workers with a space to evaluate COSATU's responses to xenophobia<sup>1</sup>.

## **The Evolution of Immigrant Labour: A Synopsis**

Migration in Africa and southern Africa predates colonialism, capitalism and apartheid and the presence of immigrants in South Africa has its roots in the development of capitalism in South Africa. In southern Africa colonial conquest, land grabbing, early commercial agriculture, mining and the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in the late 1800s were violent processes which led to the creation of the working class. People who had access to land and lived on it were largely alienated from it and turned into workers working for a wage in order to survive (Callinicos 1980). South Africa has an extensive literature on production process in the mining sectors, the migrant labour, the role of violence in the mining sector, and the compound system (Abrahams 1946; Allen 2003; Callinicos 1980; Gordon 1978; Crush 1992; Dunbar 1994).

This scholarship also shows that the mining sector and the Witwatersrand in particular played an important role in the generalisation of the migrant labour system and the Witwatersrand became a 'pole of attraction' for migrant workers from South Africa and southern Africa. Later the other sectors of the economy such as the manufacturing sector employed workers from other parts of South Africa as well as other countries in southern Africa (Hlatshwayo 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> The research methodology adopted in this article is qualitative and includes 50 in-depth interviews conducted between 2009 and 2013 with COSATU officials, shop stewards, representatives of COSATU affiliates, labour commentators, immigrant workers and representatives of immigrant communities. The research was funded by the Atlantic Philanthropists.

Some of these workers became worker leaders in the trade union movement. For instance, Clements Kadalie who originally came from the then Nyasaland became the leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the 1920s and 1930s (South African History Online 2009). According to Dominic Tweedie, a former COSATU's *Shopsteward* magazine editor, two current national office bearers of COSATU are originally from the neighbouring states (Tweedie 2009, interview).

In other words, the development of the South Africa and its 'economy' is directly tied to other countries in southern Africa. So, the history of immigrant workers from other southern African countries is inextricably linked to the development of the South African industries and the economy.

## **Post-apartheid South Africa and Migration**

In post-apartheid South Africa immigration to South Africa is an issue that COSATU will have to navigate courteously as Crush (2008:1) argues that 'South Africa is increasingly seen by Zimbabweans as a place to try to build a new life, rather than a place of temporary respite and quick income'. The presence of immigrants and immigrant workers has increased since the dawn of democracy in the 1990s. South Africa's population is said to have increased to just below 53 million by the middle of 2013. According to South Africa's Statistician General Pali Lehohla, an inflow of migrants is the cause of the 1.2 million population increase since the 2011 Census. The South African Government News Agency said,

The population is expected to have grown from just under 51.8 million in 2011, to an estimated 52 981 991 next month. However, driven by a net inflow of migrants, the population grew slightly faster per year in 2013 than over a decade a year – having increased by 1.34% between 2012 and 2013, up from a 1.3% increase between 2002 and 2003 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

The agency states that the increase of inflow of migrants is not a new development. The agency argues,

An estimated 864 000 African migrants entered South Africa between 2001 and 2005, and this increased to an inflow of 974 000 between 2006 and 2010. An estimated 998 000 African migrants are expected to enter the country between 2011 and 2015 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

Writing about xenophobia in South Africa, Crush argues, ‘South Africa prides itself on having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. The Bill of Rights guarantees a host of basic political, cultural and socio-economic rights to all who are resident in the country. Yet there have been persistent reports that citizen intolerance of non-citizens, refugees and migrants has escalated dramatically since 1994 (Crush 2001:103). Migration to South Africa has also been accompanied by a violation of the rights of immigrants and immigrant workers in particular. Women immigrant workers from Zimbabwe tend to work under precarious conditions in places like Johannesburg. For example, these women are involved in sex work, domestic work and hospitality work (Hlatshwayo 2010). The Zimbabwean economic and political crisis has also contributed to the inflow of Zimbabwean immigrant workers into South African farming areas near the Zimbabwean borders. Again, these immigrant workers work under poor working conditions and earn low wages. Rutherford (2008:4010), argues, ‘Many of the border zone farmers are keen to employ them as their desperation for work typically predisposes them to work harder and often for lower wages than South Africans’.

South Africa’s positioning as a dominant economic power house, the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe, the economic liberalisation of African economies and wars on the continent are related causes of migration towards South Africa. All these factors are not caused by immigrants and immigrant workers. It is the South African state, some of its corporations which are multinational in character and the developed countries and their institutions that are responsible for these migration patterns in southern Africa and Africa. Bond and Manyanya (2002) indicate that South Africa also played a role in the de-industrialisation of Zimbabwe and by implication South Africa is also part of the cause of a flow of immigrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa. They argue,

All took advantage of the ESAP [Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes] years by opening shops in what was then a forex-rich Zimbabwe, and importing mass-produced consumer goods from their own South African supplier networks, to replace goods which were previously made locally in Harare or Bulawayo. But Zimbabwe's de-industrialisation meant that when forex began to dry up in 2000, it became more difficult to source those same goods as no local alternatives were available (Bond & Manyanya 2002:132).

In line with Bond & Manyanya's (2002) argument, Lehulere states,

On the contrary, it is the actions of the South African state that ensure that immigration into South Africa will continue with or without the Zimbabwean crisis. As an agent of South African capital, the South African state is responsible for policies that undermine African economies, it is responsible for policies that extract wealth from Africa into South Africa, and it is responsible for policies that are concentrating the capital of the continent – both human and financial – into South Africa (Lehulere 2008:36).

Lehulere further argues that South Africa's role and policies in Zimbabwe and other countries in the region are contributing factors to migration towards South Africa. He contends,

As sure as day follows night, the movement of people will always follow the movement of capital. The direction of migration in the Africa continent will be towards South Africa, and can only be changed once South Africa loses its position of hegemony on the continent (Lehulere 2008:36).

According to van Driel, economies of other African countries have also been weakened by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's (IMF)-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes. The destruction of jobs and services which were provided by the state in terms of these and their related adjustment polices in a context of a relatively stronger South African economy, makes South Africa to be a pole of attraction for immigrants from

other African countries. She expands on this point,

By the 1980s the so-called debt crisis hit Africa; and the World Bank and the IMF imposed economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAPs) on Africa. This deepened the social economic and political crisis in Africa. The repayment of the debt resulted in the transfer of wealth from the south to the north just to repay the interest on the debt. The ESAPs curtailed state expenditure, especially cuts on basic social services, introduced privatisation and user fees. This impoverished the working population even more (van Driel 2008:4).

Van Driel also states that South African state corporations and companies are dominant in Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria, and these companies export despotic apartheid labour regimes and destroy local industries. She further states that in 2008 ‘the trade imbalance between South Africa and the region is estimated as 7:1. South African companies’ profits are between 2-3 times higher than those earned in operations at home’ (van Driel 2008:7). In other words, the transfer of values or wealth from other African countries to South Africa leads to the decline of these economies and also makes South African to be attractive to immigrants from these other African countries which have fewer economic opportunities compared to South Africa.

Another factor that leads to migration towards South Africa is that countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic republic of Congo and Somalia, for instance, are confronted with civil wars and wars. This leads to displacement of people in these countries. The economic strength of South Africa on the continent and the perceived culture of human rights in South Africa are factors which make immigrants from these countries to end up residing in South Africa (Hlatshwayo & Vally forthcoming).

Deducing from the works of the abovementioned scholars, one of the realities of post-apartheid South Africa is that immigrants and immigrant workers are ‘here to stay’. Consistent with Lehulere’s (2008) contention is that the presence of immigrant workers from other African countries is going to be a permanent feature of the South African economy, Gordon reflects, ‘... there is a distinct probability that illegal migration will continue and even increase (Gordon 2005:76)’. Given that immigrant communities and immigrant workers seem to be a permanent feature of post-apartheid South

Africa, how has COSATU responded to xenophobia and the increased presence of immigrant communities and immigrant workers in post-apartheid South Africa?

## **COSATU's Policy Positions on Xenophobia and Immigrant Workers**

The September Commission of COSATU had a task of developing long-term policies for COSATU, its affiliates and the labour movement in general. The commission's report released in 1997 made a call for trade unions in southern Africa to work jointly in exchanging ideas and practical suggestions on issues of migration. In the same report of the commission COSATU espouses positions which undermine the freedom of movement of people and right to choose a country of work. COSATU is a member of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC) which adopted a social charter which says, 'Freedom of movement, residence and employment for workers throughout the region' (Jauch 2001:21). The contradiction in the commission's report is the fact that it calls for the South African government to implement 'voluntary repatriation and fair and proper control of entry of migrant workers into host countries' (COSATU 1997:30).

In 2000, COSATU made a parliamentary submission on the White Paper on International Migration. In line with the September Commission's report, COSATU proposes that the South African Development Community countries impose a quota system on the number of immigrant workers to be accepted by each country. The submission further calls for 'the state to impose heavy penalties' on those companies that 'illegal' immigrants (COSATU 2000). COSATU's statement published during the United Nations World Conference Against Racism and Xenophobia (WCAR) in Durban in 2001 stated that the federation is opposed to xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. Like the submission to the White Paper, the federation also argued that 'unscrupulous employers that are taking advantage of the situation' (COSATU 2001). Criticising COSATU for just blaming employers and not organising immigrant workers, Mike Abrahams, the spokesperson of SAACAWU, said, 'We cannot expect our enemy to do the job for us. We

have to organise and unite all workers regardless of their country of origin' (Abrahams 2009, interview).

COSATU is part of the 'Proudly South African Campaign'. Founded in 2001, the campaign promotes the purchase of local goods and services so that jobs can be created in South Africa (Proudly South African Campaign 2001). According to Malecki (1999), this campaign entrenched national chauvinism in the sense that it projects South Africans as important people who should be prioritised in employment and other economic opportunities at the expense of building African unity and workers' solidarity regardless of countries of origins. It does not also take into account the fact that people from other Southern African countries contributed to the building of the South African economy and the fact that South African continues to extract wealth from the rest of the continent. He explains national chauvinism in the unions,

The National Union of Mineworkers in Rustenburg called for a moratorium on hiring Mozambicans during wage negotiations. Meanwhile, the SACTWU has organised rallies protesting Chinese imports. At the COSATU congress, the bureaucrats raised a furore because some of the caps made for congress delegates had been produced in China (Malceki 1999:1).

Anele Seleka, a social movement activist in the Western Cape, further talked about this South African chauvinism and saw it as obstacle to building solidarity, African unity and combating xenophobia. He reflects,

They treat it [South Africa] like a small island that does not belong in the continent. Personally I do believe they should not be talking *proudly South African* but about solidarity in the continent, doing away with the borders and inheritance of colonial names like South Africa. We are stepping in a wrong step (Seleka 2009, interview).

Perhaps Fanon (1990) is worth quoting here. He said,

From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvi-

nism, and finally to racism. These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked ... (Fanon 1990: 125).

Fanon (1990) remarks that nationalism which defined struggles against colonialism in Africa can end up being national chauvinism in the post-independence period. Immigrants are then blamed for all the ills and sufferings of working and poor people in a country. In that context the African elite tied to powerful economies and corporations of the North which also calibrates and reinforces national chauvinism is absolved from any form of responsibility and accountability.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the corrupt elite which loots state resources in various forms and has presided over poverty and inequality uses the immigrants a scapegoat for its lack of delivering its promises to the poor and workers. Neocosmos explains,

Government departments, parliamentarians, the police, the Lindela detention centre, the law itself have all been reinforcing a one way message since the 1990s: We are being invaded by illegal immigrants who are a threat to national stability, the RDP, development, our social services, and the very fabric of our society (Neocosmos 2008:1).

Lehulere comments on COSATU statement released in May 2008 during the xenophobia attacks of May 2008. He identifies what could be interpreted as national chauvinism in COSATU's policy statement. He argues,

Cosatu blames employers for 'employing foreign immigrants, especially the illegal ones', and calls on 'employers to stop taking advantage of the desperate situation of foreign nationals'. No mention of the need to organise the workers (especially the 'illegal ones'!) into unions, but rather a call on employers to fire 'the illegal ones' (Lehulere 2008:34).

It seems as if COSATU faces a policy tension between solidarity with im-

migrant workers and what appears to be national chauvinism which has a pre-eminence and the privileging of South African workers over immigrant workers, especially the so called illegal immigrants. Some of the statements and the discourse used by COSATU in its policy positions borders along the lines of a xenophobic discourse and the ‘othering’ of immigrant workers. The use of words like the ‘illegal ones’ undermines any notion of solidarity as Lehulere (2008) suggests. The ‘othering’ of immigrant workers is also at the lower levels of union leadership. Moses Makhanya, a Provincial Secretary of SACCWU in KwaZulu-Natal, shared his views on organising migrants by saying,

The problem we have as a union [is that] for starters they employ them at a very low salary scale. Our South Africans end up not getting jobs because jobs are taken by those people who the employer regards as cheap labourers. I think that is the first point. The second difficulty is that it becomes extremely difficult to organise those people because some of them get paid, eat and enjoy themselves and think that it is the end of the world.

Makhulwe Ndwandwe, the COSATU Durban Central Local Secretary, interpreted COSATU’s policy to be meaning that the unions are not supposed to organise ‘illegal’ immigrant workers. She indicated,

We only organise those who are here legally and having proper documents .... No, that is not the policy but the LRA [Labour Relations Act] demands that only the people with documents must be employed, so we organise those who are employed.

The importance of education on xenophobia and the need to liquidate the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ was emphasised by Phillip Nkosi, a South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers’ Union (SACCWU) full-time shop steward at Southern Sun. He said, ‘As long as there is distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’, there will always be these differences. Education and education!

One of the responses of COSATU in the Western Cape and the Western Cape based Labour Research Service, the International Labour Research

and Information Group, and the Ogoni Solidarity Forum to the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 was the formation of the Migrant Workers Committee (MWC) – ‘a group of migrants and refugees which acts as an organizing platform for migrant workers and refugees’ (Imbula-Bofale 2010:1). Consistent with Nkosi’s advice on a need for education, the MWC organised a number of workshops bringing together immigrants workers, immigrant organisations, COSATU and NGOs with the view to raise awareness about the rights of immigrant workers and organise these workers into trade unions (COSATU *et al.* 2008). Perhaps the initiative can be seen to be ‘Pan Africanism from below’ because it also argues, ‘The partners also agreed to provide a referral and resource centre that will educate and empower a core group of migrants and refugees that would contribute to a pan-African migrant workers and African refugee support and advocacy structure’ and also states that ‘the country’s trade unions would serve as a home for workers from different part of the continent and a platform from where activists could challenge capitalism and oppression in the continent’ (Imbula-Bofale 2010:1). This initiative is not led by leaders of African countries and politicians, but has been established by immigrant workers, trade unionists and activists in the Western Cape.

In September 2009, almost a year-and-a-half after the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, the Tenth Congress of COSATU adopted a resolution on xenophobia and the organising of migrants. As a positive development from previous positions, it argues that the capitalist crisis is the cause of xenophobia. It also noted that some shop stewards and members of COSATU affiliates were also killed during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. In addition, the resolutions call for labour laws to cover all migrants. In order to raise consciousness among workers and the South African public about the continent, COSATU proposes that Africa Day be declared as a public holiday (COSATU 2009).

As part of attempts to develop its policies in a post-May 2008 period, in 2010 COSATU together with the United National High Commission for Refugee (UNHRC) hosted a policy seminar on xenophobia. A declaration of the seminar states,

Xenophobia is largely a scapegoat for frustrations arising from persisting socio-economic ills and lack of profound understanding of the

root causes of the crisis facing people from other countries and how they relate to our internal situation. This begins to shape social relations in a way that takes the form of them and us or ‘outsiders’ (COSATU & UNHCR 2010:1).

COSATU then committed itself to addressing xenophobia and also spoke about a need to organise immigrant workers,

We set ourselves the following tasks in pursuit of our common commitment to the fundamental eradication of xenophobia and its causes:-

- Review of migration dispensation to care for foreigners; and
- Organising migrant workers to fight for and defend their rights (COSATU & UNHCR 2010:1).

Perhaps some of the policy positions adopted after the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, especially at its 2009 national congress, are beginning to indicate some policy shifts which are beginning to engage the question of immigrant workers positively. Of course, the limitation of polices is that they do not always translate into concrete actions.

## **COSATU and Campaigns against Xenophobia**

Having examined COSATU’s policy position on xenophobia and immigrant communities and immigrant workers, I am now examining COSATU’s practical campaigns against xenophobia. Based on the interviews and documentary evidence, I argue that COSATU’s practical campaigns against xenophobia were lukewarm if not cold and this perhaps had to do with fact that the trade union federation, as stated earlier in this article, was ambivalent on how to relate to immigrants. On one hand, the union saw a need to defend immigrant communities against xenophobic attacks. On the other, the union had problems with the so called illegal immigrants and immigrants in general who were seen to be responsible for the lowering of

labour standards. For the sake of completeness, it has to be mentioned that a tiny minority within COSATU and its affiliates has been able to provide solidarity with immigrant communities, especially during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 (Di Poala 2012).

## **Humanitarian Assistance to Immigrants during the Xenophobic Attacks of May 2008**

As part of providing practical solidarity, some COSATU affiliates, provinces, and individuals provided humanitarian assistance ranging from food, clothing to shelter to immigrants who were under attack in May 2008. Western Cape COSATU's Mike Louw said, 'We quickly got together as various organisations and as civil society we were able to pull humanitarian resource together and reached the ground' (Louw 2009, interview).

Thulani Mabaso, the Chairperson of the COSATU local in Boksburg, spoke about how the local structure of COSATU with the assistance of the Gauteng Province of federation provided clothes, blankets and food to displaced immigrant communities in May 2008 and stated that it had to be noted that the East Rand was 'hard hit' by the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 (Mabaso 2009, interview).

Besides providing shelter to immigrants on the East Rand (Falkner 2009, interview), the South African Municipal Workers Union's (SAMWU) statement on xenophobia also highlighted the gender, women and children's dimensions of the violence. The statement read also said, 'We especially condemn the attacks that have been made on women, and the use of gender based violence to intimidate working class communities'.

In 2009, Mandela Day as a platform for pledging solidarity with immigrants from Zimbabwe. Momberg reported,

Cosatu Gauteng officials swopped their placards and protest boots for brooms and gloves to clean the Central Methodist Church and its surrounds in the Johannesburg inner city. This was done through dedicating 67 minutes - reflecting the 67 years of selfless service Mandela had given to the nation - to community work (Momberg 2009:1).

## **Awareness Raising and Mobilisation against Xenophobia**

For the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 were not just catastrophic events requiring general workers' solidarity. The union lost one of its leading shop stewards during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. The union issued a statement seeking to highlight that it had lost one of its leaders and also raised awareness about the ferocious nature of xenophobia. The union said,

Walter Ntombela, a Mozambican national who has been a shop steward for the past 10 years, was killed in his shack at the squalid Madelakufa Squatter camp, outside Tembisa township in Germiston (NUMSA 2008:1).

The NUMSA region on the East Rand to which the late Walter Ntombela belonged sent Mlungisi Rapolile, a NUMSA Regional Educator in Ekurhuleni, to a course on humanitarian disaster management (Rapolile 2009, interview).

Other COSATU affiliates such as the SAMWU and South African Transport Workers Union spread the anti-xenophobia message by printing T-shirts and posters. In KwaZulu Natal COSATU spread the message against xenophobia by convening meetings of the unions. According to Zet Luziphlo, the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Secretary of COSATU, 'We used our structures such as shop stewards council and the alliance in KwaZulu Natal to stop it' (Luziphlo 2009, interview).

Despite its sheer size, influence and history of active mobilisation, COSATU's campaign against the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 did not translated into active mobilisation in the streets. The only visible mass mobilisation against xenophobia was organised by the Coalition Against Xenophobia, a coalition of Gauteng-based social movements, immigrant organisation and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). With about 5 000 participants, the march was the noticeable public demonstration against the action of those who violated the rights of immigrant communities. In 2009, a follow up public event which sought to highlight the abuse of the rights of immigrants was held at the Lindela Repatriation Centre near Johannesburg. According to the Coalition, Lindela is known for being a centre that detains, tortures and deports those who are suspected of being the

so-called illegal immigrants. A number of South Africans have also been detained and were accused of being ‘illegal’ immigrants (Hlatshwayo 2011).

Stephen Faulkner of SAMWU reflects on COSATU’s lack of participation in the march,

Because the organisers were very clearly associated to the social movements on the far left, that time there was still antagonism on the leadership of social movements and COSATU unions. This dated back to two marches at WSSD [World Summit on Sustainable Development] and marches on Palestinian solidarity. I think that SAMWU was unusual to a certain point and clear about the need to have a working relationship with the Social Movements. Sometimes, despite sectarianism of COSATU and Social Movements themselves, we were very upset with the two WSSD marches. It is a really wasted opportunity and antagonism that is out there. Both sides have turned to focus on extreme polarised arguments around selling out and bankrupting of the alliance.

Faulkner had an optimistic outlook in as far the relationship between COSATU, social movements and an immigrant worker is concerned. He remarked, ‘I think the imbalance between that and xenophobia is because we have an undeveloped position [on xenophobia]. But trade unions are slowly addressing that’.

## **Organising Immigrant Workers?**

Despite calls for solidarity and a need to unite all workers, COSATU and its affiliates have not had a strategic discussion on how to organise immigrant workers (Luhelere 2008). Perhaps the question of organising precarious workers in general such as casual workers, workers working for labour brokers including immigrants is an issue that has not been taken seriously by the trade union movement (Buhlungu 2010).

What seems to have happened is that COSATU and its affiliates have been fixated with ‘palace politics’ which entails focussing most of the energies to power battles and positioning in the African National Congress (ANC) led alliance (COSATU 2012). This perhaps can be explained by the

fact that some of the leaders of COSATU have been able to use the alliance as a platform for upward social mobility which enables leaders of unions to leave the unions and occupy strategic positions in government and business (Masondo 2012). Put differently, immigrant workers are not the only section of workers that is not organised properly by COSATU and its affiliates. Be that as it may. For the sake of focus, the article is only looking at immigrant workers.

There are very isolated instances where union organisers and shop stewards have tried to organise these sections of workers, but these practices have not been generalised. Even these isolated instances tend to be accidental. Put differently, COSATU and its affiliates do not have an active campaign for recruiting and organising immigrant workers.

For example, COSATU affiliates such as SACCAWU, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) have been involved in a number of isolated attempts at organising immigrant workers (Hlatshwayo 2012). For example, Honest Sinama, a Provincial Secretary of SATAWU in the Eastern Cape, spoke about how the union is grappling with organising migrants and diffusing xenophobia in the security and transport sectors. He said,

As SATAWU we are able to explain to our members to say even ourselves we can be regarded as migrants because we have our drivers who travel as far [as] Zambia, Mozambique etc. So how would we feel if those people are treated with [the] same attitude as South Africans are showing to other people? .... In the security [sector] we have people who are from other countries who are also our members (Sinama 2009, interview).

In an interview with Glenn Mpufane of NUM he indicated that the NUM has always been organising migrants. He explained, ‘Concerning organising, we have organised irrespective of language or country of origin. At one stage NUM had a large membership from the neighbouring countries’ (Mpufane 2009, interview). The union demographics changed in post-apartheid South Africa. NUM’s inability to champion the needs and aspirations of migrant workers led to drill operators who are largely migrants from the Eastern Cape, Lesotho and Swaziland forming an independent workers’ committee

which took a direct mandates from striking mine workers in Marikana, a platinum mining area in the North West province. The workers were demanding a wage increase and felt that the union was no longer championing the needs of migrant workers. NUM lost credibility because it was seen by the striking workers as a union that defends the interest of the bosses and the state. In August 2012, during the strike, 34 workers were massacred by the police in Marikana (Jika *et al.* 2012; Vundla 2012). Given that some of workers killed during the massacre were from Lesotho, the Lesotho government held a memorial service for the victims of the Marikana massacre in 2012 (South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 2012:1).

Maybe De Lange made a more fundamental discovery with regard to a changing profile of immigrant workers. From what he argues, it seems as if NUM has really been transformed from a union which catered for immigrant workers to a union that caters for supervisors, technicians and lower levels of management who are regarded as South Africans in the mining sector. This is what de Lange said about the profile of NUM in 2012,

Secondly, and most importantly, a gradual change had taken place in the profile of the NUM membership over the last 15 years; one that nobody had taken notice of. The NUM was originally borne out of the lowest job categories of South African mineworkers, mainly from gold mines. More than 60% of its members were foreigners, mostly illiterate migrant labourers who were not interested in a career path. Nowadays that number has dropped to below 40%. On the other hand, an increasing portion of the NUM's membership comes from what can be described as white-collar mining staff ... (De Lange 2012:1).

## **'Papers' and the Question of 'Illegal' Immigrant Workers**

During the interviews the union interviewees were asked whether the unions do organise immigrant workers including those that do not have official documentation from the Home Affairs office. Documentation entail various 'papers' in possession of migrants and these range from work permits to refugee status documents.

Abrahamse, the Provincial Secretary of SATAWU in the Western Cape, said, ‘Most illegals (sic) outside our scope are not organisable’ (Abrahamse 2009, interview).

Judging from the abovementioned statement, one may assume that it is absolutely impossible for unions to organise the so-called illegal immigrant workers. However, in context of xenophobic attacks in De Doorns in the Western Cape in 2012 COSATU in the Western Cape called for the legalisation of ‘undocumented’ immigrant workers. COSATU in the Western Cape said,

We are shocked by dangerous attempts by farm owners to divide workers and to provoke xenophobia in cheap attempts to divide workers. We call for a documentation amnesty, to avoid bloodshed and mass displacement (Herron 2012:1).

## **Attitudes of Immigrants towards COSATU**

Immigrant communities and their representatives stated that COSATU was not visible during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. It could have used its public profile to send a clear anti-xenophobia message to South Africa and the world. There was also a concern about a lack of COSATU’s participation in the anti-xenophobia march organised by CAX during the attacks of May 2008. Ahmed Dawlo, the former Director of the Somali Association of South Africa, said, ‘COSATU has to come out with a very strong message against xenophobia and the loss of innocent lives of migrants’ (Dawlo 2009, interview).

James Mhlanga, a Zimbabwean immigrant worker working at a university in Johannesburg, arrived in South Africa in 1990 and has been working under precarious conditions since then. He was concerned about the fact that COSATU and its affiliates did not organise immigrant workers because they would have been able to strengthen the union and access their rights in the process. He said, ‘COSATU should organise all workers so that they can access their rights’ (Mhlanga interview, 2013).

COSATU in the Western Cape seems to have developed a close relationship with immigrant communities in the area. Concerning the working relationship between migrant organisations and COSATU in the Western Cape, Barry Wuganaale of the Ogoni Solidarity Forum remarked, ‘Their [COSATU Western Cape] leadership and the staff have welcomed the organisation that I represent .... This has been very encouraging’ (Wuganaale 2009, interview).

## **Conclusion**

While COSATU has adopted resolutions against xenophobia, the federation as a whole has not used its numerical and political strengths to mobilise against xenophobia. Besides humanitarian aid provided during the xenophobia attacks of May 2008, COSATU has not been able to develop a strategy which sees the prevalence of immigrant workers in South Africa as a permanent feature of the South Africa economy. In fact, a policy approach that organises workers regardless of their country of origin seems to be plausible because immigration to South African appears to be unstoppable. While the Food and Allied Workers’ Union (FAWU) and COSATU have adopted resolutions calling for the organisation of immigrant workers (COSATU 2012), only time will tell whether these resolutions will be implemented. Perhaps COSATU nationally and its affiliates have a lot to learn from COSATU in the Western Cape which has convened a number of discussions on organising immigrant workers. It has to be noted that these are not easy issues to resolve, but COSATU in the Western Cape is trying to subvert national chauvinism by emphasising solidarity ‘within’ the South African borders.

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# *Alternation*

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Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the  
Arts and Humanities in  
Southern Africa

## **Love thy Neighbours – Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia in Social Spaces in South Africa**

Guest Editors  
*Sadhana Manik and  
Anand Singh*

2013

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Durban

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# **Editorial: Love thy Neighbours – Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia in Social Spaces in South Africa**

**Sadhana Manik  
Anand Singh**

Globalisation, political discord, environmental hardships, socio-economic strife and a desire to obtain an improved standard of living will continue to be drivers for human migration. At a continental level, Africa is poignantly subject to all of these factors so it's no surprise that migration is perceived as a common solution/ escape. South Africa (SA), the big apple of Africa has been perceived as a destination where dreams can be accomplished given legislative and policy advancements post-apartheid but this will soon plummet to South Africa being perceived as the rotten apple of Africa, if xenophobia is not addressed and repetitively swept under the carpet especially by government institutions, key political figures and civil society.

Whilst there is an understanding that xenophobia is not peculiar to SA, having reared in ugly head in numerous developed countries and continents such as Europe, it has been debated and discussed and certainly not avoided like the plague, the route South Africa has opted to follow. Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh (2005) declared a long time ago that 'South Africa is a highly xenophobic society' and despite the ongoing pronouncements and declarations, some to the contrary, as academia (through this special edition) there is the voice of social justice that calls for constant engagement with xenophobic discourses to understand and address xenophobic outpourings in its myriad forms in contemporary SA. But what constitutes xenophobia in a SA context? There are some constructions of xenophobia as an attitude (Bekker *et al.* 2008) which has culminated in foreigners being associated with undesirable behavior such as stealing the jobs of locals and criminal activities such as drug dealing and hijacking.

Violent outcomes for foreign nationals particularly those from Africa signaled another understanding of xenophobia, one that has been extended to denotations of action with xenophobia being understood as a verb (Von Holdt *et al.* 2011). There has been a plethora of research into the causes of xenophobia in SA and some of the threads that appear to emerge post 1994, include the following links: what constitutes the South African identity, media coverage of incidents and political suggestions that indicate prejudice. Khan (2007), drew attention to the preoccupation we, as South Africans, have about identity recognition which snakes its way into each and every aspect of our daily existence, from applying to attend a school or university, opening a bank account, buying furniture/ appliances. Equally important is the use of language, especially fluency in a South African language. So it's no shock that we differentiate between those in receipt of a South African identity document and who aren't. But isn't this strangely reminiscent of a 'dompass' mentality which has become ingrained in the SA psyche despite us overcoming apartheid?

Media coverage, also, has frequently been blamed for portraying foreigners as the perpetrators of unsavoury incidents, although recently the media spot highlighted the physical abuse by SA police of a Mozambican taxi driver in SA (in 2012) which led to a public outcry. After his subsequent arrest, he died in police custody fuelling speculation about police brutality towards foreigners. But xenophobia is institutionalised in numerous other segments of South African society apart from the media. These include government departments such as the department of Home Affairs and financial establishments.

In the political arena, the president of SA, Jacob Zuma recently committed a huge *faux pas* when speaking about the introduction of toll highways in Gauteng. He remarked that as South Africans 'We can't think like Africans in Africa generally. [There was laughter at this remark.] We are in Johannesburg. This is Johannesburg. It is not some national road in Malawi' (eNews, 23 October 2013, 11h00; The Justice factor, etv, 28 October, 20h30). These comments drew continental criticism from leaders for implying that South Africans perceive themselves as superior to the rest of Africa. This type of sentiment is not unusual and it has led to scholars remarking that a particular brand of xenophobia was apparent in South Africa, namely that of Afrophobia (Osman 2009:09 cites Motha & Ramadiro

2005:18) which encompasses ‘negative stereotypes towards people from other parts of the continent’. African immigrants are commonly described using the label: ‘Makwerekwere’ which is an inflammatory label (Neocosmos 2006; Steenkamp 2009) that refers to people who are not *au fait* with an Nguni or Sotho language and who are also ‘pitch black’ in complexion (Sichone nd: 11). Makwerekwere also has other undesirable meanings apart from being an African immigrant ‘who lacks competency in the local South African languages’ and being dark-skinned, 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). Segale (2004) long ago noted that the use of ‘makwerekwere’ constitutes hate speech, however as South Africans, we have not chosen to explore ways to root out its use in society. In this edition, Muthuki (in her article in this special edition) concludes that Afrophobia has its roots in poverty on the African continent.

This special edition of articles explores and exposes xenophobia in an array of social spaces in SA, many of which have not previously been examined in studies. Furthermore, some contributions seek to provide direction to a somewhat impotent SA government to address the burgeoning xenophobic crisis as immigration spirals.

Daniel Tevera’s article commences this edition by honing in on urban violence in SA cities. He examines the recent literature to create a deeper understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. He argues that the apartheid footprint is still very prevalent in xenophobic incidents in city locales. His findings demonstrate that key discourses to understanding xenophobia evolve around the importance of human deprivation, (e.g. poverty and poor service), citizenship and belonging which play instrumental roles in the incidences.

Anand Singh’s article by contrast boldly unpacks South Africa’s racialised social order, where he argues that there is a tendency to downplay the extent and nature of poverty among Coloureds and Indians when compared to the situation of Africans. Using a case study methodology, he illuminates what he terms ‘perceived xenophobic cum racist practices and how such issues are being viewed as deliberate attempts to alienate’ SA Indians. He argues that the experiences of people across South Africa are far too diverse and complex to be packaged into one paradigm. Hence, he states that they could be collapsed into the interrelated categories of xenophobia, ethnocentric behaviour, racist attitudes, ethnic nepotism and narcissistic

egoism. He concludes that the alienation of Indians is more contextual than racist or xenophobic.

The next five articles are located in an education context with the first focusing on teachers' experiences of xenophobia, the second on teachers and lecturers' experiences and the third and fourth articles on students' experiences of xenophobia in higher education. The fifth article focuses on the perspectives of foreign learners in school. Zimbabwean migrants are the largest cohort of foreigners in SA and Suresh Singh's article examines Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of xenophobia in schools in the rural province of Limpopo, which borders Zimbabwe. He exposes a host of challenges that Zimbabwean teachers face for example 'local teachers, students and community members use local indigenous languages to exclude foreign teachers'. He concludes that locals need to acknowledge the value of Zimbabwean teachers in advancing education in schools where their skills are in dire need. This idea is furthered in the next article. Sadhana Manik's article continues the theme of Zimbabwean teachers in SA, by focusing on Zimbabwean school teachers and lecturers in KwaZulu-Natal province and their experiences of and thoughts on xenophobia. Her findings reveal that issues of race, class and location matters in incidents with xenophobic violence. Also, Zimbabwean immigrant teachers' experiences indicate that whilst their expertise is required in critical subjects, they are not valued by being treated with the respect deserving of professionals. She exposes Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of social and professional disconnections, which were either self / externally imposed, which led to their psychological trauma. Interestingly, she shares the view of Jesika Singh, the next article discussed, that institutions of higher learning are establishments where fear and the threat of violence hangs in the air for foreigners.

Jesika Singh's study is located in a rural university which is close to the South Africa's borders and it has experienced an influx of foreign students. She reports on foreign students' experiences of xenophobia in their daily lives on campus. Her article chronicles xenophobic attitudes in foreign students' interactions with other students in their attempts to integrate, by university academics in their teaching and by support staff. Her findings point to university institutions being sites that do more than promote 'teaching and learning' but rather spaces where hatred of the 'other' and a lack of integration and fear amongst foreign students is engendered. Janet

## *Editorial: Exploring and Exposing Xenophobia*

Muthuki's article continues this theme of xenophobia in institutions of higher learning but she moves the location of her study to an urban based university and unpacks the phenomenology of xenophobia by examining the xenophobic experiences foreign post graduate students. Interestingly, some participants in her study report that xenophobia in SA has a striking resemblance to xenophobia in their home country.

The next article by Nirmala Gopal, is written from the perspective of foreign learners and it provides insight into how foreign learners think and feel about xenophobia. Using thematic analysis, she highlights the 'social exclusion of children and youth through the threat of violence and intimidation' which she argues should be addressed by the state and civil society. She advances that South Africa should embark on the protection of the rights of foreigners by engaging with key role-players.

The next article by Vahed and Desai examines the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, and also distils measures that should be adopted to address xenophobia. They note the multitude of explanations have been advanced to account for the 2008 attacks. These include 'the absence of a clear immigration policy, porous borders, corrupt police and Home Affairs officials, socio-economic inequities in the country, and even the African National Congress's poor service delivery record which is resulting in ordinary South Africans venting their frustration on foreign nationals'. They advocate the possibility of legalising migrants which would then provide them with the protection of labour legislation, and to also offer amnesty to long term residents. These suggestions are embedded in previous decisions by SA where 'migrant workers who entered South Africa legally before the 13 June 1986 were regarded as 'ordinary residents' and received voter registration cards and South African Identification Documents' (Harris 2001: 22-23). They conclude by noting the futility of any attempts to restrict immigration into South Africa as immigration is an international concern.

The following article by Rukema and Khan is located in the metropolitan area of Durban. They hone in on Congolese and Burundian women's experiences during and after the 2008 xenophobic attacks against them. They explore the impact the xenophobic attacks had on shaping and reshaping foreigners' views about South African society. They also examine the coping strategies used to rebuild livelihoods in an attempt to recover from the emotional trauma of the 2008 xenophobic attacks. They conclude that 'the

emotional and psychological scars of the xenophobic attacks continue to remain a lived experience in the minds of victims.' The Next article by Yasmeen Vahed is also located in Durban. Her article examines the two issues of crime and xenophobia, in a mixed income suburb in Durban. She focuses on 'how residents and the police view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community and the social, economic, and political factors' which are responsible 'for shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals.' She concludes that her respondents' narratives 'associate crime with race and nationality.'

Continuing the theme of the criminal justice system in Durban is Shantha Singh whose study gives voice to foreign nationals awaiting trial at Westville Correctional Centre in Durban. She accesses their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality by documenting the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial. She reports that the increase in the crime rates in South Africa post1994 is frequently ascribed to immigrants, 'without any justifiable proof.' She notes the dissonance between SA Immigration Law and its practice by stating that a foreign national is only allowed to stay for 30 days whilst awaiting trial but the mean term was in excess of a year. She concludes that 'foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system... and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.'

The next article by Desai and Vahed shift the focus to the role of non-governmental agencies (NGO) in xenophobic incidents. Using a case study methodology they examine one NGO, namely the Gift of the Givers in their role of 'providing assistance and material help' to victims of xenophobia in the 2008 attacks. This article notes a shift from the politics of xenophobia to a humanitarian focus by GOTG with the SA government as a key partner. Strangely, the government intended closing down the refugee camps following the 2008 incidents. The participants in the study bring to the fore a depravity amongst South Africans eager to take advantage of or dismiss foreigners in numerous ways: for example alleged corruption in refugee camps, the provision of rotten food and a home affairs department expecting refugees of the 2008 attacks to pay R 800 to renew their permits when they have lost all their property.

The final article by Mondli Hlatshwayo explores xenophobia and the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplace.

Using interviews and documents, he locates his analysis of COSATU within the 2008 xenophobic attacks and argues that COSATU's policies on immigrant workers and xenophobia are contradictory. He provides evidence that 'the federation claims to be opposed to xenophobia, but some of its policy utterances belong to what can be regarded as xenophobic discourse and national chauvinism'. He notes the humanitarian aid provided by COSATU during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 but states that although it adopted resolutions against xenophobia, the federation as a whole, (notwithstanding the work by Cosatu Western Cape) has not used its strengths to rally against xenophobia.

It is apparent that xenophobia is pervasive, that it manifests itself in many ways, from the blatant physicality of violence to subtle forms of psychological violence and dehumanizing slander and that it has taken a stronghold in SA society. This special edition comes at a critical moment in SA, as it seeks to plunge the topic of xenophobia into the limelight again, in the hope that readers of this edition, feel sufficiently stimulated to generate the much needed dialogue and propagate a love for thy neighbours in their social gatherings, professional hubs and daily conversations.

Finally, we want to thank Wazir Surajlall for the cover painting, done in oils. It is an aesthetic representation of an owl, which denotes a wise creature associated with the concepts of wisdom and good advice.

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# **African Migrants, Xenophobia and Urban Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa**

**Daniel Tevera**

## **Abstract**

The urban space in South Africa is increasingly becoming a troubled terrain of xenophobic violence. In recent years xenophobia has emerged as one of the major contributing factors to urban violence in several African countries and the phenomenon is becoming an urban management challenge that deserves academic inquiry and policy attention. Yet most of the academic research into the incidence and causes of xenophobic violence has not explored the connections between urbanity and xenophobia. This article aims to contribute to the debate by examining the broader relationship between xenophobia and urban violence in South African cities and by pulling together the latest literature into creating a better understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. This article provides an assessment of xenophobia in contemporary South Africa within the context of the on-going and important debate regarding the extent to which poverty and poor service delivery are determinants of urban violence. In addition, it argues that debates surrounding the complex spaces of deprivation in urban areas, citizenship and belonging should be central to the discourses on violence in South Africa's cities, which in many ways are still struggling to erase the imprint of apartheid. Xenophobic violence in cities is a phenomenon that deserves policy attention and direct intervention by central government, local authorities and community leaders.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, urban violence, multiculturalism, migrants, South Africa

## Introduction

The term xenophobia involves negative social representations and practices that discriminate against immigrants, refugees and migrants (Rydgren 2004; Roemer & Van der Straeten 2007). In recent years xenophobia has emerged as one of the major contributing factors to urban violence in many African countries and the phenomenon is becoming an urban management challenge that deserves academic inquiry and policy attention (Anderson 2002; Crush & Ramachandran 2009; Hassim *et al.* 2008). Xenophobia, and its various forms of intolerance and violence, is a source of concern because it generates rhetoric that at times provides moral justification for the exclusion of non-nationals from accessing basic services that they may be entitled to, such as public health and education, shelter, potable water and sanitation. Also, xenophobia places migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in difficult situations where their human and labour rights are circumscribed by anti-migrant policies (ILO 2004; Taran 2000; Wickramasekera 2008; Lefko-Everett 2007). In his overview of various forms of violence in urban South Africa, Abrahams (2010) provides a useful discussion of xenophobic violence in the country during the post-apartheid era. Several other scholars have engaged in the debate on xenophobia and these include Danso and McDonald (2000), Charman and Piper (2012), Crush (2000), Crush and Pendleton (2004), Morapedi (2007), Hassim *et al.* (2008), Hossay (1996), Misago (2009), Morris (1998), Tshitereke (1999) and Nieftagodien (2008). Various surveys on xenophobia that have been conducted in the country during the past decade reveal two disturbing findings. First, that urban South Africa exhibits high levels of intolerance and hostility to outsiders that is occasionally reflected by xenophobic attacks on migrant communities, their livelihoods and properties. Second, that there has been a hardening of anti-migrant attitudes during the post-apartheid era. The two findings are disturbing because they are at odds with the discourse of the 'New South Africa' and the 'rainbow nation' that conveys a different and inspiring message about inclusiveness and tolerance.

This article aims to contribute to the debate by examining the broader relationship between xenophobia and urban violence in South African cities and by pulling together the latest literature into creating a better understanding of xenophobia in urban spaces. The article focuses on xenophobic violence and does not examine the other forms of urban violence

that have been examined in great detail by scholars such as Hough (2000); Harris (2001); and Palmary *et al.* (2003). Also, the article gives an overview of xenophobia in contemporary South Africa and it argues that debates surrounding the complex spaces of deprivation in urban areas, citizenship and belonging should be central to the discourses on urban violence.

A plethora of studies has been undertaken on the relationships between urban poverty, xenophobia and urban violence in both industrialized and developing countries (Rodgers 2010; Moser, 2005; Agostini *et al.* 2007). In southern Africa studies on xenophobia and international migration by Crush and Pendleton (2004), Danso and McDonald (2000), McKnight (2008), and Morapedi (2007), have generated a rich literature on patterns and forms of anti-migrant expressions in the region but the studies have lacked a distinctive urban focus. Some of the literature shows how different urban communities in the country have variously accommodated and assimilated xenophobic patterns through variegated forms and expressions ranging from subtle hostilities to physical attacks on non-nationals (Charman & Piper 2012; HSRC 2008; Crush 2000; Crush 2001; Hunter & Skinner 2003; Misago 2009; Morapedi 2007; Nieftagodien 2008; Hassim *et al.* 2008; Hossay 1996). The literature also reveals that the rise of intolerance and xenophobia has destabilized and undermined the linkages between international migration and human development (De Haas 2010; IOM 2008; 2010; Nyberg-Sorensen *et al.* 2002; Dodson *et al.* 2010). A review report by Crush and Ramachandran (2009) on the linkages between xenophobia, international migration and human development reveals that the increased volume of South-South migration since the late 1990s has resulted in repeated attacks on migrants in the receiving countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Not surprisingly, such xenophobic attacks have contributed to the vulnerability and exploitation of various categories of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees. Studies by Roemer and Van der Straeten (2007) on the triangular connections between racism, xenophobia and the economy, have contributed to our understanding of how xenophobia and urban violence can be a hindrance to economic and human development. As Roemer and Van der Straeten (2007) further argue, in order to maximize the socio-economic benefits accruable from the international migration process, there is a need to tackle all forms of xenophobia in the economic and social arenas.

## Migrant Spaces and Entrepreneurship

South Africa has one of the most robust economies in sub-Saharan Africa and has a long history of recruiting skilled and semi-skilled labour especially from countries in the SADC region with relatively weak economies (e.g. Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) and histories of political instability (e.g. the DRC and Mozambique). Weak national economies and political instability are the main migration triggers that have directed the flow of migrants from their home countries to South Africa (Campbell 2001; Crush 2002; McDonald and Crush 2002; Tevera 2011; Maharaj & Rajkumar 1997; Crush & Tevera 2010; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush *et al.* 2006; Pendleton *et al.* 2006). South Africa is one of the few countries in southern Africa that has historically received more people than it has lost from the migration process and as a result many urban areas reveal strong multiculturalism patterns in the form of languages spoken, religious practices and foods eaten. Post-apartheid labour recruitment has given rise to the emergence of diverse and vibrant African diasporic communities including Zimbabweans, Batswana, Basotho, Swazi, Somalis, Nigerians, Senegalese and Congolese. Among the enduring legacies of the African migrants to the country, has been the growth of vibrant and multicultural urbanscapes dominated by a rapidly growing informal street trading sector in the ‘deracializing’ urban space where national and foreign traders often compete but also collaborate. According to a study done by Hunter and Skinner (2003) there is a strong migrant presence in street trading in central Durban largely because this unregulated activity is outside the purview of direct local government control. However, migrant entrepreneurial spaces are not confined to inner city streets but they also stretch to the former African townships. A study by Grant (2013) reveals that an analysis of the spatial impress of informal entrepreneurship in Soweto re-veals a gendered and local diasporic investment patterns. The limited linkage of the former African townships to the wider urban economy is one of the spatialised legacies of apartheid planning that has stifled economic activities in these areas (Grant 2013; Beall *et al.* 2000; Charman & Piper 2012).

The presence of these migrant groups as shop owners or street traders has not only contributed to the transformation of the landscape of the post-apartheid South African city but has renewed the lifeblood in low-income neighbourhoods as is manifested by the vibrancy of the economic and

social activities in townships such as Alexandra near Centurion, Motherwell in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, and De Doorns in the Western Cape (Grant 2013; Hunter & Skinner 2003; Morris 1998; Rusinga *et al.* 2012). In the last decade, South African cities have experienced a sharp increase in the number of African and Asian migrants who have opened small shops at the periphery of the central business district (CBD) or have engaged in various street trading activities. The presence of the small shop traders has been, on the one hand, beneficial to low income consumers facing increasing economic hardships and who have come to depend on the low prices. On the other hand, they have become a source of bitterness to local shop owners who feel that they are being pushed out of business and would like to see the government introduce legislation that restricts the operations of foreign traders. A decade ago, Hunter and Skinner (2003) eloquently showed that most African migrants in Durban effectively used the informal sector as the entry point to other entrepreneurial activities in the formal sector. The migrants often find themselves competing with nationals for street space and for the same clientele. This direct competition with locals partly accounts for the often tense relations between nationals involved in street trading and African migrant traders operating in the informal sector as spaza shops owners.

## **Xenophobic Violence in Urban Areas**

Recent surveys on xenophobia in South Africa provide useful data about citizen attitudes towards migrants and refugees (Crush & Pendleton 2004; Campbell & Ocho 2003). A study by McDonald and Jacobs (2005) which analysed media coverage of migration issues showed that xenophobia was pervasive, deep-rooted and structural. In 2001/2002 and 2006, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) undertook national surveys of the attitudes of the South African population towards foreign nationals residing in the country. For example, SAMP's 2001/2002 National Immigration Policy Survey (NIPS) on attitudes of citizens towards immigration in southern Africa revealed that xenophobia was widespread among diverse communities across urban South Africa and Botswana and often cut across class, employment status, race, and gender lines (Crush & Pendleton 2004). According to the survey, about 50 percent of the respondents in Botswana were willing to participate in actions that would inhibit migrants from

moving into their neighbourhoods; while 46 percent would block foreigners from opening businesses in their localities if they had the capacity to do so; and 38 percent were willing to prevent children from immigrant families from studying in the same schools as their children (Campbell & Oucho 2003; Oucho 2000).

The 2006 SAMP Xenophobia Survey shows that South Africa exhibited increased levels of intolerance and hostility to most categories of foreign migrants. Nearly three-quarters (74%) supported a policy of deporting anyone who was not contributing to the growth of the national economy. Quite extraordinary is the increase in the percentage of respondents who wanted to see the borders with neighbouring countries electrified from 66% in 1999 to 76% in 2006. The SAMP findings also reveal that nationals did not want it to be easier for foreign nationals to engage in street trading or to operate small businesses in South Africa or to obtain South African citizenship. The data from the quantitative survey allowed the SAMP researchers to analyze the state of the national sentiments on immigration, immigrants and refugees in the period immediately prior to the well documented wave of xenophobic violence in South Africa that occurred in 2005 and 2008 in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. The three metropolitan centres dominate the recent literature on xenophobia in South Africa largely because they have been the locus of violent xenophobic protests during the post-apartheid era (HSRC 2008; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush *et al.* 2006; Pendleton *et al.* 2006; Morris 1998; Misago 2009).

The hardening of anti-migrant views between 2002 and 2008 culminated in the May 2008, violent attacks on foreign African nationals which left many migrants homeless and generally in positions of extreme vulnerability (see Table 1). Similarly, in the December 2005 xenophobic attacks on African migrants at Olievenhoutbosch, near Centurion in Gauteng Province, began with local groups chasing away foreign Africans living in the Choba informal settlement from their shacks and business premises. Foreign migrants are generally identifiable on the basis of biocultural factors such as physical appearance and an inability to speak indigenous languages. Reports reveal that several people, mostly migrants, were killed in the burning and rampant looting that followed. Two years later, in 2007, similar attacks on foreign nationals resulted in the deaths of at least 100 Somalis followed by looting and the setting on fire of their businesses and other properties. The

small shop-cum residence has become the archetypical signifier of entrepreneurial Somali migrants who operate small general dealer shops at the periphery of the central business district of urban regions and has become a regular casualty of xenophobic violence in many South African cities.

Yet again, in May 2008 several South African cities witnessed large-scale xenophobic attacks that mostly targeted migrants of African origin (Crush *et al.* 2008). This episode marked the latest development in a long series of violent incidents involving the victimization of migrants and refugees in the urban areas of the country (Crush 2000). Alexandra township, which is located to the north-east of Johannesburg, was the site of one of the first waves of violence against foreign nationals, which later spread to other townships across the country in May 2008 and resulted in the deaths of more than 60 people (including South African nationals and foreign cross-border traders). In addition, more than 500 shops were either looted or burned down and about 100,000 African migrants, refugees and citizens were displaced and many were hospitalised after sustaining physical injuries (IOM 2009; Misago 2009; (McKnight 2008; Iggelsden *et al.* 2009; Rusinga *et al.* 2012; Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

A detailed article by Misago (2009) argues that the attacks in the sprawling township of Alexandra were spearheaded by a group of less than 300 residents who were on a crusade against foreign migrants whom they accused of sabotaging national economy and household livelihoods in the townships. In January 2009, an armed group led by a community councillor occupied a building in Durban and began an assault on the foreigners present. Similarly, in November 2009 about 2,500 Zimbabwean migrants at Stofland informal settlement in De Doorns (the Western Cape) took refuge in government buildings after several of their informal dwellings (shacks) were attacked and demolished by local residents who were unhappy that farm owners had been employing Zimbabweans whom they paid lower wages and were not recruiting from the local community (Morris 1998; Misago 2009; Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

## **Factors Accounting for the Hardening of Xenophobic Views and Increased Attacks**

The causes of the hardening of anti-migrant views and the xenophobic

attacks that have occurred in South African cities during the post-apartheid era are contested. On one hand is a neo-liberal perspective which argues that xenophobic violence in urban areas is fueled by stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants often presented by some sections of the media. On the other hand, there is a more radical perspective which argues that xenophobia studies need greater epistemological reflection. The more radical analyses view urban space as a terrain of contestation over access to services, rights to urban accommodation and general urban citizenship rights.

It has been argued from a neo-liberal perspective that xenophobic violence is fueled by stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants often presented by some sections of the media. The media has also been criticized for fanning the flames of a socio-spatial discourse that is dominated by xenophobic hostilities (McDonald & Jacobs 2010; Hossay 1996; Danso & McDonald 2000). Scholarly analyses of the media in southern Africa by Danso and McDonald (2000) and more recently by Crush & Ramachandran (2009) reveal that it is exacerbating the diffusion and intensity of xenophobic sentiments across the urban landscape through negative profiling of migrants. For example, press coverage on immigration in southern African countries between 2001 and 2003 in newspaper articles frequently used pejorative images of migrants as ‘job-stealers’, ‘carriers of disease’, ‘criminals’ and ‘illegals’ (Crush 2001; Crush & Pendleton 2004; Campbell & Oucho 2003). Newspaper headlines, featuring articles by various writers such as Carnie (2006), Leeman (2001) and Kearney (2001), reveal considerable media interest in issues like ‘foreign migrants stealing jobs’ or ‘foreign migrants being involved in crime and other anti-social behaviour’. In situations of heightened xenophobia, foreign migrants often endure threats of violence and victimization as xenophobia increases their vulnerability by exposing them to regular harassment, intimidation, and abuse by society (Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

Clearly, when migrants are made scapegoats or are demonized for various urban ills, such as crime and unemployment, negative and biased stereotypes are produced and re-produced. A case in point is the physical violence against Somali shopkeepers which has been cited as evidence of xenophobic violence in urban South Africa (Grant 2013). Perhaps, as a result of a recent history of intense economic competition in the *spaza* market in which migrant entrepreneurs have come to dominate, increased levels of

violent crime against migrant shopkeepers have been reported. However, what is not clear is whether this is solely attributable to xenophobia or could it be a reflection of a societal symptom characterized by an emerging violent entrepreneurship whereby business competitors often resort to physically attacking the opponents?

Some of the more radical analyses have blamed the xenophobic attacks on service delivery challenges in many urban areas and increasing poverty and unemployment levels in recent years which have led to the scapegoating of foreign migrants by frustrated citizens. For example, scholars like, Nieftagodien (2008); Hassim *et al.* (2008) and Hossay (1996) have argued that perceived rather than real economic threats are the major drivers of xenophobic tendencies in South Africa. This argument helps to explain why communities experiencing debilitating economic circumstances have experienced more xenophobic riots and violent attacks than the more economically sound communities. A case in point is Alexandra whose 350 000 residents experience high levels of unemployment, poor accommodation, inadequate infrastructural services, systemic exclusion and deprivation. Here, unemployment and infrastructural challenges are decisive determinants in the reproduction of poverty and deprivation that in turn have generated conditions that are conducive to the emergence of conflict or violence. In Alexandra, as in many former African townships, residents often struggle violently for access to basic infrastructural services, such as decent toilets, clean water and electricity. The 1995 and 2008 xenophobic riots are examples that illustrate how struggles for access to services can rapidly degenerate into urban violence engulfing entire residential areas and often spilling over to adjacent public and private spaces. Nieftagodien (2008) eloquently argues that the Alexandra xenophobic violence could be explained by the local residents daily eking out an existence in the congested squatter camps and dilapidated prison-like hostels. Previously in 1995 the ‘Buyelekhaya’ (go back home) campaign in Alexandra had driven Malawian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean immigrants to a police station as part of a campaign to rid the township of foreigners whom they blamed for causing crime and unemployment (Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

However, despite the obvious connections between the incidence of xenophobic violence and the high levels of material deprivation in the townships, it is inadequate in explaining why some poor urban communities

have repeatedly engaged in xenophobic violence while other urban communities confronted by similar challenges have remained relatively peaceful. Some scholars have attempted to respond to this question by focusing on the role of community leadership in promoting xenophobic violence. According to Misago (2009), who investigated the immediate causes which led to recent xenophobic violence, the micro-politics of local communities, particularly the lack of institutional structures and trusted leadership in the affected areas were the fundamental causes of the violence. In Atteridgeville and Alexandria, meetings were held by the local community leadership to explore ways to close down all foreign-owned shops. The same pattern was followed in several other communities, such as Cape Town's communities of Delft, Masiphumele, Crossroads, Phillip East, Khayelitsha, Samora Machel and Gugulethu (Rusinga *et al.* 2012).

What this all means it that the rise of xenophobia in the urban areas of South Africa since the 1990s is the result of a combination of complex factors which, however, should not be delinked from the migrant inflows from neighbouring countries, that characterize the post-1994 migrations patterns. Clearly, the xenophobic conflicts are not just about economic struggles between competing local and foreign business people but they are also a vivid manifestation of intolerance of diversity in the growing multicultural cities. It is worth noting that in most urban spaces, foreign migrant communities remain largely unassimilated and excluded and this raises major issues surrounding the notions of belonging and citizenship under conditions of multicultural urbanism. Also, hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999).

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to contribute to the debate on xenophobia and violence in South Africa's multicultural cities where streets have often become sites of perpetual tension and conflict between local and migrant groups. Studies show that the high levels of anti-migrant rhetoric and general xenophobic attitudes are quite disturbing and do undermine efforts towards the realization of policy goals of promoting urban and national development. Xenophobia poisons social interactions between locals and migrant groups,

and at the same time it undermines the positive effects of migration on human development. The inevitable result is to increase the social distance between migrant and local populations and this has created challenges with respect to notions of social cohesion, belonging and citizenship. In such settings ethnic tensions, overcrowding and competition for access to scarce resources have provided the spark that has given rise to complex forms of economic and social violence that the media commonly refer to as xenophobic attacks. Also, public spaces in cities have become sites of tension and conflict between local and foreign traders, especially in the low income townships where struggles for basic infrastructural services are perpetual. Violent attacks on foreign African nationals have not only left many migrants in positions of extreme vulnerability, but have also had high economic and social costs due to the destruction of properties and the dislocation of some urban communities. As a result, areas like Alexandra, Atterridgeville and Olievenhoutbosch have become regular sites of xenophobic violence. At the same time, there has been a huge development of ‘fortified enclaves’ across urban spaces as one of the responses to prevent the possible spread of violence and crime into the traditionally safe neighbourhoods.

The causes of the hardening of anti-migrant views and the xenophobic attacks that have occurred in South African cities during the post-apartheid era are contested. What is evident, however, is that in the urban areas, the stereotypical negative views of foreign migrants presented by some sections of the media; the organizational role of community leadership; and the existence of complex spaces of deprivation, have not only provided a recipe for violent xenophobic outbreaks, but they also helped to explain variations in the incidence and intensity of xenophobic violence within and between cities and neighbourhoods.

What is required, if the development potential and gains of labour migration into the country are not to be undermined by xenophobia, is a more coordinated and systematic effort to understand and manage the phenomenon. The Immigration Act of 2002 commits the government to challenge xenophobia by rooting it out in all social spheres. However, success in this endeavour will require societal changes and intervention by community leaders. In addition, there is need for government and the media to embark on a major public awareness and education campaign to counter

xenophobia. However, any plan to develop tolerance towards foreigners must take place alongside a programme that addresses the crisis of poverty, housing and unemployment in urban areas. One is reminded that, following the 1990s xenophobic attacks and concerns for the safety and well-being of non-nationals, the National Consortium on Refugee Affairs (CoRMSA), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations launched the Roll Back Xenophobia (RBX) campaign in 1998 with the primary aim of promoting awareness about the legitimate presence of foreign nationals and the need for a harmonious co-existence. The campaign used community radio, television and school programmes and seminars as part of its national public awareness. There is a need to pursue strategies whose objective is to address all forms of xenophobia through socially inclusive dialogue and participatory decision making involving all the stakeholders, including central government, local authorities, community leaders and migrant communities.

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**Table 1: Major Sites of Xenophobic Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa**

<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Alexandra township (Johannesburg)	'Buyelekaya' inspired attacks on Malawian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean migrants	1995
Alexandra township (Johannesburg)	Attacks on migrants resulted in over 60 deaths including locals; 342 shops looted, 213 premises burned down, about 100,000 people were temporarily displaced	May 2008
Olievenhoutbosch (Near Centurion in Gauteng)	Attacks on migrants at Choba informal settlement resulted in several deaths; looting and destruction of foreign-owned spaza shops, hair saloons and taverns	December 2005
Olievenhoutbosch (Near Centurion in Gauteng)	Attacks on migrants resulted in several deaths; looting and destruction of shacks and property	2007
Durban	Armed group led by a community councilor led attacks on migrants; 100 Somali owned businesses were looted and over 400 Somalis were displaced	January 2009
De Doorns (Western Cape)	Attacks on Zimbabwean migrants at Stofland informal settlement resulted in looting and destruction of shacks; 3000 foreigners were driven from their shacks	November 2009

Cape Flats (Western Cape)	Seven migrants were killed following disputes between locals and migrants residing in the area. The violence spread to neighbouring low income areas.	September 2000
Cape Flats (Western Cape)	Attacks on Somali migrants resulted 20-30 killed; looting and destruction of shops; several Somalis were displaced	August 2007

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# **‘Positive Discrimination’ and Minorities in Post-apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Indian South Africans**

**Anand Singh**

## **Abstract**

There are numerous ways in which people attempt to make sense of the transformation that is taking place in contemporary South Africa, especially with respect to ‘positive discrimination’ and ‘affirmative action’ – often used interchangeably as synonyms<sup>1</sup>. Against the background of its racialised past, characterised by the highest privileges for Whites and a narrowing of privileges for Coloureds, Indians and Africans (in this order) – during apartheid, reference to changes is often made in the context of a continuation in discriminatory policies that resembles institutionalised patterns of ‘reverse discrimination’, a somewhat grim reminder of the Apartheid era. As people (Indian respondents) refer to this they often bring up a sense of turgidity in at least 3 issues such as ‘positive discrimination’, ‘affirmative action’, and ‘Black Economic Empowerment’. In a similar vein, their references to these being forms of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, ethnic nepotism, collective narcissism, or sheer racism in reverse, shows the lack of clarity that the lay person often has about the academic contexts of these concepts. This article argues that while they may not be accurate, as people often tend to use them interchangeably, the terms often overlap in definitions and they do have one thing in common i.e. reference to institutionalised forms of discrimination and polarisation. While South African Indians often feel that the alienation brought about by affirmative action/positive discrimination is harsh and reverse racism, the evidence herein suggests that ethnic nepotism is a more

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article both words will be taken as synonyms.

appropriate concept than its related counterparts because it does not have their inbuilt harshness.

**Keywords:** Affirmative action, positive discrimination, xenophobia, Black Economic Empowerment, minorities, South Africa, Indians

## **Introduction**

From about May 2013 a pressure group calling itself the Mazibuye African Forum began making provocative statements against the building of a statue to commemorate Mohandas K (Mahatma) Gandhi in Durban. They claimed that Indians were too privileged under minority rule and were generally racist towards Africans. Their call was for Indians to be excluded from Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programmes and for greater socio-economic parity for Africans, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The call was immediately rebuffed by a number of people across the racial divides in South Africa, and the state appears to have acted swiftly in curtailing the group from further derogatory statements, understood in South Africa as ‘hate speech’. The interesting aspect about this racialised rage lies in ignoring the contemporary realities of the South African political economy – that while Africans are in control of the political arena, Whites are still largely in control of the economy. Yet there has been no rage against Whites and the hegemonic position that the elitists among them still occupy.

However, the ways in which people responded demonstrated the varying perceptions that prevail in South Africa about the nature and pace of transformation in the country. While some assume that there was a clear divide between Whites and other subjugated groups (African, Coloureds and Indians) during the apartheid period, others believe that Indians and Coloureds collaborated with Whites to frustrate African advancement. In ongoing media and academic analyses, and as responses from the field accrue, it is clear that there can be no simplistic analysis of the direction that South Africa is taking towards satisfying the needs of all its citizens.

Despite the noises by the Mazibuye Africa Forum, a critical statement from a senior member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party, Mathews Phosa, placed the nature of transformation into a perspective that is shared by many commended analysts:

South Africans started designing the first draft of the black empowerment policy in 1990. The unfortunate fact is that black economic empowerment, although a work in progress, did not make any meaningful or substantial contribution towards addressing the twin ills of poverty and unemployment. It did not address a fundamental issue, namely that for economic transformation to be successful, we had to create black entrepreneurs who were not the beneficiaries of wealth created by others.<sup>2</sup>

In a more incisive attack on contemporary characteristics of political leadership, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela made Durban's evening *Daily News* front page headlines with the caption: 'Stop the greed... It is time for the ruling party to take stock'. She was forthright in her attack against rogue elements in the party:

I cannot pretend all is well...today it is all about self-enrichment. The struggle was never about individuals but today you open a newspaper there is a councillor being charged and there is a government department being investigated and an institution in trouble because it cannot account for huge amounts of government expenditure<sup>3</sup>.

While Phosa attacked policy failure, as noted in the first quotation above, Mandela attacked self-interest and greed within the party – warning the state of a possible revolt by the poverty stricken masses. In doing so they are alienating themselves from the mainstream population<sup>4</sup>, including the African majority. But there is a way that the ruling party (ANC) is trying to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.polity.org.za/article/bee-not-working-phosa-2012-10-26>.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, Wednesday, September 18, 2013, page 1.

<sup>4</sup> Told this in two independent conversations by African individuals (males) living in squatter camps, who want to vote for the White led Democratic Alliance (DA) (March 2013). They believe the ANC no longer has the confidence of the Black majority. N.B. this is not meant to be evidence, but a reflection of at least how some Africans are beginning to think about the ruling party.

circumvent its increasing alienation from the masses viz. through ‘justifiable discrimination’, also referred to as ‘positive discrimination’.

Durban’s Archbishop Wilfrid Napier publicly denounced this approach in a more recent Sunday Tribune edition (27 January 2013) against discrimination in South Africa, while attacking President Zuma on his moral behaviour:

Today many, including myself, are upset about being victims of a new race classification which is passed off and applied as ‘justifiable discrimination’ because it is meant to benefit the previously disadvantaged. It is a moot question whether discrimination can ever be justified. Whether it is white discrimination or black discrimination, it remains discrimination. And our constitution says there should be no discrimination. And Nelson Mandela said he would stand up against any type of discrimination.

Against the background of the ticket that the ANC used to unify the previously disadvantaged in South Africa viz. the Freedom Charter, their about turn in selectively creating opportunities for the African majority is viewed widely among Coloureds and Indians as akin to treacherous practice.

## **The Freedom Charter and Expectations of Non-Racialism**

As the post-apartheid regime surges ahead in attempting to create level playing fields in employment, access to learning institutions, and political office across racial boundaries, it is seemingly alienating many of those they once pledged to incorporate into their equity programmes. Evidence about such perceptions is replete among White, Coloured and Indian citizens<sup>5</sup>. When statements around responses such as: ‘We are no longer confident about future prospects in this country’, or ‘the privileges of employment and promotion in government departments no longer exist for us because we are not Black enough’ are repeatedly made (by respondents during this research

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<sup>5</sup> Reference to these racial categories still prevail in South Africa, and are not intended to be derogatory.

exercise), several critical questions arise about the nature of the state with respect to either multi-racialism or non-racialism, and the future of minorities in South Africa. These questions become ever more critical when budding contributors to the essential services such as in health-care feel constricted - from the point of entering medical learning institutions to their post-graduate employment. There were huge expectations, especially among those still referred to as 'Coloureds' and 'Indians', who believed that the major political force in the country viz. the African National Congress (ANC), was committed to the principles enshrined in the Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 by a multiracial gathering calling itself 'Congress of the people'<sup>6</sup>.

The Freedom Charter, adopted by the non-racial Congress Alliance in 1955, was the cornerstone around which opposition to Apartheid was mobilised, particularly through the United Democratic Front (UDF, formed 1983). It facilitated support from across the four racial categories in South Africa, although support from Whites was minimal, and Coloureds and Indians showed substantial but not necessarily majority support<sup>7</sup>. One of the most important pillars of this document was its bold rejection of race as a criterion for entry into educational facilities, residential areas, employment and economic and political opportunities. It was emphatic about discarding the notion altogether in order to create a non-racial society based upon meritocracy and achievement<sup>8</sup>.

The new South African constitution, introduced in 1996 after the first democratic General Election on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994, incorporated most of

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<sup>6</sup> The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; The People Shall Govern!

<sup>7</sup> However, in the race-based elections in 1983, in which Africans were excluded and relegated to ethnically enclaved and relatively unproductive areas called 'Homelands', Whites, Coloureds and Indians were cajoled to vote for their respective representatives in what was called the 'Tri-cameral' parliament. The overwhelming Indians and Coloureds chose to boycott the elections, because it was White controlled.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/cape-town/formation-and-launch-udf?page=3>

the principles of the Freedom Charter and it introduced the Equity Bill in 1998, which was aimed at specifically monitoring fairness in implementation and practice. In Section 6, Paragraph 1 of the Equity Bill, the statement is clear that discrimination of any sort on the basis of at least 19 grounds, including ethnic background, race or language, is unconstitutional and a libellous offence. The Department of Labour has strengthened this point by emphasising that ‘Affirmative Action ensures that qualified people from designated groups have equal opportunities in the workplace’<sup>9</sup>. ‘Designated Groups’ in this context is understood to include Africans, Coloureds and Indians, and implies non-discrimination among them.

South Africa’s apartheid past with respect to discrimination across various fronts has made the legal system and organs of the state ever more conscious of how not to persist (seemingly) with this practice in whatever form it might emerge. The recent case of Jon Qwelane, a journalist, for instance bears testimony to this. It showed the level of seriousness South Africa’s democracy watchdogs can take against issues such as hate speech - when Qwelane wrote pejoratively in the Sunday Sun about homosexuals: ‘Call me names, but gay is NOT okay’ (*The Witness* Thursday 29 August 2013: 2), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) instructed Qwelane to pay a one-hundred-thousand rand fine, and to apologise through the Sunday Sun, against which he intended to appeal.

The point about the SAHRC is that as an organ of a constitutional democracy and it being independent of the state, it can take up issues of a discriminatory nature and impose severe penalties upon transgressors. However, issues around ‘positive discrimination’, implemented through the policies of affirmative action, seldom reach the SAHRC. An understanding of ‘African’ entitlement prevails in South Africa to a point where Whites, Coloureds and Indians submit somewhat helplessly to it when jobs are not offered to them in favour of Africans - even when they might be more appropriately qualified and meet the criteria. This ‘reverse discrimination’ is seemingly justified through reference to Africans being the most marginalised during the years of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. There is a widespread belief that in terms of the racial hierarchy that was

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.workplacelaw.net/human-resources/blogs/41023/positively-unfair-workplace-discrimination-in-south-africa>.

created by apartheid there was a condescending order that put Whites on the top, Coloureds and Indians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom. Hence access to employment and the quality and investment in education was staggered along this hierarchical basis. It is against this background that post-apartheid democracy aspires to bring about equity, especially for Africans. However, while there is a significant amount of truth about South Africa's racialised social order, there is a tendency to downplay the extent and nature of poverty among Coloureds and Indians when compared to the situation of Africans. In the sprawling municipal provisioned housing in urban complexes, widely referred to as 'townships', such as Chatsworth and Phoenix for Indians and Wentworth for Coloureds, the nature and depth of poverty among all three of the classified population categories could hardly be different from one another. The poverty in Coloured and Indian townships was and still is no less among those who have been structurally alienated by apartheid's policies (Desai 2002; Desai & Vahed 2013). The significant difference between Africans and Coloureds and Indians is that the former is a substantially bigger population group than the latter two. While there has been visibility of the Indian and Coloured middle classes, the overwhelming majority of the people from both these categories still reside in townships and are still as economically and politically alienated as they were during apartheid. There is little, if any difference at all in the extent and nature of poverty among Africans, Indians and Coloureds when compared in terms of household-for-household.

One of the main problems of affirmative action cum positive discrimination in South Africa is that the issue of race is placed before economic status. Many of those benefitting from positive discrimination policies are from the African middle classes rather than from the working and underclasses – where the greatest attention is needed<sup>10</sup>. It is in these types of issues that accusations about a lack of vision, opportunism and reverse discrimination have been attributed to the successive post-apartheid governments soon after the first democratic General Election in April 1994. Public cries about reverse discrimination are an almost daily issue in the popular print media, in staff room meetings, social gatherings and in one-on-one interviews. Against the background of such frequency and prevalence, it

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/244570>.

would be prudent to suggest that debates about its merits be brought out into the open in order to ascertain the legitimacy of latent fears and possible directions that the state is taking in respect of addressing minority fears.

When issues of discrimination are raised in the context of multi-racial societies and where hegemonic forces are at play, they raise crucial questions in analytical studies, especially with respect to how they should be understood. When the application of positive discrimination among Africans themselves ignores issues around class, it adds to a racialised situation that is already complex. For instance, former South African President F.W. de Klerk has acknowledged that apartheid was fraught with problems and that some form of positive discrimination ought to be applied in order to correct the imbalances of the past. But his view was that this should not occur at the expense of the potential that lurks among the young and talented from among the other racial groups<sup>11</sup>. De Klerk however, emphasised the plight that young Whites were facing as a result of positive discrimination, with little attention paid to the plight of Coloureds and Indians. On the surface of contemporary politics in South Africa, it does appear that the grousing are more about mere accessibility to employment or places in educational institutions, than about more severe forms of discrimination. When severe forms of discrimination do arise, crucial to this is how we contextualise prevalent perceptions and experiences, especially where evidence is available.

## **Contextualising Economic Redress and Positive Discrimination**

In bigger and more diverse countries such as India and the USA the practice of positive discrimination cum affirmative action is usually reserved for minorities who have been politically and economically marginalised within the mainstream economy. The difference about positive discrimination in South Africa is that it applies to the majority population and discriminates against the minorities. Over the years, the Union Government since 1910 and

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1545193/De-Klerk-condemns-positive-discrimination.html>.

since apartheid in 1948 African movement into and out of the urban areas in South Africa was regulated by influx control laws that were rooted in the Native (Black) Urban Areas Act No. 21 of 1923 which was applied stringently to control African movements to meet White labour requirements. By 1937 the law was revised in order to strengthen control over African movements into urban areas. Africans were given 14 days to find employment or return to the areas then known as 'Reserves', subsequently changed to 'Bantustans' and then to the more aesthetically sounding word: 'Homelands' (Sharp 1988).

While the political and legal references changed, the extent and material circumstances of these areas remained the same. The majority of the population, which happened to be African and in excess of 80 per cent, remained constrained to the smallest vestiges of the most unproductive land in the country. Such restrictions on Africans however, did not mean that Coloureds and Indians had similar privileges to Whites in several respects viz. freedom of movement, ownership of land, access to business opportunities, access into political office, or free choice of employment and career building. In movement, occupation and ownership of land, Indians were constrained long before apartheid came into effect in 1948. There are a series of enactments that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century that demonstrates how people of Indian origin were continuously harassed, constrained and blatantly discriminated against to ensure that their upward economic mobility was limited to levels that did not challenge White business, political or social interests<sup>12</sup>.

As early as 1876 the Free State passed legislation that prohibited Indians from becoming citizens there, precluding them from ownership of property or establishing long term interests. In the South African Republic (or the Transvaal – now known as Gauteng) Law 3 of 1885, enacted similar measures against Indians. A petition was filed by the British Indian Government against these measures, but was rejected - only this time the demeanour assumed a punishing plot - it placed all Asians on the same level as 'Africans' i.e. as labourers. On 11 September 1891 all Indians were forced to close their businesses and were removed from the Free State without any

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics-and-society/anti-indian-legislation-1800s-1959>

compensation. While Africans were disenfranchised in 1865, Indians in Natal were disenfranchised through the Franchise Act No. 8 of 1896, through a process that began in 1894. Act 17 of 1895 imposed a three pound tax on ex-indentured labourers, which was to include all males of 16 years and females of 12 of age from 1901. This law was rescinded in 1913 through a non-violent protest led by MK Gandhi (Swan 1985). This law and subsequent protest of 1913 bore significant similarities to the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906 when the imposition of a poll tax turned into a bloody confrontation between the British and the Zulus, who had no alternative but to fight against it in this way.

Containment of the African majority was further perpetuated through restrictions on Africans from acquiring competent education and training in skilled employment. Their task was to remain in menial, subservient and unskilled labour that ensured a subversion of potential threats to White hegemony in every aspect of South African life. People who were classified Coloured were permitted to vote and were allowed to enter into apprenticeships in skills training from the 1950s. Indians were only accepted as South African citizens in 1961 and those classified as ‘Indian’ were granted permission to enter into the building trade in the 1960s and into the engineering trades in the early-1970s. It was forbidden to offer Indians apprenticeships in jobs that trained them as electricians, metal workers, welders, motor mechanics, or as fitters and turners for most of their stay in South Africa. Visibility among Indians in South Africa emerged mainly through professional work in law and medicine, in businesses through petty entrepreneurship and small scale retailing, and in semi-skilled office and factory work that was generally low paid. While a few managed to break through middle barriers and enter into relatively big manufacturing businesses, or in agriculture, they were few and far between. None of them however, were able to match or compete with the enormity of big White capital in the country (Arkin *et al.* 1989).

Such opportunities were delivered as ‘privileges’ to Indians and not as citizen based rights. As confidence in White minority rule consolidated through the 1950s and 1960s, Africans were being increasingly relegated to their reservations or restrictive high density townships. Their only recourse to paid employment was through unskilled labour. As conditions in the reservations and townships deteriorated, so did the patience of African youth

and their political leaders<sup>13</sup>. Agitation against the oppressive system rose to a point of entrenched opposition to apartheid and a determination to completely dismantle it. At least four incidents in each of the decades stand out in the history of opposition to apartheid and a widespread opposition by people of all racial groups. An ‘early’ sign of this movement was at Kliptown on 26 June 1955, when progressively minded politicians and their followers from across the racial spectrum in South Africa met to declare their opposition to apartheid’s practice of institutionalised discrimination. The major parties viz. the African National Congress (ANC), The South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (SACD) and Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC) opened the meeting with the declaration that ‘The People Shall Govern’, and thereafter referred to the event as the ‘Congress of the People’. The second major hallmark in oppositional politics was on 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville when thousands, mainly Africans, marched against the state to protest against ‘pass laws’ that also required Africans to carry their identity documents with them at all times. Around 180 people are said to have been injured and at least 69 people died as a result of police brutality. The subsequent banning of the respective Congresses led to a lull in oppositional politics and to the strengthening of White minority rule. However it all came to a head when the then Minister of Bantu Affairs wanted to make Afrikaans a compulsory language in African dominated schools. The aim was to bring Afrikaans on par with English and subjects such as mathematics, arithmetic and social studies had to be taught in Afrikaans. This led to the third major event in 1976, when African high school learners in Soweto marched against the state and were once again met with brutal police force. While many learners died others subsequently began leaving the country to join banned organisations like the ANC and PAC because they no longer saw any value in peacefully protesting against the state (Lodge 1983).

The fourth major opposition was marked once again by the well pronounced multiracial opposition in 1984 – when elections for the ‘Tricameral Parliament’ was set up by then President PW Botha and his government. But the Houses for Indians (House of Delegates) and for

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<sup>13</sup> I use the phrase deliberately, because leadership was based then on racially based distinctions.

Coloureds (House of Representatives) had suffered a credibility crisis when only 16.2 per cent of these population categories turned out to vote. The lack of participation among these classified racial groups was not mere complacency about voting, but it was an active publicised campaign to discredit the entire tri-cameral system because it excluded Africans. Most individuals who stood for elections then were not popularly sanctioned by their respective constituencies and were not known for any measure of critical engagement against apartheid's system of institutionalised discrimination<sup>14</sup>. When opposition against racism in South Africa was challenged, it was done so by such candidates on the basis of sectional interests. They firmly represented interests of Indians, Coloureds or Whites only. It was the ANC however that represented the interests of all, on a somewhat non-racial basis. It was their adherence to the Freedom Charter and the continuous popularisation of the 'Congress of the People' in 1955 that brought most Indians and Coloureds under one political umbrella, albeit in varying degrees of affinity and trust in the rhetoric that they dished out to the masses.

In the period that Nelson Mandela reigned as President of South Africa (1994-1999), the relatively large number of Indians who were in senior parliamentary and political appointments created consternation among Africans who felt uncomfortable about it<sup>15</sup>. This gave rise to internal murmuring and then to more public statements against such levels of representation so high up in politics. In the Thabo Mbeki<sup>16</sup> era, followed by that of Jacob Zuma, rumblings about Indian representation slid downwards to include employment and admission to the educational institutions as injustices to African attempts towards upward economic mobility. This has been implemented to a large extent, but has surfaced in numerous ways, according to Whites Coloureds and Indians as alienation, narcissism, reverse discrimination, and the admission or employment of inappropriately qualified people whose under-performances are already showing in the lack

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/sites/default/files/files/downloads/Learners%20book%20Chapter5.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> The issue came to the fore when Thabo Mbeki replaced Nelson Mandela as State President in South Africa.

<sup>16</sup> South Africa's second post-apartheid President.

of service delivery. Accompanying this situation is the perception of alleged impatience towards transformation and increasing public cries about inefficiency, hampered service deliveries and concerns about the future viability of the state (Desai 2002).

## **Evidence from the Ground**

There are clear signs of discontent among minority groups throughout the country about accessibility to education and employment. In a survey of 20 households in two middle-class neighbourhoods viz. Clare Estate/Reservoir Hills and Westville, during the months of June and July 2013, and among six of my own siblings with respect to these 'cries' about being marginalised, some interesting facts emerged. In the 26 households there were a total of 58 'children' between 21 and 31 years of age, who had reached graduation levels at technical institutions and universities. All of the 58 were gainfully employed in their respective areas of specialisation. Against this, what then could the problem be?

Three key issues emerged as common grousing. First, that state funded primary and secondary schools have been 'swamped' by African children from neighbourhood squatter camps and from neighbouring African townships. This was because the alleged perceptions among African parents was that Indian teachers and schools are the most preferable to White teachers and schools, which were better equipped but too costly for them to send their children. Secondly, this necessitated Indian parents having to send their school going children to White dominated schools much further away. The costs in terms of time, transport and school fees increased phenomenally for Indian parents, because, as all families claimed, learning with Africans who were not conversant in English was too much of a 'risk' – in that it compromised the pace of teaching and learning in the class (Singh 2001). And thirdly, while all of the respondents were employed, their tasks of acquiring employment were made more difficult because of affirmative action that favoured Africans before any other racial category. Within their work environments too much emphasis upon a preference for African employees over other racial groups tended to emphasise their distinctiveness as 'the other'. In the course of interviewing at least three statements are worthy of recording here since each one led to further investigation:

- I had to send my child away from the school only 3 doors away from our home because it was impossible for him to continue learning with the Black children. If they can't speak English then when are the teachers going to talk to our children in English? What would have become of him and his cousins in high school and university if they carried on there?
- My grandson applied to Wits and UCT medical schools, and both warned us not to have our hopes up for him. So we also applied to a medical school in Mauritius. Of course when I look at what UCT did to that Indian family there we are no longer banking on him studying medicine here in this country. (See Case Study 2 below.)
- We had an African woman employed at the call centre in the municipality. She was given the post of supervisor, but the job was entirely out of her depths. After she made a mess with job, the very people who supported her appointment, that is Africans themselves, turned against her because she was useless. But the xenophobic tendencies in the municipality against Indians are strong. There is no way Indians are going to have much of a chance in employment anymore.

The statements above illustrate how words such as ‘xenophobic’ and related concepts emerge in implicit ways to argue the uncertainties they feel about transformation. In other responses people referred to the pattern of transformation as being ‘reverse discrimination’, ‘African racists/racism’, and ‘narcissistic’. Numerous references were made to known incidents that caught the attention of the media and became public issues – especially with respect to what the implications for Indians in SA, in the future. Each statement is followed by a case study below which provides incidents of perceived xenophobic cum racist practices and how such issues are being viewed as deliberate attempts to alienate Indians.

## CASE STUDY 1

SR - a 60 year old widow recalled how she and her husband's brother had to

follow what their entire neighbourhood had to do since 1996 in order to save their children from what they deemed was the unfolding of an inferior education, brought about by an unbridled entry of non-English speaking African learners into their junior primary school. The situation became increasingly intolerant when Indian children had to sit in classes of more than 40 learners, being threatened and having their stationery and lunches allegedly stolen, and in several instances the children were assaulted for standing up against being bullied and threatened. African learners were allegedly often older than their Indian counterparts and did not share much in common with them as speakers of a different language and as learners from different class backgrounds. The neighbourhood was generally complacent but at individual levels they complained incessantly about how insensitively the state was handling their educational institutions. The residents in the area saw themselves in oppositional terms on various fronts: that they were being undermined because they were a minority far smaller than those classified as 'Whites' and therefore easier to manipulate; that they were property taxpayers and the Africans as squatters were not; that while the ANC spoke about transformation towards a non-racial South Africa, in actual fact they practiced reverse discrimination towards Indians by ignoring their contributions towards stable and prosperous neighbourhoods; that Africans were being given greater attention because their bigger population numbers gave the ANC greater political mileage during elections; that Africans do not have a tradition of literacy like Indians and Whites – thereby making fair competitive meritocratic performances untenable in education, training and employment practices. SR and her neighbours were grateful that they moved their children away from the district primary school and placed them in ex-Model C schools (previously for Whites only during apartheid). While they moped about the astronomical costs and inconveniences this decision imposed upon them, they marvelled at the fact that their children were now well educated University graduates in well placed employment.

## **CASE STUDY 2**

In March 2005 an Indian couple applied to the Cape Town High Court to have their daughter admitted to the University of Cape Town Medical School, while their admissions policy was being reviewed. The High Court

ruled against their appeal and ordered them to pay the University's hefty legal bill. The couple's daughter, Sunira, was one of 2100 applicants for 200 places in UCT's medical school. Seeing that their daughter would have lost the year, the couple decided not to pursue the case any further. But the ruling was based on the approach that Sunira's legal team adopted viz. that all learners from among Africans, Coloureds and Indians, were equally disadvantaged, even if they attended private schools. Judge Rosheni Allie said that while both UCT and Sunira's parents agreed that the University's admission policies appeared to be discriminatory, they differed in terms of whether the policies were reasonable, justifiable and capable of dealing with the inequities of the past. While Senior Counsel for Sunira argued that all Coloured and Indian learners were discriminated against despite their schooling backgrounds, Indian learners were divided into two categories i.e. whether they attended private schools or government schools, and are regarded either way as not having had disadvantaged education under apartheid, or under contemporary conditions<sup>17</sup>.

### CASE STUDY 3

The respondent who made the third statement above was an engineer who was employed by a major municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province. While he enjoyed being employed there, he finds the emphasis on affirmative action too alienating and often 'openly racist'. His relative satisfaction emerges out of the fact that he gets along well with all of his colleagues who work around him, irrespective of race or department. But his problem is with how vacant positions are filled and what is often said, especially by Africans themselves, about who should be considered. The case of the Floor Manager in the Call Centre for instance was one of the more talked about positions because of the popularity of the previous person. She was Coloured, had

... excellent managerial skills and was a people's person... Since she ran the department so well people did not think about how complex the duties were and how important it was to be a committed but

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/indian-couple-to-pay-uct-s-legal-fees-1.235661?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>.

approachable manager .... Only when she left and was replaced did many realise that personality and capability was more important than race. It was a relief for all of the staff of the Call Centre when this newly appointed African botched up enough and suddenly resigned. While management realised that it was their obsession with affirmative action that led to the situation, they still wanted to persist with employing another African, until staff from the Call Centre insisted that an Indian woman who was a deputy, be given an opportunity to fill the post – and it is working far better this time ....

A similar situation exists in all of the engineering departments. When African graduates cannot be sought for the positions, the posts are left vacant for up to a year before a person from another racial group is considered. But in such periods service is seriously affected and pressure mounts upon available staff.

In each of the case studies above there is evidence of at least three crucial issues: that Africans are now the most preferred candidates for the entry into medical teaching institutions; Indians are feeling the negative impact of positive discrimination; and state departments – being service driven as opposed to profit driven, have little interest in filling vacancies where Africans are not available to occupy them, even if service delivery is compromised. While each of the statements above is from/about individuals, they point to how positive discrimination is being implemented and how it is impacting upon perceptions and experiences among the designated groups that feel victimised by it. The second case study above was chosen to complement the first and third case studies that are presented here as material from interviews.

A crucial question here is: Is Section 6 of the Equity Act and the statement made by the Department of Labour real commitments to achieving equity for all those who were previously discriminated against, or is it merely rhetorical and for mere public distraction? Is South Africa receding into an apartheid-like situation that has once again adopted institutionalised forms of discrimination that can be matched to issues such as xenophobia, racism and ethnocentrism? The discussion below is intended to find discerning ways of understanding the nature of discrimination in post-apartheid South Africa.

## Is a Singular Paradigm Possible?

In the course of interviews and in general day-to-day interaction, it is not unusual to have someone refer to the notions of affirmative and positive discrimination in South Africa by one of its various related concepts viz. xenophobia, ethnocentrism, narcissism, and racism. While there are specific meanings attached to each concept, there is also a significant overlap among them, causing people to use the words rather loosely. The genesis and meanings of these concepts have been widely researched and debated globally (see for instance LeVine & Campbell 1972; Burns *et al.* 2004; Billiet *et al.* 1996; Blalock 1967; Coenders & Scheepers 2003). Against the information that has been provided above, it would be appropriate to delve into at least a glimpse of how the respective concepts have been defined, and to gauge whether they are befitting to the process of transformation in South Africa:

- Collective/group narcissism – when an individual in a group demonstrates excessive love for his/her group. The concept is related to ethnocentrism<sup>18</sup>;
- Ethnocentrism - The term ethnocentrism was first used in 1906 by Sumner to describe a cultural narrowness in which the ‘ethnically centered’ individual rigidly accepted those who were culturally alike while just as rigidly rejecting who were culturally different. Ethnocentrism refers to the belief that the in-group is the center of everything and is superior to all out-groups (Öğretir & Özçelik 2008);
- Xenophobia – generally understood as a natural dislike or hatred for out-groups; in South Africa xenophobia is racialised, even though it is widely associated with local Africans showing antagonism against Africans from outside the country (Harris 2002; Warner & Finchil-

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<sup>18</sup> Documents\Paper on Collective narcissism - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.mht.

escu 2003; Jost *et al.* 2013; Patel 2013)<sup>19</sup>; and

- Ethnic nepotism – applied in multi-ethnic societies in ways that discriminate against out-groups, especially in situations of intense economic competition<sup>20</sup> (see also Sailer 2004; Vanhenen 1999; Salter & Harpending 2013).

While South Africa's intensely racialised history has enforced a spill-over of racial prejudices into the contemporary era, it is in the last bullet above viz. ethnic nepotism, that much of the 'positive discrimination' appears to apply in South Africa. Although Indians are a minority of barely 2.5 per cent of the country's total population, the economy over the last two decades has not grown sufficiently to embrace the increasing number of job-seekers, creating tensions between classified groups over who should receive highest privileges in the emerging democracy that is South Africa. Indians are widely viewed by Africans as being more privileged in economic opportunities, leaving them with the justification for privileged access to work. There are two issues that emerge out of what prevails in the country and how people conceptualise around what they see and experience. The first is that Africans as the new preferred segment to economic and political privileges are viewed as deliberately alienating minorities who were equally disadvantaged; and the second is that placing Africans in positions of responsibility when they are not adequately ready for it is pathological. When viewed retrospectively the beliefs and concepts that prevail in the mind-sets of minorities, via their contemporary experiences as victims of institutionalised racism, are difficult to box as being of one type or the other.

Against the background of an aesthetically pleasing and unifying concept that emerged soon after the 1994 general election that acquired international currency viz. 'Rainbow Nation', how is that South African minorities find themselves in a situation that reflects a widespread reduction in pride and patriotism? Much of the answer undoubtedly lies in its history of colonialism, apartheid as well the contemporary post-apartheid era. Like

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<sup>19</sup> See also reports at: <http://www.news24.com/tap/topics/xenophobia>; and <http://mg.co.za/tag/xenophobia/attacks>.

<sup>20</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic\\_nepotism/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_nepotism/).

most pluralistic societies, South Africa's trajectory of racialised planning, with the chief characteristic being for preference groups over different eras, continues to mould and entrench attitudes in terms of in-group/out-group mentalities. During colonialism and apartheid those who were classified as 'Whites' were the preferred group and most privileged beneficiaries of state driven programmes and incentives, as well as in big private businesses.

In the vitriolic opposition to apartheid over the years, especially in the 1980s, the all-embracing concept of 'Black' was bandied about to refer to all the designated groups that did not receive the same privileges as Whites. Soon after April 1994 'Black' gradually took on a reference to the African majority, excluding those who were classified under apartheid as Indian or Coloured. The dismantling of apartheid did not lead to the dismantling of boundaries that divided people along racial lines. In both situations, institutionalised racism that previously operated in favour of Whites, and positive discrimination that currently operates in favour of Africans, is ascribed with a pathological tinge that endlessly focuses upon racial boundedness. Contemporary South Africa is a juxtaposition of all four areas of discrimination mentioned above, coupled with the irony of a progressive constitution and progressive trends towards de-racialisation. It is the scramble for scarce employment, scarce state funding for entrepreneurial opportunities, and degrees of collective narcissism that adds to the robustness of post-apartheid South Africa. But the experiences of people across the nine provinces in South Africa are too varied and complex to box them into a single paradigm. They do however vary to the extent that they could fall into the related categories of xenophobia, ethnocentric behaviour, racist attitudes, ethnic nepotism and narcissistic egoism.

## **Conclusion**

When a senior politician such as Mathews Phosa makes a public statement about how the state is failing in their social service delivery to disempowered Africans, there must be some substance to it. And when such a statement is backed up by another generally popular woman politician among African youth such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela about politicians needing to be less selfish and more committed to service delivery, it confirms the extent of the pathology that has set into the real politic in South Africa. Such public

statements reduce the Mayibuye Africa attacks against Indians as no less than racial ranting. Phosa's and Madikizela's open admissions and challenges that are thrown out at politicians flies in the faces of narcissistic organisations such as the Mazibuye African Forum, that blames African lack of advancement on Indian privilege under White minority rule rather than on the short sighted policies of BEE as pointed out by Matheus Phosa, or on the greedy politicians that Winnie Mandela had referred to. However, such candid public declarations against their own political party should not shift attention away from the fact that BEE rests upon politicians lack of vision and greed, and that it is in these ways that the minorities who have much to offer economically and politically are being alienated in ways that often show indifference towards their feelings of helplessness. The fact that all of the graduates surveyed had employment does not necessarily mean that the South African state is doing an acceptable job. Most of them are employees in profit driven private enterprise, not in service driven state departments. When equity enrolments in tertiary institutions such as the case of Sunira against UCT precludes a child entry into a course that she wants to study, or when the local government hires an inefficient person as a manager largely because she was African, then such policies go beyond either individual or collective narcissism. Such instances point toward practices that are no less than crude forms of racism, ethnocentrism or xenophobia (see Billiet *et al.* 1996). The common factor in each of these forms of discrimination is that they appear in either veiled forms of ostracism or bold acts of exclusivism because they have the power to do it. Excluding Indians from the same privileges that Africans now enjoy after building up their hopes during the struggle against apartheid constitutes an about turn that operates on a form of selective amnesia. Against perpetual exclusivism in admission to tertiary institutions, to employment opportunities and to political office, the inclination to believe that racism, ethnic nepotism, xenophobia and/or ethnocentric attitudes are at work should not be too far off the mark as an analytical derivative. But the fact that in the snap survey of 26 households with graduates who were all gainfully employed and who experienced no overt animosity in acquiring their jobs, demonstrates that alienation of Indians is more contextual than crudely racist or xenophobic. The shrinking national and global economies, as well as corruption across civil society, including state officials, would serve as more convincing explanations for the

intense competition in accessibility for learner and economic privileges.

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# **Zimbabwean Teachers' Experiences of Xenophobia in Limpopo Schools**

**Suresh Kamar Singh**

## **Abstract**

Due to the shortage of teachers in schools, many foreign teachers are employed in South African schools. In rural areas, foreign teachers offer services to communities that need teachers desperately. In the Limpopo province, which is predominantly rural, a large number of foreign teachers are employed in both public and private schools. Many of these teachers come from different neighbouring countries; however, the focus of this study is on teachers from Zimbabwe. These teachers experience many challenges teaching in South Africa. Xenophobia is experienced in many forms. The study was done using qualitative data collection methods. Data was collected from Zimbabwean teachers working within the Capricorn District of Limpopo province. The data collection tool employed was the interview. Teachers were asked to reflect on the incidents of xenophobia that involved them personally, took place within their work or home environment. Findings from the interviews revealed that Zimbabwean teachers experience xenophobia on a daily basis; xenophobic attacks on teachers escalate when there are incidents of xenophobia in the school community or the country; teachers experience xenophobia when local teachers' jobs come under threat (temporary posts, substitutes). Xenophobic attacks range from: verbal abuse, indirect insulting, to the chasing of foreign teachers from villages. The recommendations made by this study include: Zimbabwean teachers should have equal status as local teachers, xenophobic attacks on Zimbabwean teachers must be documented and Zimbabwean teachers in scarce skills areas who work in rural schools should be permanently employed.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, foreign, teachers, schools, rural

## Introduction

In South Africa, issues relating to education, access to services, disparate economic status, autonomy and problems arising from migration are among the manifestations of racism and xenophobia (Chakma & Jensen 2001:90). In particular, this article focuses on the issues relating to education. In the context of basic education, teacher shortage is a common problem experienced in South African schools, especially in rural areas. In scarce skills areas or subjects like Maths and Physical Science, the extent of the shortage is even more greatly felt largely due to the shortage of teachers but also because South African teachers prefer to teach in urban rather than rural areas. This gap in the supply of teachers to rural schools in the scarce skills areas has been exploited by foreign teachers. For many years, Indian nationals highly qualified in Maths and the sciences have been employed in these teaching positions (McConnell 2009:38). More recently, with the continued economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe, millions of Zimbabweans have fled the country (McConnell 2009:38) and have temporarily settled in South Africa. They brought a wealth of expertise into South Africa; many of these Zimbabweans are qualified teachers who are proficient in the English language. This is an area of expertise sorely needed in South African rural schools where English is used as a medium of instruction and most learners are English second language learners and speakers. Given this scenario, it would be expected that these teachers would be welcomed, however, Landau *et al.* (2005:4) reports that

South Africans' negative attitudes towards non-nationals are largely oriented towards other Africans, although there are increasing reports of discrimination towards new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent.

This led to the central question that this article addresses: What are Zimbabwean teachers' experiences of xenophobia in Limpopo schools? It is crucial to examine this phenomenon in the context of the wider society where xenophobic violence is a constant threat. Since the violent and widespread xenophobic violence of 2008, there have been constant flare-ups of xenophobia across South Africa. As the result of this, foreign nationals live in constant fear of attacks by local people. In order to further understand the

concept, xenophobia is discussed by examining definitions, forms of xenophobia as experienced by the international community and a historical review of xenophobia as experienced in South Africa.

## **Defining Xenophobia**

The concept of xenophobia is believed to have originated from two Greek words: *xenos* (meaning foreigner or stranger) and *phobos* (meaning fear) (Soyombo 2008:86). However, fear of a stranger or foreigner is a simple way of defining xenophobia. In reality, the concept of xenophobia may slightly differ in different contexts. Xenophobia may also be targeted at people or groups of people who are not strangers but are immigrants living in a community for a long time but are not regarded as *sons of the soil* (Soyombo 2008). Xenophobia has also been seen to entail *contempt* or *loathing* of strangers (Van der Veer *et al.* 2011). Whilst fear-like emotions imply a feeling of vulnerability, contempt and dislike imply some kind of dominance (Van der Veer *et al.* 2011). Other terms used to describe xenophobia are *hatred* and *prejudice* against foreigners (Laher 2009). Fear may not necessarily be associated with people only but it can be explained in the context of the fear of losing one's national identity and purpose (Moisi 2009). Xenophobia is also defined as attitudinal, affective, and behavioural prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign (Yakushko 2009). Of all the definitions cited, this perhaps best explains the type of xenophobia experienced by foreign teachers in South African schools. A negative attitude and behavioural prejudice is directed towards foreign teachers by local teachers, students and the local community.

## **Xenophobia as Experienced Worldwide**

Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon. It has been experienced worldwide under various kinds of circumstances (Soyombo 2008). Xenophobia is a multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon (Yakushko 2009). Among Western nations, the United States has one of the highest numbers of total immigrants coming to live within its borders each year (Yakushko 2009). Although often related to periods of political and economic instability (like Zimbabweans in South Africa), xenophobia often also follows terrorist

events like the bombings of the twin towers on 11 September 2001. Jones (2011) terms this toxic xenophobia (or Islamophobia). Jones (2011) also reports that xenophobia towards Muslims in the United States and Europe has increased since 9/11. The example she cites is the ban or laws regulating the wearing of the veil by Muslim women in schools and public places, France was the first country to ban the wearing of veils by Muslim women. The other example that Jones (2011) cites is the growing movement by the Swiss to ban the building of minarets. Jones (2011) has identified three distinct forms of xenophobia: *exclusive* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and therefore exist outside of our imagined community); *possessive* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and are trying to take our jobs, money, medical aid etc.); *toxic* xenophobia (you are fundamentally different and are trying to destroy that which we hold most dear, our freedom).

In recent times, studies have focused on how to use education to resolve issues of xenophobia in many different countries. Yakushko (2008) suggested strategies for including a systematic focus on the impact of xenophobia in psychological practice, education, research, and policy advocacy. Jones (2011:44-45) proposed creating a critical curriculum within the United States which can facilitate resistance to xenophobia and bias and cites the following conditions as necessary to resist toxic xenophobia through the curriculum: explicitly confront issues of power and privilege; delineate the creation and mobilization of xenophobia against various groups of people internationally and within the US; counteract ethno genesis through explorations of the complexity and diversity of the group called Muslim Americans; and bring in graphic images of xenophobia for critique and for verbal and graphic response. Osler and Starkey (2002) see education for citizenship as a way of combatting racism and xenophobia. This Education for Democratic Citizenship programme was proposed by the Council of Europe. This education programme emphasises the key role of education in combatting xenophobia as it is seen as a barrier to democracy and social cohesion. Van Zalk *et al.* (2013) conducted a study on the extent to which adolescents and their friends socialize one another's attitudes towards immigrants. One of the findings showed that friends' xenophobia predicted increases in adolescents' xenophobia. Put simply, friends influence one another's xenophobic behaviour. The measurement of xenophobia has been inconsistent (Van der Veer *et al.* 2013) and they set out to describe the

development and cross-cultural validation of a new instrument. By using a sample of US, Dutch and Norwegian students, they found that individual respondents' criteria for the ranking of the scale items strongly depend on the way immigrants are framed. They concluded that we often think we know what we measure, but in fact it is not the case. They suggest using pretesting to attain this goal.

Students travelling to other countries also experience all the challenges associated with studying and adapting to a foreign country. Scheunpflug (1997) examined the conditions under which it may be possible to overcome xenophobia through cross-cultural encounters and suggests that communication (common language), planning and length of partnership should be the focus of cross-cultural studying. Cross boundary travel is also influenced by xenophobia as found in the study by Friebel *et al.* 2013). They investigated how emigration from a developing region is affected by xenophobic violence at destination. They surveyed 1000 Mozambican households before and after the xenophobia attacks of 2008 and found that the intention to migrate after the attack was lower.

## **Xenophobia in South Africa**

Over the years, there have been various cases of xenophobia across the African continent; the most recent and highly notable is the May 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa (Soyombo 2008). In South Africa, xenophobia appears to be a racial issue. Black immigrants from other African countries in particular are at a greater risk of being victimised than white immigrants (Warner & Finchilescu 2003). Despite the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, prejudice and violence continue to mark contemporary South Africa (Harris 2002). The culture of violence can be described as a situation in which social relations and interactions are governed through violent, rather than non-violent means; this culture of violence is a legacy of apartheid (Harris 2002). Despite this legacy of the past, South Africa has a democratic constitution and immigration policies and laws which govern the rights, responsibilities and treatment of foreigners (refugees, immigrants etc.) (Landau *et al.* 2005). The legislation has been able to address certain issues like acknowledging the existence of xenophobia and holding South Africa responsible for the treatment of

immigrants (Adjai & Lazaridis 2013). Yet cases of xenophobia are constantly reported in the media. Neocosmos (2010) argues that a new beginning of the conception of politics is needed. He argues that

a truly political community can only be imagined and constructed on the basis of respect for the other; that social justice cannot be bought at the expense of the oppression of others (foreigners, ethnic groups, women, children or whoever) (Neocosmos 2010:549).

An active politics of peace is necessary (Neocosmos 2008:587). Consequent to the xenophobic violence, many sectors of the community (media, social commentators, researchers, public) rightfully questioned the capacity and willingness of the government's safety and security and criminal justice departments to act decisively and effectively against perpetrators of various forms of violence (Seedat *et al.* 2010:18). However, as previously mentioned in this article, xenophobia cannot be easily explained away or blamed on a government. The African context of politics and migration needed to be examined and the impact of this on all aspects of South African life. Of particular note has been the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. According to McConnell (2009:38), in 2007 alone, 45 000 new applications for asylum were made to the South African Department of Home Affairs and more recently, an estimated range of between 500 000 to 3 million Zimbabwean refugees are living in South Africa. These large numbers of people, whose presence had not been expected or planned for, put an enormous strain on resources within South Africa. However, measures were taken to prevent xenophobic violence; for example, the Counter Xenophobia Unit was established. Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) describe the 2008 xenophobic violence as 'Two Steps Backwards' and argue that the ANC government must take a lead in the fight against xenophobia. Despite decisions and statements by political parties on xenophobia, at the level of ordinary people, there is a constant threat of xenophobic violence. Bateman (2011) describes xenophobic experiences of foreign doctors and the lack of support from some local colleagues. Bateman (2011:788) quotes one doctor:

I was ready for the risk of violence and other problems, but not exclusion by colleagues whom we came to help out with the

shortages. It's not an outright xenophobic attitude – more like ignoring you in a group speaking their own language or not informing, involving or supporting you.

Laher's (2009) study of African immigrants in Johannesburg also found that feelings of realistic threat increased prejudice. Sharp (2012) cites the example of day labourers in Cape Town and the constant squabbles that erupt between locals and foreigners. At this level, the basic survival instinct makes people react violently. Similarly, in the school situation, when job and survival are at stake, foreign teachers face the full brunt of the local teachers and communities. There is a gap in the literature concerning xenophobic experiences of teachers in South African schools. Osman's (2009) study of xenophobia as experienced by immigrant learners in inner city schools of Johannesburg contains some accounts of foreign teachers experiences of xenophobia, however, these accounts are of teachers observations and experiences of xenophobia amongst the learners and not as experienced by themselves.

## **Theoretical Background**

Many theories can be used to explain the basis of xenophobia. The two theories most relevant to this study are the psychologically postulated theories of Integrated Threat and Scapegoating. In the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000), four major components of threats are felt by one group in relation to another. *Realistic* threats endanger the well-being of the group and can include fear of harm or a decline in quality of life; *symbolic* threats are threats that are seen to be threatening the group's culture or place in the wider society by challenging or undermining accepted norms; *intergroup anxiety* occurs when two groups come into contact and relates to fear over the ability to communicate positively and effectively; *negative stereotyping* are ingrained attitudes and responses to members of another group that mediate contact, set expectations and that can hamper the process of mediation (Harrison & Peacock 2010). By examining the responses from the teachers, it was evident that these four concepts were experienced by the sampled teachers in various forms.

People sometimes use prejudice and discrimination to express hos-

tility arising from frustration. This is referred to as scapegoating (Osman 2009). When people become frustrated in their efforts to achieve a desired goal, they tend to respond with aggression. The source of the frustration is unknown or too powerful to confront, so a substitute is found to release the aggression (Osman 2009:17). According to Harris (2001), in Osman (2009:18), the phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa may be explained using the scapegoating hypothesis. This theory posits that foreigners are responsible for limited resources like jobs and education. The underlying factor (poverty and violence) is directed towards foreigners because of the perception that they commit crimes and take away jobs meant for South Africans. This is used as a convenient scapegoat for those experiencing the reality of hardship that has worsened since the arrival of Zimbabweans into South Africa (Osman 2009:18).

## **The Study**

The study was conducted in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province, South Africa. Limpopo province is the northern-most province which borders Zimbabwe and Botswana. Due to its proximity to Zimbabwe, many foreigners from Zimbabwe cross over the border to work and study in South Africa. The languages spoken in the northern parts of Limpopo province are familiar to Zimbabweans, especially those who live close to the border.

The qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyse data. Interviews were conducted with teachers from the Capricorn district (which is located at the centre of the province). In total, 14 teachers were interviewed. They were purposively selected from the teacher population in this district. Only Zimbabwean teachers were chosen as their experiences form the crux of this inquiry. A semi-structured interview was used. The interview focussed on their experiences as foreign teachers in South Africa. A descriptive account of their experiences are presented and discussed below.

## **Findings and Discussion**

As all the teachers interviewed were from Zimbabwe, this is not unusual in the Limpopo province since there is a large presence of Zimbabwean teachers ever since the political and economic problems began in that

country. Many professionals sought refuge in South Africa and took temporary teaching jobs in rural schools. This explanation is supported by the period that these teachers have been in South Africa. The range of years spent in South Africa is from 3 to 17 years with one teacher at 3 years, two at 4 years, six at 5 years, three at 6 years, one at 8 years and one at 17 years. Most of the teachers (9) arrived in South Africa 5-6 years ago during the economic melt-down in Zimbabwe. Of the teachers in the study, 13 knew of other foreign teachers who were teaching in South African schools. The Zimbabwean teachers prefer to spend time with colleagues from their own country (10) even if they are not in the same area, as opposed to interacting with local teachers. The reason given was that they share similar experiences with teachers from their own country.

Of the 14 teachers in the study, 8 experienced xenophobia in a direct way. Some Zimbabwean teachers were attacked because of the language they speak, they are fluent in English. The local learners show disrespect towards them because a black person is not expected to speak English. They ask questions like: 'why are you speaking English when you are black?' Learners also showed the Zimbabwean teachers disrespect while they were teaching and threatened the teachers when disciplined for bad behaviour. The Zimbabwean teachers also felt unrecognised in meetings when they wished to express an opinion. In addition, conversation in meetings is exclusionary because they use a local language in official communication and meetings which cannot be understood.

When it came to promotion, they were also excluded. One Zimbabwean teacher cites a case of where he acted in the position of principal for two years, however, when the post was finally advertised, the SGB of the school refused to appoint him citing a reason that he is a foreigner and cannot relate effectively with their culture. The working environment sometimes shows traits of xenophobia especially in the allocation of posts at schools; posts occupied by foreign teachers are often switched in order to save the jobs of local teachers. They also felt threatened with job loss because of their Zimbabwean nationality.

Another common problem encountered by the Zimbabwean teachers was the allocation of a heavier workload on the basis that they are foreigners and would not complain. Zimbabwean teachers also had to listen to conversations attacking their country and utterances to indicate that they

should go back and work for Mugabe. Locals also made verbal utterances that they will one day leave South Africa because they are foreigners.

Unlike acts of xenophobia in the general community where extreme forms of violence are used and people face the threat of losing their lives, for teachers the threats are more subtle and relate primarily to their job security. This ‘realistic’ threat is what the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000) refers to. One other significant finding was the use of local languages as a means of excluding the foreigner, surprisingly even at meetings. Generally, the greatest threat that foreign teachers face is losing their jobs. This is well known by the local teachers and they use this to exploit the foreign teachers as their experiences suggest. Zimbabwean teachers were also found to carry a greater workload compared to local teachers with 9 teachers reporting that they were given additional work due to their foreigner status.

Nine teachers also reported that they were called names in local languages. Name calling is a common practice in local communities. All the teachers reported that they often found themselves excluded from discussions where the local languages are deliberately used to exclude them from conversations. This type of behaviour suggests that the local teachers either see them as a threat or are not willing to engage in conversation with them. In a school environment, exclusion such as this makes it difficult for the foreign teacher to fit in. Schools are supposed to be places where respect for all kinds of people is taught. Disrespect shown to Zimbabwean teachers both by local teachers and learners do not auger well in a young democracy. The majority (9) of the teachers also had experience of situations where cliques were formed that excluded Zimbabwean teachers. The Zimbabwean teachers (9) also felt non-acceptance by other teachers in the school. Feelings of non-acceptance or rejection affect the emotions of a person and have implications on the psychological well-being of the foreigner.

The Zimbabwean teachers did not only experience xenophobia themselves, they also reported that close friends and acquaintances who are fellow Zimbabweans had similar experiences, some of which are listed below: being forced to leave after working for only 21 days, until that point, nine foreign teachers in almost five years have left the school; attending interviews and not being appointed despite being placed as the highest ranked candidate for the job. The reason for the rejection was also openly

stated - that the school was going to be dominated by foreign educators. One Zimbabwean teacher cited a case where her friend was fired because a local individual with lower qualifications wanted the job. In one case, when a foreign principal wanted to appoint qualified staff to occupy a vacant post, the local teachers strongly objected saying that he was trying to make the school foreigner-dominated. Some cases became very tense; one teacher cited a case in Johannesburg, where a house belonging to a Zimbabwean teacher was burnt because the locals felt that Zimbabweans are taking their jobs.

Two cases were also cited of friends of the Zimbabwean teachers who were working in other provinces in South Africa. The first quote indicates the extent of the challenges faced by Zimbabwean teachers –

my friend in the Eastern Cape was forced to move out of a house he was renting when the community was driving out foreigners; the community did not consider him as a teacher of their children; actually the department saved him by giving him alternative accommodation.

The second case involves paying money in exchange for a job:

My friend was teaching in Pretoria (Braazaville) during the xenophobia attacks in Pretoria. She was given an option to give them money or leave the place. To secure her job she gave them the money they demanded.

The above accounts focus on the treatment of Zimbabwean teachers by the community and the schools. As the examples depict, foreign teachers do not have many options when it comes to demands placed on them by the schools or the community. Very often, they comply with the threats simply because they want to keep their jobs. These quotes also provide evidence of the threat that the locals face in relation to Zimbabwean domination. They are afraid that their schools will become foreigner dominated if they employ more Zimbabwean teachers. What is ironic is that in the scarce skills subjects like maths, there are a limited number of qualified local teachers available. So the Zimbabwean teachers are actually providing great value to local schools, especially in rural areas.

Zimbabwean teachers do not feel safe in South Africa for the following reasons cited by the respondents: the community does not protect them as teachers of their children, easily taking sides against them when there are xenophobic attacks; foreign teachers are always looked down upon despite the services they offer; there is a lack of job security; they do not know the feelings of those around them and therefore find it difficult to feel safe; at any onset of violence, foreigners are targeted.

Zimbabwean teachers were also asked to state some of the observations that they made concerning what they considered xenophobia: sometimes foreign teachers are blackmailed into supporting personal ambitions of school managers on the pretext that if they do not do so, their contracts would not be renewed; some teachers are hostile because they do not accept that they are not performing and are not willing to work harder; some teachers do not accept that foreign teachers are here to help students, they believe they are here to take their jobs. Again, the threat of losing their jobs is a constant concern of foreign teachers. It seems that this is a well-known fact, since the local teachers and school managers exploit this vulnerability in the Zimbabwean teachers.

The interviews concluded with comments and suggestions made by Zimbabwean teachers about xenophobia and what should be done: Zimbabwean teachers are ‘punching balls’ for such matters as running errands for the school principal, whilst local teachers may refuse to do this, Zimbabwean teachers are just instructed to run errands; Zimbabwean teachers invigilate more hours than local teachers and afternoon sessions are a part of their invigilation routine; Zimbabwean teachers are expected to reach higher targets in pass rates in order for their contracts to be renewed; xenophobia limits what one can say or do to develop education; xenophobia should not be practiced because it will impact severely on learner performance in South African schools; xenophobia does not create a safe environment and reduces productivity of foreign teachers due to fear of reprisals if they perform well; xenophobia must not interfere with the school system since this has a negative effect on student performance; Zimbabwean teachers need to be protected for the sake of the students since they teach well and produce good results; Zimbabwean teachers should be treated like all other educators and enjoy the same benefits and privileges; xenophobia is counterproductive and a crime against humanity more especially when an

African attacks another African, it hinders transfer of skills that are lacking in the receiving country.

These insights by Zimbabwean teachers indicate their commitment to education. They provided suggestions for ways in which improvement can be made into the schooling system so that foreign teachers can become a commonplace in South African schools. They can be seen as providing essential services in areas much needed by the education system, for example, they can teach in rural areas where the quality of education is often called into question or they can provide expertise in scarce skills subjects that seriously compromises any education system.

## **Recommendations**

- Teachers from Zimbabwe should be treated with the dignity afforded to a professional anywhere in the world.
- Acceptance of Zimbabwean teachers by local communities should receive more attention especially during the recruitment phase so that all parties understand the crucial role that these teachers play in the education of South Africa's children.
- Local teachers should be more accepting of Zimbabwean teachers and develop a positive attitude towards the commitment that they display to the teaching profession.
- Zimbabwean teachers should be treated fairly in schools where they teach and not be used as 'scapegoats' to reduce the workloads of local teachers.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this article examined the experiences of Zimbabwean teachers in schools of the Capricorn district of Limpopo province. The findings indicated that Zimbabwean teachers do experience xenophobia within the schools where they teach. The greatest threat that they face is job security. They are constantly made to feel that they need to perform better, take on

bigger workloads and do other tasks that local teachers do not want to do in order to secure continued contracts. Local teachers, students and community members use local indigenous languages to exclude foreign teachers. Due to sporadic xenophobic violence and attacks across South Africa, Zimbabwean teachers are on constant alert. Xenophobia has become a more serious threat for Zimbabwean teachers in recent times and South Africans need to change their attitudes towards these teachers who are providing an essential service for local children who are in dire need of the skills they bring into this country.

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

**Sadhana Manik**

## **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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# **Examining Xenophobic Practices amongst University Students – A Case Study from Limpopo Province**

**Rachael Jesika Singh**

## **Abstract**

In recent years, with the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in communities in South Africa, foreign students have encountered more direct xenophobic attacks. This article explores xenophobic practices at a rural university which has a large number of foreign students. These students come from neighbouring African countries in search of quality education. Over the last five to eight years the foreign student enrolment has increased due to political instability in these countries. This article examines the xenophobic experiences of foreign students from a social conflict perspective. Data was gathered using questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The data was both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. The findings indicate that students are faced with a wide range of xenophobic experiences which include: name-calling using local African languages; exclusion from class discussions where a local language is used deliberately; cliques formed that exclude foreigners; difficulty in finding accommodation as they are not easily accepted in residences and; they are implicated whenever violent incidences occur. This article recommends that universities devise ways of protecting the rights of foreign students; practices of tolerance and respect be encouraged and practiced and; more research be conducted in different university environments on foreign students' experiences in South Africa.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, students, university, foreign, culture

## **Introduction**

South Africa is a melting pot of cultures, religions, languages and ethnic groups. This multicultural and multiracial environment has formally existed for over three hundred years. For much of the twentieth century, apartheid laws segregated people along racial lines. One of the legacies of apartheid was racially segregated universities which continue to exist under the name of historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs). Since democracy in 1994, a ‘rainbow nation’ emerged as an example to the world that unity can exist in diversity. Given South Africa’s history, the threat of xenophobia seemed unlikely. However, since 1994, incidents of xenophobia have been sporadically reported. The 2008 xenophobic attacks, which started in Alexandria in Gauteng spread rapidly to other communities resulting in the deaths of 62 foreigners and between 80 000 and 200 000 displaced persons (Igglesden *et al.* 2009; Seedat *et al.* 2010:16). It also shocked the South African government and the world at large, more especially given South Africa’s past and the role that African countries had played in supporting South African freedom fighters that went into exile during the apartheid era. Whilst the xenophobic attacks of 2008 were immediately diffused, the tensions have been simmering since then. In July 2012, xenophobic attacks erupted in the Western Cape and Free State. This time the target was foreign *spaza* shop owners. *The Times* headline, *SA edges closer to xenophobic flare-up* (*The Times* 13 July 2012:1), reported that NGO’s have blamed the attacks on the ANC’s policy document ‘Peace and Stability’ in which the party calls for stringent laws against trading by foreigners.

However, xenophobia cannot be simply explained or reasoned according to political policies alone. It is a much more complex phenomenon that requires careful and deep investigation. In the South African context, high levels of crime and unemployment have been sighted as mitigating factors (Neocosmos 2008). The notion is that African migrants are here to take only and not to give, a belief that is also shared by professionals (Neocosmos 2008:590). Although xenophobia presents itself mainly in socio-economically deprived communities, it is found everywhere – ‘even in institutions of higher learning where one expects a higher level of broadmindedness’ (Mogekwu 2005:10). Here xenophobia may not be expressed in the same manner as in poor communities where outbreaks of physical violence and attacks on businesses occur, but in ‘more subtle forms

of making the non-national feel so unwelcome and despised in an environment that is psychologically hostile' (Mogekwu 2005:10).

Although South Africa is a democratic country, racial divisions amongst South African students is very visible at higher education institutions. The policies of these institutions may contain democratic principles; however, the students' interactions with each other reflect racial divisions. Foreign students however, perceive these divisions differently. Cross and Johnson's (2008:311) study at Wits University revealed, amongst other things, that xenophobia 'has had serious repercussions' and that 'xenophobia is something that makes South Africa a very intimidating society'. Excerpts from one of the foreign students they interviewed indicated how foreign students experience xenophobia: 'They always feel like you are using their money to maybe develop yourself ... They still don't understand the concept of foreigners coming into their country ... Most students who are South African are still very much xenophobic' (Cross & Johnson 2008:311).

In South Africa, all universities enrol foreign students each year. Whilst at some universities, there is a deliberate policy to attract high calibre foreign students from all parts of the world; other universities attract foreign students for various reasons including location in relation to neighbouring countries, economic problems in neighbouring countries and programmes offered by the individual universities. For example, in Zimbabwe over the last five years, due to the economic and political challenges (Manik 2012: 82), lack of jobs, hyper-inflation and human rights violations (Bloch 2010: 235), many students and academic staff have crossed the border into South Africa to seek education and employment. Universities such as University of Limpopo and University of Venda located in the Limpopo province, by virtue of their close location to Zimbabwe, are natural choices for such students.

Unlike the xenophobic experiences in South African communities which are more violent in nature and openly hostile, xenophobia within the higher education context manifests in more subtle ways. The effect, however, is still the same. It leads to the foreign student being made to feel unwelcome and creates a sense of 'not belonging'. Cross and Johnson's (2008:310) findings at Wits University show that 'in real life, group identities on campus still reflect the apartheid legacy'. It has been sometimes been argued that

xenophobia is experienced by migrants in South Africa as a consequence of the isolation caused by apartheid (Crush *et al.* 2008:235). Whilst open acts of xenophobia within communities are widely reported and more ‘visible’, xenophobia amongst students is more subtle and can only be uncovered by establishing the individual experiences of students who are willing to share these experiences. Xenophobia as experienced by foreigners is rooted in constant fear of reprisals. By examining different theories of xenophobia and discussing it from a social conflict perspective, the aim of this article is to examine xenophobia from the perspective of foreign students at one historically black university in South Africa.

## **Theoretical Explanations of Xenophobia**

Three theoretical approaches that contribute to the rise of hatred were identified by Pedahzur and Yishai (1999) in Mogekwu (2005:9). The first which derives from the power theory relates to the socio-economic status of individuals and the perceived threat from foreigners that induce animosity. Often perpetrators of xenophobia state the following as reasons for their attack: ‘They (foreigners) take our jobs’, ‘They take our business’, ‘They rob us of economic opportunities’. The second approach is related to cultural identity where the main issue is the fear of loss of social status and identity. People usually prefer to be surrounded by their own kind (race, religion, ethnic group) rather than exposure to people who are not like them. In many ways, the opposite is true in South African society where people work, live and study in multi-cultural settings. However, despite the openness of South African society, one still finds groupings of people who identify with each other. A typical example at a university is the close friendships that develop between foreigners or students coming from the same country. Another unique South African example is where students are in the minority from a particular race group, they tend to keep company with each other. The third approach called phenomenology attributes xenophobia to general attributes of society. This occurs especially when society experiences crisis, this leads to a crisis of collective identity.

Soyombo (2008) uses Economic Theory, Frustration-Aggression Theory, Conflict Theory and Socio-Biological Theory to explain causes of xenophobia and conditions under which it is likely to occur. Economic

theory (like Power Theory) attributes xenophobia to economic factors like poverty and unemployment where poor and unemployed people are more likely to engage in xenophobic practice compared to rich and employed people. A criticism of this theory is that rich and employed people are also xenophobic. What is crucial to this theory is that in reality, it is the poor and unemployed that are more likely to engage in xenophobia. At HDUs, where most of the poorer students are found, they display similar survival characteristics as that of the surrounding poor communities. Poverty and politics play a role in xenophobia in such an environment.

Frustration-Aggression theory attributes xenophobia to frustrations experienced or imagined by one group, for which another group is held responsible (Soyombe 2008:99). This usually happens when one group experiences problems attaining a goal, they want to take out their frustrations on another vulnerable group (usually a minority), using them as a scapegoat. This is usually when the agent of the frustration is too powerful to confront. A criticism of this theory is that not all situations of frustration produce aggressive behaviour. Linked to Frustration-Aggression theory is Conflict theory where xenophobia is explained in terms of conflict between working and ruling class. In this context, the working class is always dominated by the ruling class and often, out of frustration, they engage in deviant behaviour such as xenophobia. An explanation for xenophobia by the Socio-Biological theory put forward by Waller (2002) in Soyombe (2008:101), and Omoluabi (2008) where ‘all human beings have an innate, evolutionary tendency to seek proximity to familiar faces because what is unfamiliar is probably dangerous and should be avoided’.

Other theories of xenophobia as discussed by Omoluabi (2008) include Psychoanalytic Theory, Avoidance Conditioning Theory, Modelling Theory and Cognitive Theory.

**Psychoanalytic Theory:** Originally Sigmund Freud put forward that the ego defence mechanism used by individuals to protect themselves in high-level conflict situations is phobia. This theory was later expanded to explain how xenophobia originated in children and later in adults (Arieti 1979, in Omoluabi 2008:56).

**Avoidance Conditioning Theory:** Related to consistent pairing of a neutral stimulus with a painful or frightening event resulting in a fear of the stimulus as a result of classical conditioning. This phobia, when related to

interactions with strangers or foreigners, could elicit xenophobic responses (Omoluabi 2008).

Modelling Theory: Postulated by Bandura and Rosenthal in 1995; this theory posits that pain-eliciting situations involving modelled behaviour results in a phobia for the situation (Omoluabi 2008). If people are exposed to such models like the media or individual powerful figures, they are likely to engage in xenophobic behaviour.

Cognitive Theory: This theory is linked to avoidances created by cognitive phobias that people possess (Heinrichs & Hoffman 2002, in Omoluabi 2008). It is usually associated with negative situations and events. This sometimes manifests in xenophobic situations where pre-conceptions and perceptions of strangers exist.

## **Social Conflict Theory**

This section examines how social issues and conflict intersperse especially in relation to xenophobic behaviour. ‘From the conflict perspective, xenophobia can be explained in terms of the conflict between classes and groups of people in a capitalist system’ (Soyombo 2008:101). Often, the working class is dominated by the bourgeoisie. This results in alienation, frustration and marginalisation. The poor, unemployed and isolated working class use xenophobic actions to vent their frustration; the foreigner is often an unsuspecting recipient of such deviant behaviour. Arogundade (2008:169,171) examined Carl Jung’s perspective on xenophobia by looking at the psyche and its effect on the individual. He examined the psyche as ‘a life processing energy that is a product of conflicts between the opposite forces within the individual’ (Arogundade 2008:169). Friendship and enmity are seen as opposing forces. He goes on further to propose that the fear of the foreigner could be an innate way of life of a particular group of people or a nationality. Social psychology, argues Olowu (2008:11), examines individual behaviour; however, ‘all behaviour takes place within a social content’. Social psychologists, in this sense, focus their attention on the effect of family background and environment on behaviour or attitudes of people towards a different race (Olowu 2008).

Henri Tajfel and John Turner posited social identity theory as an explanation to the psychology related to a range of prejudices and biases. This theory is used to understand how prejudices develop by pinpointing

identity and categorization as the main cause of social bias (Alarape 2008:78). Sometimes racial or ethnic groups are blamed for the problems experienced by the majority national group. This is attributed to the social psychology of nations which includes national identity that is the group's sense of belonging (Osuntokun 2008:25).

Social and cultural issues are related to each other and the interplay between them manifests in conflict situations where xenophobic behaviour erupts. Cross and Johnson (2008:304) argue that 'the effectiveness of any diversity initiative will certainly depend on its ability to integrate a theory of cultural recognition with a theory of social justice'. Race is also another factor that contributes to tension in the higher education environment. Not only is the foreigner a threat to local students, but students from different racial groups also poses a threat. However, race is 'sublimated' (Soudien 2008) in the university environment. This is because of the laws against the practice of racism. Whilst racism is more closely monitored by watchdog bodies, xenophobia does not enjoy the same protection. At universities, foreign students or international students (as they are commonly called) are further classified according to race, ethnicity and religious affiliation. According to Soudien (2008:305), 'students from different social backgrounds (race, gender, ethnicity, nationality) experience, and negotiate membership of campus life differently'. Clearly, university students are not exempt from the xenophobic behaviour that has been occurring in South African communities since 1998. As the tensions smoulder and erupt in different areas of the country periodically, these tensions are also felt by foreign students within universities. As already discussed, the tensions in an educational environment are of a more subtle nature. However, the effect created is still one of fear by the foreign student and a feeling of being unwanted.

## **Xenophobia Research**

Xenophobia manifests in different contexts across a spectrum of people and places. Harrison and Peacock's (2010) study in England on the interaction between home and international students found that home students perceive threats to their academic success and group identity from the presence of international students on the campus and in the classroom. In relation to

classroom practice of xenophobia, Osman's (2009) study of immigrant learners in inner city schools of Johannesburg concluded that the level of prejudice and discrimination against immigrant learners is severe and persistent. She cited bio-cultural factors such as shade of the skin as an important determinant of prejudice (Osman 2009:73). This view was earlier identified by Harris (2001:71) as the bio-cultural hypothesis which states that because foreigners are easily identified by their visible differences, this triggers xenophobic behaviour. In the South African context, colour of the skin is classified under race. At university level, race has been identified as the most important determinant of discrimination amongst students (Jansen 2004; Makobela 2001; Woods 2001).

South Africa has been identified as one of the countries which have the harshest anti-immigrant sentiments, together with Namibia and Botswana (Crush & Pendleton SAMP 2004). International comparative studies have also shown SADC countries to be among the most xenophobic in the world (Crush & Pendleton SAMP 2004; Crush & Pendleton 2007; McDonald & Jacobs SAMP 2005). These empirical studies were carried out before the 2008 uprising of violent xenophobic acts in South Africa. Biekpe (2008:5) cautions that 'today it is the foreign Africans on the receiving end of xenophobic attacks ... tomorrow it will be the middle class black South Africans and other racial groupings'. Given these sentiments, the next section looks at the study that was conducted amongst foreign students at a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa.

## **The Study**

This study was conducted at a historically black university which is situated in the Limpopo province. This university is a rural-based university which is situated in almost the centre of the province. The students at this campus are mainly from the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. The dominant home languages spoken by the student are Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda. The language of teaching and learning at the university is English. Foreign students communicate mostly in English. The university has a significant number of foreign students from African countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Cameroon. As Limpopo province borders Zimbabwe, many students from Zimbabwe choose to study in Limpopo.

A sample of fifty (n=50) students was selected from the foreign student component at the university using the snowball sampling technique. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The methods of data collection employed were questionnaires and interviews. The data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data is as follows.

Country of origin	Number of students	Male	Female	Time in SA (years)			
				1	2	3	4+
Botswana	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Kenya	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Nigeria	6	4	2	-	1	1	4
Swaziland	2	2	-	1	1	-	-
Zambia	6	3	3	-	1	2	3
Zimbabwe	34	20	14	7	15	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>				

**Table 1 – Country of origin, gender and time in SA**

## Findings and Discussion

Majority of the students in the study (34) come from Zimbabwe. This represents 68% of the total sample. The most obvious reason for this representation is the closeness between the two countries in relation to distance. The distance to the nearest Zimbabwe border post is 200 kilometres. The university also lies close to the main route that links South Africa to Zimbabwe; this is the N1 national road. The other significant reason for this representation is the recent political instability in Zimbabwe. In the past five to eight years, Zimbabwe has been in political and economic turmoil. The higher education system almost ground to a halt, resulting in masses of students and professionals crossing the border into South Africa seeking asylum and opportunities to work and study. The South African population was unprepared for this mass exodus. Competition on the already strained job markets resulted in resentment by local South Africans and fear in the foreigners. Other significant figures of foreign students in the sample are from Zambia and Nigeria, both at 12%. It is expected that students from

Zambia would study in South Africa as it is a neighbouring country. With respect to the number of Nigerian students, this may be explained as a general trend in South Africa where, in recent years, there has been a migration of Nigerians into the country. The attitude of local people towards these foreigners is that they take away their employment opportunities and introduce elements of crime (drugs) into the country (pers.com). Although both Swaziland and Botswana are neighbouring countries, their populations are relatively small. In the case of Swaziland, the population is also very poor. This could possibly be the reason for the small representation in the sample.

A total of 42% (21 students) from the sample had personal experiences of xenophobia in South Africa. The major reason cited was around issues of language. These issues ranged from lecturers speaking in local languages and excluding foreign students; refusal of services because they could not speak a local language; name calling in public places, being labelled as '*MaKwere-Kwere*'; using local words and comments that are abusive and inhumane; poor service in cafeteria because foreigners do not speak the local language; hostility from staff because of an inability to speak Sepedi; local students deliberately speaking in their mother-tongue to exclude foreign students; people judging students based on their English accent and refusal to communicate with them; local students refusing to speak English when foreign students are present and teasing foreign students when they bring this to their attention; lecturers use of local languages in the class when they are aware that there are foreign students.

Students also experienced discrimination by service-staff of the university. These occurred in areas such as accommodation/residences and security. One student reported that he experienced problems gaining access to postgraduate accommodation: 'I could not secure postgraduate accommodation because I was told that some students were not willing to stay with a Zimbabwean'. Another student said that his residence application 'went missing' and the accommodation officer (who he claims was drunk), criticised international students by saying that 'we are given more attention than other students'. Another concern was that 'in their formulation of policies on residences, there is no consideration for international students ... for allocation of rooms at the beginning of the year'.

Some students' experiences of xenophobia centred on issues of security, both on and off the campus. For foreign students, fear is a part of their daily experiences. One student cited an incident involving the local police who refused to assist a group of four girls after they indicated that they could not speak the local language. Foreign students also experienced discrimination by being called various names and by being teased. Name-calling was almost always associated with the language issue discussed previously. Local students often label foreign students. A name cited by students was '*kwere-kwere*'; this means 'a foreigner' in the local languages. Other studies have also cited the use of name-calling as a xenophobic act (Sookrajh *et al.* 2005:6; Tsai 2006:3). They have also cited '*kwere-kwere*' as the name used. It seems to be a derogatory term used to invoke some sort of marginalisation. Name-calling can be demeaning, leaving the foreign student emotionally vulnerable. Language, in this context, is used to socially exclude foreign students from the 'normal' university experience. It also causes conflict during lectures where local languages are deliberately used to exclude students. This link to social conflict theory shows that students do not necessarily have to be separated into working and upper class to experience conflict; their social circumstances also contribute to xenophobia.

	Name-calling	Class discussions in local language	Local cliques	Accommodation	Non-inclusion in residences	Blamed for violence
Number of Yes responses (n=50)	26	21	22	29	9	10

**Table 2 – Summary of xenophobic experiences**

Table 2 shows a summary of the xenophobic experiences of the sampled students. Of the 50 students surveyed, 52% experienced name-calling in the local African languages. This implies that this practice is fairly widely used. It is important to note here that some of the respondents do not believe that

name calling constitutes xenophobia because in their initial response, only 42% stated that they experienced xenophobia. Whilst name-calling may seem less significant compared to violent acts of xenophobia, according to psycho-social theory, this has psycho-social effects on the foreign student, especially in an environment where intellectual capital is valued. It was also apparent from the foreign students' responses that a significant percentage (42%) was excluded from class discussions because they were conducted in a local language which was not understood by the foreign students. It is important to note that the local language is used deliberately here with the intention of excluding foreign students. Such behaviour alienates the foreign student, creating a sense of 'not belonging'. Through the formation of cliques, 44% of the sampled foreign students felt excluded from class discussions and social interactions. Cliques form when one group is usually trying to gain domination. Cliques are related to power struggles (Seedat *et al.* 2010). The target is usually someone who is in a position of 'weakness' or a minority group, in this case, the foreign student. Students who are in a 'position of weakness' within a social community may also experience power struggles as explained under social conflict theory.

A significant percentage (42%) of the sample also experienced some form of discrimination in relation to allocation of residences. The sentiment expressed by respondents was that postgraduate residence allocations favour local students. This allegation would need to be verified against the records of the university as postgraduate accommodation is usually in high demand. However, the findings indicated that students in residences felt a sense of acceptance in the residences with only 18% reporting feeling 'excluded' from the residences. Also, a small percentage (20%) indicated that they were implicated when incidents of violence occurred in the residences or the surrounding community.

From the interviews conducted, the data is presented and discussed under the following headings: personal xenophobic experiences; other foreign student's xenophobic experiences; safety concerns of foreign students; hostility towards foreign students; suggestions and comments from foreign students on xenophobia.

The following are some of the personal xenophobic experiences of selected students in the study:

- In first year, I wanted to get to know a female classmate so we could form a study group; she told me she can't befriend a kwere-kwere.
- Generally my South African classmates show a great dislike of my presence, which is often characterised by local comments and words which I have come to learn are abusive, inhumane to such an extent I can't write them let alone imagine them.
- Was once told to my face that Zimbabweans should be removed from activities of the international students because they are not international based on their appearance.
- I could not secure postgraduate accommodation because I was told some students were not willing to stay with a Zimbabwean.
- I had a hard time being registered in my first year, together with my colleagues from Zimbabwe and Nigeria, due to the fact that we were not South African citizens.
- The police station officers in town would not help us (myself and 3 other female students) even after we made it clear to them that we do not understand what they are saying.
- On campus, I once got stabbed mostly because I could not relate to 6 Shangani guys (identified by a passer-by).
- I have been told in a lecture hall to go back to my country.
- Reaction of certain people (especially vocally) based on their stereotype beliefs about Nigeria and Nigerians at large.

From the personal experiences cited above, it is clearly evident that foreign students experience mainly non-violent forms of xenophobia. Social conflict, as previously explained, may be subtle; however, the effect is still substantial on the foreign student. In an academic and intellectual environment, these

experiences are almost expected because violent forms of xenophobia are generally not tolerated in such an environment. However, Frustration-Aggression theory, as espoused by Soyombe (2008), is evident in such xenophobic practices. The perpetrators are aware of their environment and its policies, so they express their frustrations on unsuspecting foreign students. The foreign students, on the other hand, may not be physical victims of xenophobia but they bear the emotional and psychological scars of xenophobic encounters.

Sampled students also cited xenophobic experiences of other foreign students that they were aware of.

- She had an encounter with a residence manager when she went to her office consistently to complain about the sockets in her room which were out of order. She (residence manager) reached a point of uttering poignant words that this is not Mugabe's university and she should not bring her Zimbabwean tendencies in her office, but her complaint was justifiable.
- She was denied services at a public hospital simply because she could not speak Sepedi.
- South African colleagues refused to take food from her saying she'll poison them.
- A cousin had visitors from Zimbabwe who were brutally chucked out of her residence on allegations of co-letting regardless of them producing identification with the same surname as her.
- A group of guys had targeted a Zimbabwean student for a long time. One day when he was coming from studying, they attacked him. They did not even steal anything from him.
- Knife attack which happened last semester.
- Mostly asked why we are here in South Africa, don't you have universities?

- She was excluded from attending a conference in Eastern Cape (masters student).
- One guy was denied an affiliation form to join the soccer league by fellow students (South Africans).
- Students have been stereotyped as thieves because they come from Zim.
- Jokes are made about how poor, ugly or remote some of our countries of origin are.
- A student from Nigeria was called a crook and drug-dealer, just for being from Nigeria.
- A friend of mine has been imprisoned on campus twice with charges on both occasions being dropped after threats to take up a legal case.
- One of my houseboys, who was a lecturer, was not given a new contract because he was a foreigner. His job was given to a less qualified student.
- My friends experience resentment, in the residences trash/refuse is often dumped on your door.

From these quotations of xenophobic behaviour that foreign students experience, it is evident that foreign students and their friends experience such incidents on an on-going basis. What is also evident is that their general campus-life experience is marked with such incidents from time to time. It is also apparent that local students and service providers generally target them in relation to poor service delivery. This shows a broader picture of social conflict as it points to how the broader university community engages in xenophobia.

When foreign students were asked about their safety concerns, a very interesting scenario emerged; 42% felt unsafe as a foreign student in South Africa, 54% felt safe as a foreign student in South Africa and 4% felt both

safe and unsafe. Of the students who felt unsafe, their explanations were as follows: they take precautionary measures, especially at night, as they are not sure about South African reactions to foreigners; locals have xenophobic mind-sets; the crime rate is high in the local community; students carry weapons with them; and negative discussions about Zimbabweans by locals.

Conversely, majority of the students felt safe as foreign students in South Africa. They gave the following reasons for feeling safe: locals are left alone because South Africa is their country; South Africans accept them and are eager to learn their languages; people are generally friendly; they get good reception at the international office; living on the university premises is safer than living outside; South Africa has laws that protect foreigners; permission in the form of a legal passport ensures freedom and safety; they have made friends with local students who have taught them the local culture; and they have defence skills in martial arts.

Of the two respondents who felt safe and unsafe, both stated that they felt safe within the campus, however, they felt unsafe outside the campus (On campus yes but out on the streets no because of the high rates of violence in this country). The safety concerns of the foreign students are linked to their experiences and perceptions of xenophobia. Personal attitudes towards safety and the precautions taken also affect their feeling of being safe. Interestingly, many students made specific mention of their feelings of safety within the confines of the campus as opposed to living and interacting with people outside the campus.

Foreign students were also asked to reflect on their experiences of hostility from South African students. Again, their responses were divided with 50% feeling that South African students were hostile towards foreign students and 42% felt that there was no hostility; 8% felt that some are hostile whilst others are not.

The final section contains suggestions and comments from foreign students on xenophobia. This section was included in the interview to allow respondents to raise issues on xenophobia that they felt were pertinent. It also allows for differing views to be considered from the experiences of the students. The following are selected suggestions and comments made by the students: the student population should be encouraged to find out, learn more or travel to other countries so that they get a clear perspective of different people before they stereotype international students; xenophobic attacks are

not only through violent attacks but also through words; there should be campaigns and mass education on highlighting how it is wrong to be hostile to foreigners; xenophobic experiences are mostly prevalent between uneducated and hostile students and staff; university by definition is a place of learning, the university students should co-exist irrespective of race, cultures, gender; locals must accept foreign students, since they are all Africans; South African students do not have knowledge about their foreign counterparts; some students/people should just accept that foreign students come to learn, not to cause trouble; South Africans at large should just accept the fact that the world has changed and even if they do not like to travel and explore other people's culture, the world and its populace is now global and people from other parts of the world will come to their country to experience South Africa; the university should craft policies which protect the foreign student; the staff (non-academic as well) should communicate with students in English as opposed to their native languages; students have to be taught/educated on how to co-live with internationals just like they would with locals from a different tribal group; administrators, housing staff and people in the finance department need particular attention; workshops and seminars should be organised to facilitate training; locals and foreigners should be mixed in the allocation of rooms so that they learn one others' lifestyle; campaigns and workshops of oneness should be hosted; and acceptance should be promoted.

The suggestions and comments by foreign students indicate a maturity in their views on this subject. Their suggestions indicated that they understood the nature of xenophobia as they experienced it. Their broader perspective on the issue also stems from the fact that they have had the experience of living in a foreign country. The review of the literature and associated theories, the experiences of xenophobia by students and the suggestions that they made are consolidated into the next section which makes recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

- The entire university community needs to be educated about the presence and treatment of international students from a xenophobia perspective. This includes staff, students, non-academic departments

(finance, accommodation, security, catering), community service providers (hospitals, clinics, police) and the general community (taxi industry, community leaders, religious leaders).

- Awareness must be created about the university's policies concerning international students and general policies on language, staff conduct, residences and complaints procedures. This awareness will enable better interaction and communication for all students at the university.
- Students must make use of the university hotline to report complaints anonymously. This allows students affected by xenophobic practices to make the university management aware so that measures can be put in place to prevent xenophobia amongst students.
- In order to recruit and retain international students, adequate accommodation should be made available for these students. The greater the number of international students at a university the more exposure the university receives on a global level. This creates positive spin-offs for the university (funding, students, international rating).

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# **The Complexities of Being a Foreign African Student in a South African Tertiary Institution**

**Janet Muthuki**

## **Abstract**

This article is based on a study which focuses on the experiences of foreign African students as they became ‘insinuated’ into new gendered contexts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban South Africa. UKZN is not only global and universal as can be observed by the number of foreign or international students but is also integrated into a given society and region as well as social, political and economic system. As a result of immersing themselves in this context, foreign African students must negotiate this new social and cultural environment. For instance, by immersing themselves in a new South African context, the students by their very status as African foreigners became vulnerable to xenophobia a phenomenon they assert is not common in their home countries. This article begins by giving the background of UKZN and locates it in the broader South African social-political and economic context. Using data elicited by the use of in-depth interviews within a qualitative paradigm this article thereafter examines the varying shades of xenophobia experienced by these students as African foreigners. The article also looks into the gendered nature of xenophobia.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, Afrophobia, Xenophilia, foreign African students

## **Introduction and Background of the Study**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is as a result of the merger between the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville in

January 2004. The South African government higher education restructuring plans led to this merger whose objective was,

To promote access to learning that will expand educational and employment opportunities for the historically disadvantaged and support social transformation and redress of the devastating legacy of apartheid education (Makgoba 2004:3).

It is instructive to highlight that other African countries played an enormous role in the anti-apartheid struggle either by pressurizing international bodies in condemning apartheid and by supporting the military struggle.

The post-apartheid system of education in South Africa had previously been elitist and exclusionary. However, with the change to a democratic government, the number of international students increased steadily. Moja (2002) proposes that a balance be struck between responding to inherited problems of the legacies of apartheid and new demands of internalisation of South African education. International students or foreign students are an integral part of an internationally recognised institution and it is important to recognise the academic, cultural and financial benefits to be gained from these students. UKZN advances that its commitment to internalisation is embedded in its stated intention ‘To be a world class university and an active global player’.

Ramphela (1999) describes the university as global and universal as well as local and regional with the issue of foreign or international students depicting the global nature of university education. This then means that universities are integrated into a given society and region, social, political and economic system. Geographically, in terms of place, the UKZN is embedded in concentric local contexts namely; in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, in KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa and in the global South each of which is a viable geographical context. Durban where the interviews in the study took place is one of the four major urban industrial centres in South Africa and is located in the province of KwaZulu- Natal (KZN). KZN also known as the Zulu Kingdom is one of the most densely populated provinces in South Africa and is home to the isiZulu speaking group of people.

The specificity of Durban as compared to other towns in South Africa is the mix of cultures and races. Alongside Black Africans and the

white population, Durban has a large Indian population, the largest outside of India (Bhana 1990). Despite the close proximity of these different groups however, they are marked by huge disparities in resources and opportunities and are highly racialised. From a socio-political perspective arising from South Africa's national history, the legacy of apartheid is a society that is deeply fragmented and divided. Pattman (2007) in his article, *The significance students attach to race at the University of KwaZulu-Natal* notes that despite the UKZN merger, race continues to be an important marker of student identities and group affiliations.

These time-space relations are a major factor in the constitution of societies according to Gregory (1994). Giddens (1984) advances that people not only make histories but also make geographies. This is useful in transitional societies that are charting different courses from processes such as colonisation and apartheid in the case of South Africa. In these regions, the history and geography of the place are essential to understanding political, social and economic changes occurring there. It is against this backdrop therefore that foreign students of African origin immersed themselves in a new different South African context.

The term foreign has however increasingly acquired negative connotations in the South African context. The issue of foreignness has been a source of much tension between a group of largely black South African students and foreign students of African origin. South African students feel deprived and invoke their South African citizenship in the wake of competition from foreign students for local resources in order to make ends meet. The situation is further problematised by the promotion of equity in terms of race to which the South African government has committed itself which is seen as open to abuse by foreign students of African origin who stand to gain from its undifferentiated use. Of great significance is the reality that these students are better equipped since they were spared the Bantu education and can therefore compete on merit for undergraduate, postgraduate and staff positions (see Ramphela 1999). The frustration of the South Africans who were excluded from the formal South African educational system under the apartheid system when they perceive a group of foreign nationals as a threat with regards to the opportunities they fought for, is understandable.

Foreign students of African origin are however not a homogenous

group since they come from different countries such as those in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. Language barriers especially for those from Francophone Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC hereafter), ensure that they do not get the same job opportunities as those from Anglophone Africa. Further, despite the opportunity structures in place such as the UKZN Graduate scholarship offering fee remission for postgraduate students and the opportunity to be tutor or contract lecturer, foreign students also felt constrained as foreign nationals in terms of accessing other opportunities which were available to local students. The foreign African students were keenly aware that they were foreign nationals due to lack of access to other scholarships and lower remuneration rates at their work places. The negotiation of being of a foreign African national in a South African tertiary institution was further problematized by the phenomenon of xenophobia<sup>1</sup>. Xenophobia is typically defined as the ‘dislike’, ‘hatred or fear of foreigners’ (Harris 2002: 169). Importantly, however, as Harris (2002: 170) correctly emphasises, xenophobia is ‘not just an attitude as the standard definition of the phenomenon implies, it is also an action.

The findings of this article are based on a qualitative study which sought to examine the discursive and social practices through which the foreign students of African origin come to perceive South African gender norms and how these new gender norms either challenged or supported their own gender norms. In conducting in-depth interviews over a period of one year from March 2008 to March 2009, I used open-ended questions to enable the students to reflect on and give detailed accounts and perceptions of the myriad contradictions and complexities of their experiences of renegotiating the new geopolitical and social context in South Africa. The study sample comprised of twenty two foreign African students (both men and women) hailing from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda,

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophobia is derived from the Greek words *xenos* (foreign) and *phobos* (fear) and can be defined as the attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perceptions that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity (UNHCR, International Labour Organisation and International Organisation for Migration, 2001).

Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Liberia.

The study employed social identity theory to examine the ways in which foreign African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal constructed and modified their social identities in relation to the identities of other groups in the South African context. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan 2002). This can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity, which refers to self-knowledge that derives from the individual's unique attributes. An important aspect of this theory is that it recognises that different social groups vary in terms of the power and status they have in society. Social identities are always constructed and modified in relation to the identities of other groups: mainstream and subordinate, proximal and spatially distant (see Dolby & Cornbleth 2001). Social identities are in motion in multiple ways, not only in relation to other groups and their enactment of selves but also in relation to the dynamics of geographic place. Social identity theory enabled me to examine how foreign students of African origin negotiated the complex geopolitical and social context in South Africa.

### **Varying Shades of Perceived Xenophobia**

With the advent of democracy, the legacies of the apartheid system combined with new forms of discrimination, such as xenophobia toward African refugees and immigrants, have played out through the country's period of political transition. A national survey on South African attitudes on immigration in 1997 revealed that South Africans were more hostile to immigration than citizens of any other country for which comparable data was available. Foreign African nationals are perceived by local South Africans as an economic threat and as people who have come to take their employment opportunities (Crush 2008).

At the time of conducting this research, xenophobia had reached unprecedented proportions in South Africa with violent attacks against foreign African nationals in May 2008 in Gauteng Province. Xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals were also reported in the Western Cape Province immediately after the FIFA 2010 World Cup. Xenophobic prejudice is manifested in various ways and is sometimes subtle and

sometimes obvious. Given the background of hostilities by local South Africans towards other African nationals, any form of discrimination against these foreign African nationals is perceived as being tinged with xenophobia.

According to the foreign African students, one of the ways in which they experienced xenophobia was when local students and sometimes staff members would speak to them in local languages such as isiZulu. The fact that they did not speak isiZulu created a gap between them and the black South African students and they had to contend with being called names such as *Makwerekwere*<sup>2</sup>.

Even whilst carrying out their work duties foreign African students contended with being misunderstood. Norah from Cameroon gave an example of how a misunderstanding ensued between her and a student in a tutorial while they were discussing factors affecting migration to South Africa. According to Norah the misunderstanding may have occurred on the basis that she was a foreign national and seemed to be insinuating that South Africans had HIV/AIDS. The discussion was centered on factors leading to migration in South Africa and how the broad based pyramid<sup>3</sup> was increasing. When HIV/ AIDS emerged as a factor that could lead to the decrease of the pyramid, the student interpreted this to mean that Norah as a foreign national was insinuating that it was only South Africans who had HIV/AIDS. Norah on her part expressed that the student may have been of the opinion that it was foreign nationals who were responsible for the transmission of HIV/AIDS to South Africans. This situation is indicative of the tensions existing between foreign African students and local South African students due to the perceived hostilities of local black South Africans towards foreign African nationals.

Another area of contention was in the documentary requirements at the level of admission and registration. While foreign students of African

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<sup>2</sup> The word *Kwerekwere* is a derogatory word denoting one who cannot speak or understand the speaker's language.

<sup>3</sup> A population pyramid with a broad base suggests a population with a relatively high birth- rate or a high volume of migration. A decrease in the pyramid may be occasioned by fluctuations in the number of births or volumes of migration or a rise in the number of deaths as a result of war or epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.

origin acknowledged that they did not expect to get the same treatment as local students since they were not South African citizens, they felt that the requirements expected of them were very stringent. These requirements were in various forms such as the payment of the International student levy for foreign students of African origin alongside students from Europe and America who students felt were more financially endowed.

The distinction between foreign African students and local South African students also appeared to have taken a new dimension at the UKZN Human Resources department as is amplified in the following excerpt by Koffie from the DRC:

To me I understand I'm a foreign student and I don't expect to be treated as a local. What makes me now look at it is when South Africans own the African identity. They now differentiate between foreign and African. It is obvious I'm a foreign national. The only problem that I have with it is when the African identity is given to a South African and you call me foreign because I'm not South African. On my side I don't know what the idea behind it is and when you come give me another identity I have a problem with that (Koffie, DRC).

Koffie was referring to the race section in the UKZN remuneration forms from the Human resources department where a distinction was made between 'foreigner' and 'African' in the race section. While this may not have presented a problem for foreign students from outside Africa, it was problematic for foreign African students. The term 'foreigner' in this case is used as a distinct category and serves to exclude the foreign students of African origin from identifying themselves as African and confines the African identity to 'black' South Africans. This presents a paradox in the sense that on the one hand there is an assertion by South Africans of Africanness in order to differentiate the new identity from the erstwhile white South African identity. On the other hand, a sense of South African exceptionalism promotes nationalist chauvinistic tendencies, ostensibly targeting foreigner Africans (see Thakur 2011) as explained in a subsequent section.

At the State level, there has been increasing stringent immigration controls from the department of Home Affairs in terms of the following: study permits, visa acquisition and renewal and repatriation requirements.

These requirements are understandable but the only challenge is that visa renewals frequently happen at the end of the year when students are in the last stages of writing their examinations or their theses in a bid to meet the submission deadlines. Koffie from the DRC, decried the bureaucratic process involved in acquiring a study permit and expressed that the International Students Office should be more pro-active in assisting foreign students to renew their study permits

I think in South Africa, it is not the policies that have much of a problem though there needs to be some changes. I would say mostly it is the attitude of the personnel. For example you can go to home Affairs and spend the whole day waiting for visa renewal. You can even be told to come back on another day. I think the processes need to be made easier. I think the international student's office needs to have foreigners in their staff because it is only a foreigner who will understand foreign students. The staff members there are South Africans and you can even ask them which counter you go to renew your visa and they would not know (Koffie, DRC).

Some of these processes are administrative on the part of South African institutions to ensure immigration control and ensure that local South Africans are not denied opportunities due to them as citizens. These stringent processes and requirements are however perceived as being punitive and as governed by xenophobia by foreign African students.

### **Sentiments on Xenophobia and the Philosophy of Ubuntu**

In terms of social interactions, most students expressed that black South Africans were largely hostile to their presence which was contrary to the experience in their home countries where people were open and hospitable to foreign nationals. This can be observed from the following data excerpts:

As Malawians we are very friendly to foreigners. It was instilled in us by the former president Levi Mwanawasa that when a foreigner comes we must ask where they are from, where they want to go,

what can we do for you and all that. That is why Malawi is called the warm heart of Africa because it is really warm (Purity from Malawi).

It is here that they treat foreigners differently. At home we welcome foreigners and treat them very well. It is so strange here that people treat foreigners differently and these are people who come once in a while and so you should treat them in a way that they come more often. South Africans and especially the blacks make us not want to stay here (Norah from Cameroon).

The hostility of South Africans towards foreign African nationals was baffling to many of the foreign African students who found it contrary to the *ubuntu* philosophy which South Africans purported to embrace. In the words of the South African Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu a person with *ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such a person is open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole (Panse 2006).

The foreign African students further felt that South Africans exhibited a sense of superiority towards them. Maina from Kenya and Koffie from the DRC expounded on this in the following manner:

Being a foreigner is disadvantageous because there is a very negative perception about foreigners especially amongst the black locals. There is this perception of superiority here where South Africans keep asking you, ‘You come from Africa?’ I think that is quite negative. Most of them are very negative and that is why I say that this is a hostile environment (Maina from Kenya).

South Africans – I don’t know whether it’s because of being exposed or it’s their type of society that makes them consider that they are no longer Africans. As much as they keep on saying *Ubuntu*- they don’t have it (Koffie from the DRC).

The sentiments from the above excerpts concur with Crush (2008), who

advances that the rise in xenophobia in the 1990's cannot be isolated from the country's apartheid past of racial and class segregation and attitudes of uniqueness and superiority towards the rest of Africa. Even though spatially located in Africa, the Apartheid regime had consciously situated itself ideologically, temporally and dispositionally in the western, white world. Fanon (1990) identifies xenophobia as a form of fragile sense of national consciousness by the national bourgeoisie to mimic its western counterpart.

## Xenophobia or Afrophobia?

The use of the term xenophobia may imply that all foreigners in South Africa are likely to be mistreated. However in the South African context, xenophobia is not directed at just anyone. It is largely directed at people of colour. This means that the mistreatment is more directed to their being black rather than being foreign. Gqola (2008) in fact argues that the predominant nature of the violence directed against foreigners in South Africa in May 2008 was more than simply a case of xenophobia. It was also negrophobic in character (Gqola 2008; Fanon 1990). Fanon (1990) describes this kind of violence as often directed at the self or at the self as reflected in the 'Other'. In explaining Afrophobia, Gordon (1997) has explained that in black gang wars, black people re-enact white violence against each other as a result of internalized self-hatred due to issues of hunger, hopelessness, and poverty. While poverty triggers violence, mental colonisation has been said to be at the heart of Afrophobia.

Olomide and Kabilia from the DRC in concurrence with this position highlighted that it was not just that South Africans were hostile to foreign Africans but that it was not unusual for Africans to be hostile to one another. Olomide and Kabilia reflected on their experiences back home in the DRC and expressed that the principles of *ubuntu* were no longer practiced by Africans and the mention of *ubuntu* was just a matter of rhetoric. Olomide from the DRC said that he was undaunted by xenophobia since he was still at home in Africa and that xenophobia in South Africa was not much different from the situation back home in the DRC.

The DRC has experienced war due to a number of complex reasons including conflicts over basic resources such as water, access and control over rich minerals and other resources as well as various political agendas.

The five year war which involved the armies of five other countries, officially ended in 2003 and democratic elections were held in 2006. However, the fighting involving a plethora of armed groups continues, especially in the east of this mineral-rich country. The fighting in North Kivu, eastern DRC, has forced tens of thousands of refugees to flee their homes. Olomide who sees himself as more of an African than a Congolese takes the issue of African hostility against fellow Africans as a phenomenon that goes beyond the confines of South Africa. Kabila also from the DRC took it a step further by advancing the following:

When I consider the war in the DRC and the xenophobia in South Africa, I do not think that as Africans we love each other, the philosophy of *ubuntu* is a lie. People do not practice it they just speak about it (Kabila, DRC).

Clearly, violent attacks against fellow Africans has to do with unequal distribution of resources. While the anger of the disenfranchised is legitimate it needs to be directed to the oppressive government and the wealthy elite. Afrophobia can then only be dealt with by ending hunger, homelessness and redistribution of wealth.

## **The Gender Dimension of Xenophobia**

Migrants are, by their very status as foreigners vulnerable to xenophobia and in the case of the South African context Afrophobia. Violence against foreign nationals and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but are normalised in ways in which the South African society interacts with minority and vulnerable groups. Foreign women in South Africa therefore face a double jeopardy since they are at the intersection of these two groups that are so vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence. The women students interviewed expressed their vulnerability in South Africa in that they could be more easily taken advantage of and even be raped as compared to their male counterparts. Sexual violence is well documented in South Africa as a means to control and punish women. While it may be argued that this is applicable to all women in South Africa, in a country where sexual violence is pervasive in everyday life, it is difficult

to distinguish between rapes motivated by xenophobic attitudes from those perpetrated because the general atmosphere of violence and lawlessness has allowed for it. In both cases, foreign African women students face a form of violence because of their gender.

Men's experiences of xenophobia however highlighted different gender dynamics. Men expressed that they experienced xenophobia not only because they were perceived as coming to take away opportunities from the South Africans but also because they were taking the South African women as well. This is illustrated by the excerpts below:

The South Africans are xenophobic especially to men. I think they (foreign men) are better to women. There tends to be this notion amongst ladies that they like foreign guys. Maybe they tend to be inquisitive and they tend to think that we are much better than South African guys in terms of handling situations such as treating them better in relationships (Zebedee, Zimbabwe).

The men are ... I have heard from others, they tend not to be too open to foreigners. I have heard that South African women like going out with foreign men because they are more kind and they know how to treat a woman (James, Cameroon).

From the excerpts, it appears that it is South African men who were xenophobic towards foreign African men because of the perception that these men treated women better than South African men. While this generated hostility from African men in South Africa and has been cited as a factor in contributing to their xenophobic attitude, foreign men asserted that they treated women with greater respect than Zulu men. They constructed Zulu men as deeply patriarchal and disrespectful of women. It is interesting to note that foreign African men described Zulu men as deeply patriarchal while they were also from patriarchal backgrounds and were unwilling to give up the patriarchal privilege that accorded power and prestige to men. Constructing themselves as less patriarchal could have been a way of reasserting their perceived superiority over Zulu men.

South African men were portrayed as less progressive than the South African women who were the ones supporting the men and the families.

Apartheid policies in many forms directly impacted on family cohesion and reinforced the destructive influences that urbanisation and industrialisation had on the family. Thus, one consequence of the legacy of apartheid is the high number of single parent families, resulting largely from pregnancy outside marriage and from divorce. As a large proportion of the nation's children grow up in female-headed households with little financial support, the African family in South Africa has continued to suffer considerably greater disintegration than families have in the rest of the continent (Preston-White 1993).

The notion that South African women are more attracted to foreign African men exemplifies an intriguing facet of South African women by amplifying the little studied phenomena of xenophilia. Xenophilia is the love for the foreign national that is also part and parcel of the encounter between foreign Africans and locals (see Sichone 2008). Sichone(2008) further shows that friendships and marriages between foreign men and South African serve to sustain male migrants and promote re-Africanisation, as some of the migrants teach their South African partners to cook dishes from central and West Africa. South African women are said to be attracted to foreign African men based on the perception that they treated women better and were less prone to violence. This attraction may also be due to the fact that they were foreign, new, spoke a strange language and they expressed their love in new ways. This then served to elevate the foreign African men in the eyes of South African women while they were vilified in the eyes of African men from South Africa.

## **Conclusions**

This article has provided a nuanced analysis of the complexities experienced by foreign African students at UKZN as a result of immersing themselves in a new context in South Africa. Various shades of xenophobia as perceived by the students were explored alongside the specificity of xenophobia in the South African context. Sevenzo (2010) has advanced that xenophobia in South Africa has emerged potently in form of 'Afro-phobia'. According to Thakur (2011), the xenophobic discourse has the same notions about 'Black Africa' as its predecessor regime under Apartheid propagated and hence the hatred for the African 'other'. While focus continues to be directed at South

Africans' hostility towards foreigners, this study has shown how African foreigners on the other hand perceive South Africans and especially the Zulus in a negative light and in many ways seek to show their superiority over them. This struggle for superiority is encapsulated by the insights of two students from the conflict ridden DRC who now question whether the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is a reality in Africa. Of great significance was that it was the foreign African men who sought to establish dominance over the Zulu men and women in general.

The article has further examined the intersectionality of xenophobia by highlighting the double jeopardy faced by foreign African women in the form of violence as foreign nationals and violence as women. On the part of the men the study revealed that while they faced hostility from South African men there were opportunities of hospitality from South African women in the form of relationships and marriage under the little mentioned phenomenon of xenophilia. Clearly, the reaction towards African nationals by South Africans is nuanced and complex. Xenophobia in the South African context is diverse and as advanced by Thakur (2011) its understanding calls for an intervention that aims to understand the difficulties experienced particularly by the marginalised in South African society, not only through the present, but also through the past. This understanding in turn needs to be examined in terms of how it influences South Africans' responses to African foreigners and the rights of the latter in South Africa.

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# ***'They call us Makwerekweres'* – Foreign Learners Speak out against Xenophobia**

**Nirmala Gopal**

## **Abstract**

While a number of studies on xenophobia have been conducted in South Africa, very little has been done to establish the effects of xenophobia on foreigners in schools. To help remedy the dearth of studies in this area, this article aimed to provide emic perspective on xenophobia from a select sample of Grade 12 foreign learners. Through the use of interviews, the study explored how these learners experience their host country, South Africa, five years after the widely publicized xenophobic violence. Thematic analysis of responses indicated, profoundly, learners' thoughts and feelings on xenophobia. Participants described their emotional and physical exposure to various forms of xenophobia perpetrated either at the level of the community and/or the school. Participants felt that South Africans who do not take responsibility for their behavior shift blame to foreigners, hence fuelling xenophobia. Although learners perceive South Africa as a beautiful country with much to offer, they prefer migrating to countries with better opportunities. This research provided a baseline for further research into this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Learners, Xenophobia, Perceptions

## **Introduction**

Views on xenophobia appear divided with some scholars arguing that

xenophobia is rooted in history, others that modernization intensifies the unevenness of the global economy. Nyamnjoh (2006) blames xenophobia on an inconsistent set of global processes, marked with closures in the borderless flows and boundless opportunities accentuated by free movement of capital, creating economic disparities between countries and regions. The ‘human development outcomes of xenophobia for both migrant and host populations are negative, pernicious, and damaging’. Attacks on non-nationals signify a threat to social order and justice which typifies lawlessness. When social conflict ensues, human rights are violated in the process as discrimination and ill-treatment of foreigners becomes socially acceptable leading to anarchism as was the case in the 2008 South African xenophobic attacks which made international headlines. This was a time when black foreigners living in informal settlements, particularly, were criminally attacked by local groups of Black Africans who accused foreigners of displacing them economically. This is a relevant example of how Xenophobia exacerbates the vulnerability of migrant groups, exposing them to regular harassment, intimidation, and abuse by citizens, employers, and law enforcement agencies. Crush (2000) argues that South Africans’ negative attitudes towards non-nationals are largely oriented towards other Africans, although there are increasing reports of discrimination towards new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent.

## **Looking at ‘Xenophobia’ Internationally and Nationally**

Mayfield (2010) comments on the xenophobia in Europe perpetrated through the xenophobic right. According to Mayfield the chief reason behind the rise of the xenophobic right in the European Union (EU) is *not* the economic alternatives it offers, but rather its hostility towards unrestricted immigration from Africa, Asia, and the Balkans. Xenophobic parties in Europe range from simply wanting tighter border controls, to calling for a ‘whites-only’ immigration policy, to demanding the wholesale deportation of minorities.

In the EU although xenophobia is focused on Muslim immigrants, especially Moroccans, Indonesians, Arabs, Somalis, Afghans, and Pakistanis, as well as African blacks it is often equally harsh against other European or ‘white’ immigrants, particularly Albanians, Bosnians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Poles, Balts, Romanians, and Russians. In Italy, the

center-right *Lega Nord* is more xenophobic towards Southern Italians than towards Muslims (Mayfield 2010).

Foreign nationals, including learners, residing in South Africa are protected in the South African constitution and by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) from xenophobic violence. Even the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) has pointed out in its Braamfontein Statement that '*No one, whether in this country legally or not, can be deprived of his or her basic or fundamental rights and cannot be treated as less than human further reinforces protection of foreign learners*'. The South African Constitution seeks to construct a society where 'human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms' are abiding values. The implication of this is clear; xenophobic attitudes and practices violate the spirit and letter of the South African Constitution. Despite national and international legal protection for non-nationals, xenophobic attacks or xenophobia has a long history in South Africa. Reitzes (in Richards 2009) in examining the history of South Africa's immigration policy suggests that the policy is rooted in South Africa's racialised past and the political economy of the country. She highlights the racially discriminatory nature of South Africa's immigration policy, from as far back as 1913 through to the passing of the country's Immigration Act in 2002. She argues that South Africa's immigration policy has contributed towards conceptions of South African national identity and the construction of 'others', comprising migrants who are non-South African, indirectly perpetuating racial exclusionary practices and adding fuel to xenophobic sentiments and violence against foreign nationals. Misago (in Richards 2009) notes that xenophobic and anti-'outsider' violence have been a long-standing and increasing feature in post-apartheid South Africa. Negative attitudes to foreign nationals have also emerged through surveys. For example, in 1997 a survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) concluded that 25% of South Africans wanted a total prohibition of migration or immigration and 22% wanted the South African government to return all foreigners presently living in South Africa to their own countries. 45% of the sample called for strict limits to be placed on migrants and immigrants and 17% wanted migration policy tied to the availability of jobs. More generally other studies (Sooklal, Gopal & Maharaj 2005; Osman 2009) have shown that xenophobia is a global problem that has been experienced in

both industrialised and developing countries and impacts adults and learners alike.

As early as 1995, a report by the Southern African Bishops' Conference concluded that 'There is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country .... One of the main problems is that a variety of people have been lumped together under the title of 'illegal immigrants' and the whole situation of demonizing immigrants are feeding the xenophobia phenomenon.' In late 2000 there was a spate of xenophobic murders in Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu, followed by attacks in Milnerton and Bellville South, and a total of 12 such murders were reported for 2000. In 2001 nine Angolans were murdered in Cape Town, including two Angolan brothers who were burned to death in a shack in Langa. Later in the year, locals in Du Noon, Western Cape, drove foreigners out of the settlement; and a mob of locals violently chased Zimbabweans from Zandspruit informal settlement, Gauteng, before torching their homes and businesses, with more than 800 Zimbabweans fleeing their homes – 112 shacks were gutted and 126 dwellings looted. In January 2002, police backed by soldiers descended on Milnerton, Western Cape, where violent clashes between locals and Angolan refugees left three Angolans and a South African dead, and a house gutted by fire.

Undergirded by a background that has stimulated the discourse on xenophobia this article emphasizes specifically how a group of Durban secondary school learners perceive themselves as victims of xenophobia. The aim of this study is not to understand individual constructions of xenophobia but instead to probe the discursive views through which participants give meaning to xenophobia.

Given that xenophobic attitudes are strongly entrenched in South African society it is not surprising that on 11 May 2008, South Africa was shaken by the outbreak of a wave of violence characterized by an intensity and fierceness previously unknown in this young democracy and instead reminiscent of apartheid bloodshed. The most severely affected groups were Africans from neighbouring states, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but migrants from more distant countries, such as Nigeria and Somalia, as well as a few South Africans were also victims of these attacks. Almost 35,000 people had fled their homes and camped out in temporary shelters, churches and police stations. Thousands more returned to their countries of origin.

Despite this the South African government through their Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula maintained that '*the violent xenophobic attacks on foreigners have not been so widespread to constitute a 'crisis'.*'

## **Xenophobic Constructions**

For Bekker, Eigelaar-Meets, Eva, and Poole (2008) xenophobia means '*the hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers*'. For Kollapen (1999) xenophobia is an inextricable link of violence and physical abuse. He further argues that 'xenophobia' as a term must be reframed to incorporate *practice*. It is not just an attitude: it is an activity. It is not just a dislike or fear of foreigners: it is a violent practice that results in bodily harm and damage. More particularly, the violent practice that comprises xenophobia must be further refined to include its specific target, because, in South Africa, not all foreigners are uniformly victimized. Rather, black foreigners, particularly those from Africa, comprise the majority of victims. It is also important to explore why 'the unknown' represented by (largely Black) foreigners should necessarily invite repugnance, fear or aggression. Xenophobia manifests itself in various forms and its roots are equally varied (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh & Singh 2005).

## **Xenophobia and Schooling**

Schools exist primarily to ensure that effective learning takes place, so that children are socially and intellectually prepared to become responsible adults who actively participate in, and make a positive contribution to, society and the economy (Burton 2008). If learners are exposed to xenophobic violence then consistent with expectations, children who have been exposed to violence have been found to be more likely to manifest a variety of psychiatric problems including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Shields *et al.* 2008; Seedat *et al.* 2004; Ward *et al.* 2001; Ensink *et al.* 1997), with exposure to violence having been found to impact negatively on children's academic performance (Reddy *et al.* 2010; Boqwana 2009; Human Rights Watch 2001 quoted in Mkhize, Gopal & Collings 2012). Such undesirable outcomes have not, however, been found to be inevitable.

Exposure to violence or violent threats could exert greater pressure on the academic performance of foreign learners making it even more challenging for them to succeed in a country that is already foreign to them and where they may feel unwanted.

While we have insufficient assessment of the impact of xenophobia on foreign learners in South Africa, Dryden-Peterson (2010) argues that xenophobia not only furthers the social exclusion of non-nationals but also increased their economic barriers by reducing their ability to pursue livelihood activities in their host-country. Horst (2006) and Jacobsen (2005) supported this, agreeing that the limited livelihood opportunities available to non-national migrants due to their legal status result in increased poverty levels and a greater inability to cover education expenses. While some information on how foreign national learners are affected by the South African schooling system is available (Sookraj, Gopal and Maharaj 2005; Osman 2009) literature searches have exposed the dearth of literature and studies that specifically show any nexus between fear, intimidation and exposure to violence and academic performance.

## **Method**

This article is concerned specifically with the meanings of xenophobia as understood by a group of secondary school learners in the contemporary period where xenophobia remains an issue for both South Africans and foreign nationals either as perpetrators or victims. The primary aim of this study is not to understand individual constructions of xenophobia but instead probe the discursive views through which participants give meaning to xenophobia. This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 24 respondents in KwaZulu-Natal who were selected through snowball sampling across the greater Durban area. There were 12 males aged between 18 and 20, and twelve females aged between 18 and 20 who participated in the interviews (see Appendix One for a demographic profile of interviewees). Interviews were conducted at a mutually arranged venue and each interview lasted on average an hour. This study is about the individual respondents in the first instance, but is an exploration of their discursive positioning in relation to Xenophobia. Questions were facilitated by a semi-structured interview schedule which focused on issues regarding their

understanding of Xenophobia, and their recollection of the 2008 xenophobic violence that plagued South Africa. Interviews took a conversational form with individuals sharing information with great enthusiasm. Utilising a working model of thematic analysis, data were analysed through a step-by-step procedure which began by searching through the transcripts of the interviews for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006 quoted in Gopal 2013). In the second part of the analysis, codes were produced to highlight emerging patterns. Each interview was coded, and these codes were matched across the 24 interviews. A thematic map was then produced where themes (discussed in the analysis section) were further refined in relation to the data from all respondents. It is critical to note that while the majority of research on xenophobia in South Africa has focussed on the nature, extent and description of the phenomenon, this study concentrates on the dominant themes generated from the interviews, which are centred on the perceptions of learners on xenophobia. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and informed that information provided would be treated with extreme confidentiality. The only identifying data obtained from participants were age, grade, and ethnicity. Written informed consent was obtained from participants who were 18-years of age or older, with written parental consent and participant assent being obtained from younger participants. Since participation in the study was dependent on availability and willingness, the study may be limited in terms of the views of the respondents. It is also limited in that the results are not generalizable owing to the sample size. Another limitation is that the snowball sampling technique excluded participants who may have had experiences not captured in this study.

### **‘Broad’ Learner Constructions of Xenophobia**

In describing how they understood xenophobia S1 and S20 maintained ‘*it is trouble between unsatisfied people*’. According to S2 ‘*It is South African people looting foreigners for easy things*’ and for S4 ‘*It is the inhumane act of dehumanizing immigrants because of issues surrounding job opportunities and skills shortage that any country might be going through. Then start*

*attacking foreign nationals for occupying these positions'. S5 and S6 respectively asserted, 'It is when people take things from us that doesn't belong to them' and 'I think it is the fighting between people of South Africa and people that are of other countries'. For S9 'Xenophobia is an attack on us foreigners by South Africans who are not happy with us foreigners being successful,' and for S13 –'It is when people without facts start a war against people they believe invaded their space'. S14 maintained, 'It is an attack on foreign nationals' while S15 noted that 'It is an attack of unhappy South Africans against people not born in their country'. S16 and S17 shared similar views such as -'It is war on refugees by unhappy South African people'.*

S18, S19 and S23 added that xenophobia '*is when South African people take the law into their own hands and steal and kill foreigners' and or 'attack defenceless foreigners'*'. Some respondents for example S21 and S22 expressed their understanding of xenophobia as a somewhat extreme construction such as, '*Well xenophobia is the killing of foreigners by South Africans' and 'It's when people don't understand why they are not prosperous and blame foreigners for stealing from them'*'.

Responses suggest that foreign learners are aware of what constitutes xenophobia although some articulate xenophobia in elementary language.

## **Recollections of 2008 Xenophobic Attacks**

Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh, and Singh (2005) argue that South Africa's long history of racial politics and stratification has had an important, if difficult to quantify, effect on how citizens perceive non-nationals. Foreign nationals living in South Africa have been exposed to discriminatory behavior not just by South African citizens but also by state departments such as the Department of Home Affairs and the South African Police Services (SAPS). The SAPS together with criminals have a history of exploiting foreigners' vulnerabilities. Consequently, foreign nationals are possibly less likely than South Africans to feel secure in public spaces, during the day or in the evenings. Leggett's (2003) findings from a study conducted in Johannesburg were that 81% of the respondents felt unsafe compared to 38% of South Africans). A study conducted by Crush and Williams (2003) demonstrate similar percentages across the country. These feelings of being unsafe seem

justified. The Wits University survey in Johannesburg, for example, showed that 72% of migrants mentioned that either they or someone they lived with had been a victim of crime in the country, compared with 56% of South Africans.

As indicated above, the 2008 attacks were preceded by a long history. However, Misago (2009) comments that the May 2008 attacks were extraordinary in their ferocity, intensity, rapid geographic space and the harm they caused. S1 recalls '*people burning and stealing from foreigners without a reason*' and a time that '*people was chasing and killing people from other countries*'. S4 re-collects '*hearing from my friends that we were under attack by the South Africans. Reason being we were taking their jobs and women. I was advised to avoid being outside after dark hours at night. I later saw on TV what was going on and it was very scary to imagine that all foreign nationals were under attack*'.

S5 recalled, '*South African people beat us and stole from us with no reason*'. Similarly S9 remembers '*being in Cape Town at the time and seeing the news of how foreigners were being attacked and then I got a call from my brother in Johannesburg telling me that another brother of ours was injured in the attack and I thought to myself, Hell no, I didn't come here to South Africa to die, but to have a better life*'. S6 recalled '*praying very hard that the attacks don't affect me and my family by locking us up and sending us back to our country*'.

For S10 the 2008 xenophobic attacks forged greater solidarity among foreign national learners, '*During that time I remember how much closer foreigner learners had to stand together and how my fellow brothers and sisters could not even sleep*'. S11 remembered that '*my family was panicking because they thought we will be killed by South African people*', S12 recalled '*During the attacks people were saying that all foreigners must go back home and black South Africans were killing foreigners*'. S13 remembers specifically that she was '*on my way to school when my friends said I must go back home because South African people were beating and killing foreigners and I remember being very scared*'.

As indicated above the May 2008 attacks were unmatched by previous forms of xenophobic attacks or episodes. When respondents were asked for the causes of the attacks, not surprisingly one respondent S17 claimed '*All I remember was people being killed and robbed by South*

*African people for no reason and during that time I was scared to go to school and even wear my foreign clothes, because I did not want to be easily recognized. It was the scariest moment in my life,*’ while S15 mentioned, ‘*All I knew is that South African black people attacked foreigners blaming foreigners for their poverty*’. Some respondents recollected suggestions to try and keep safe as expressed by S16 who remembers ‘*hiding myself under the wardrobe when Black South African people came knocking at my door, because they would beat us or kills us as we were not South Africans*’ and by S18 who recalls, ‘*being told by my parents to be extra cautious when I was going to school because the South African people were attacking foreigners and during that time it felt like I was a prisoner*’. Respondents S21 and S23 recalled ‘*seeing horrible images on ETV of foreigners being killed*’.

From the findings above it is clear that most respondents were able to vividly recollect the nature of the 2008 South African xenophobic attacks. There is fear for some that it may persist given the nature of the violence during those attacks.

## **The ‘Relationship’ between Locals and Foreign Nationals**

International medical humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders (DWB) in 2010 expressed grave concern for the health and lives of thousands of survival migrants and refugees entering and living in South Africa. According to (DWB) sexual violence, appalling living conditions, police harassment, threats of xenophobic attacks, and a lack of access to essential health care still define the desperate lives of thousands of these vulnerable people.

DWB elected in 2010 to provide health care to survival migrants and refugees at its clinics in the border town of Musina and in Johannesburg (Doctors without Borders 2010 press release). Another example of the nature of the relationship between foreign nationals and South Africans was reported in June of this year (2013) when there was a deadly upsurge in violence against foreign nationals that spread through the country. The South African government insisted these acts of violence ought to be treated as criminal in nature, rather than xenophobic. Following these attacks Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamed expressed his concerns about the treatment of Somalis in South Africa (The Daily Maverick accessed on 8

June 2013). On the same matter Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, expressed government's 'strongest condemnation of the recent attacks and killing of Somali and other foreign nationals in our country'. The minister reiterated that 'The looting, displacement and killing of foreign nationals in South Africa should not be viewed as xenophobic attacks, but opportunistic criminal acts that have the potential to undermine the unity and cohesiveness of our communities,' she said. 'There is no cause to justify this heinous crime'. Perhaps it would be appropriate to note how Sabelo, (2009) describes citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa 'A true citizen of South Africa was to be an 'Azanian' fully compatible to the right of African people to self-rule and the reclamation of all of their ancestral land (Halisi 1997; Driver 1980). As S1, in describing his political relation with South Africa maintains, '*We are always called names like makwerekerewes and South Africans think we are people that just fell from the sky*'. Similarly, S2 refers to their status, '*when you want to apply for bursaries, you have to have a South African ID to apply. You cannot do it with your refugee status*'. S3 mentions '*sometimes when I go to hospital some nurses don't treat me well, they give me attitude*'. Other comments included for example those of S4, '*I feel like I will never be treated like a local due to the fact that I come from another country, also feel like this mistreatment is due to the misinformation given to local people due to political ambitions or to discredit the name of a country*', and those of S5, '*, when you go for a job, you are paid less because you are a foreigner*'. S6's comment focussed on extra financial pressure for bribes, '*because we as foreigners are always attacked by people here and when you go to report the matter I must have money to give the cops before he can hear my story*'. Another respondent S10 reported, '*Yes we are treated very differently by South Africans. They feel that we are here to steal their jobs and women. They show us no respect as they would their fellow South Africans*', S12 and S13 highlighted the issue of language, '*People treat me differently because I am a foreigner. Most of the time when I am in a public place, they don't trust me because of my English*', S13 reported, '*There are times when I am appreciated by the public for my good skills and there are times when I am undermined because I am a foreigner*'. Learners also spoke of discrimination as obstacles to their learning, S19, '*I am treated differently as a foreign national, for example when you go to borrow books at public library, you*

*cannot take it away because you don't have an ID only a status which does not qualify me for a card and this makes life difficult for me' and S21, 'South Africans treat foreigners differently at schools,' S22 reports, 'I don't get the same attention from school as South African learners do'.*

In terms of understanding how respondents perceive their 'political space' in South Africa, generally responses spanned from being discriminated against by the South African home affairs, the public libraries, the South African Police Services and being discriminated against for the language they speak and for being foreign nationals.

## **Feelings of Safety**

The 2008 South African xenophobic attacks prompted the South African cabinet to establish the Inter-Ministerial Committee headed by the Minister of Police to deal with cases of xenophobia. When respondents were questioned on feelings of safety in South Africa, S6 claimed '*I feel unsafe as I was once attacked by people, who knew I was a foreigner, on my way back from school,*' while S10 stated '*I don't feel entirely safe because here in South Africa you are never safe after this xenophobic attack. Today you can smile at your South African neighbors, and tomorrow he may want to kill you.*' S11 maintained: '*I don't feel safe because of crime in South Africa every time when I go to school my parents always tell me to watch out and to avoid talking to anybody for my own safety. They want me to associate myself with other foreigner kids*'. Feeling unsafe could also affect academic outcomes as indicated by Gopal and Collings (2012). Although the statements on safety as expressed by the learners may not seem serious, deeper interrogation may show how these feelings impact the academic and cognitive development of learners.

Some respondents spoke of the possible anxieties around safety that they harbour eg.: S13 mentions '*I can never be sure when people can go crazy and start an attack on foreigners*' or S17, '*I only feel safe when I am at school, home or church, but when I am on the streets I am scared, because I always hear stories of girls being kidnapped and murdered and because I am a foreigner, I feel I am an easy target to South Africans,*' or S19- '*No because xenophobic attacks takes place every day is some way or another, so I never know when it's going to be mine turn*'.

All respondents expressed concerns for their safety. This stemmed from either being foreign nationals or because of their perceptions that South Africa in general is an unsafe country. Some worried about the possibility of being attacked ‘unannounced’. Other respondents expressed fear of the people they knew (for example neighbours) who could perhaps strike when they were travelling between school, church and school.

### **Learners - A Future in South Africa**

Harris (2001:5) find that a culture of violence prevails in South Africa, ‘where violence is seen as the legitimate and normal way of solving problems in the country’. Xenophobia must therefore be understood in relation to the high levels of violence that persist in South Africa.

What happened in May 2008 reflects deep tensions and dysfunctions in contemporary South African society and politics. If not addressed, the fractures and incentives that led to the 2008 killings could have grave consequences in the months and years ahead’. The scenes of hate that played out against foreign nationals in 2008 were ‘extraordinary’ in their ‘intensity and scale’, but not in their manner, as xenophobic violence has become a constant bed-fellow of post-apartheid South Africa.

The xenophobia indelibly stained South Africa’s reputation as a country that respect the dignity of foreign nationals and was an acute embarrassment to the African National Congress (ANC) government, which relied on the hospitality of African states during its opposition against apartheid.

Learners demonstrated both positive and negative notions of future life in South for example S1 *‘I can live a better life in South Africa- a life that I always dream about’*; and S3, *‘Yes I would like to live in South Africa because it is a beautiful country, more beautiful than my country’* S4 *‘I would love to live and help build this country through educating the African child about his / her neighbours and also contribute to the helping of the poor society’*. Other respondents spoke of wanting to remain in the country for future prospects *‘I would like to live and pursue my studies in South African always makes it hard, to cope with everyday living’*. Still others such as S5, mentioned: *‘Although I would love to live here for a long time, but I am scared because of all the attacks,’* and S6 *‘If I can have a chance to go to*

*another country then I won't want to live in South Africa for a long time'.*

A minority of respondents (S7'; S9) for example commented on wanting to 'remigrate' to greener pastures: '*My father always tells us that South Africa is not our country so I must not forget where I come from. He told me when I finish my studies and if my country becomes stable, I have to go back to my country, so I don't see myself staying a long time in South Africa*' and '*Yes I would to live in South Africa for a long time, so I can give back good things to this country*'

Many respondents spoke of the dualities of wanting to stay but of potentially being blocked by extrinsic forces for example S10: '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time but my South African brothers and sisters don't make it easy*' and S11 '*Because South Africans don't like us foreigners I don't like to live in South Africa for a long time*'. Similarly S12 '*South Africa is a beautiful country I would like to be in this country for a long time but I am very scared about my life anything can happen at any time to us foreigners*'. Other respondents similarly reported such as S15 '*This is a developed country compared to mine so yes I would like to live here for a long time,*' and S14-'*Yes I like to learn about different cultures and people,*' and S16 '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time and one day own my own business*'. and S17 '*If the people of South Africa can live in unity with foreigners then I would love to live for a long time in South Africa*'. S18 '*Yes, I would like to live in South Africa for a long time, but South African people make life difficult for us foreigners, in this beautiful country*'. One respondent shared that although South Africa is a beautiful country and '*anyone could like to live in this South Africa but since 2008 I am really scared to stay in South Africa. If I get a better opportunity in another country, I am ready to leave South Africa*'. For another respondent (S20) *I would like to improve my life and South Africa does not offer me such opportunities as a foreigner*'.

When respondents were questioned about their views of a future in South Africa, their opinions varied. Most respondents recognised the economic benefits of living in South Africa and compared them to their country of origin while others felt that they would love to live in South Africa for a long time if they could be accepted by the local people for example one respondent commented, '*I would love to live in South Africa for a long time but my South African brothers and sisters don't make it easy*'.

This comment also suggests the notion of wanting to be assimilated into the South African society if it was less hostile.

### **How South Africans are Perceived by Respondents**

For many victims of xenophobic violence, the battle does not end when the crowds disperse and they are re-integrated into communities. Instead, many victims of violence are left vulnerable and exposed. South Africans are viewed through negative stereotypes. Besides the feeling that South Africans are prejudiced and parochial, a prominent perception was that South Africans, especially black South African men, are extremely violent: Informants often depicted South African men as lazy, adulterous and not nurturing of their partners. Often, laziness and crime were interlinked ... South Africans were portrayed as unenterprising and wasteful ... poorly educated and ignorant (Morris 1998: 1127 - 1128). Some respondents (S1) think '*South African people in the city are very friendly and kind but people in the locations just think that they want to steal from them,*' or S2 thinks that '*they must stop accusing foreigners of all the bad things and start making opportunities for themselves,*' S3 maintains '*Ummm South Africans are good (laugh) but they are also bad.*'

A few respondents perceived South Africans positively as seen by S4, '*I believe South African people are lovely people. They have tolerated other Africans in their country and also intermarried with them. They have allowed us to live in harmony with them and even invested in business ventures in partnerships with foreign nationals,*' and S7 '*Some are good and others are not good,*' and S8 '*I think South African people are good but at times can be very rude to foreigners.*' Negative perceptions of South Africans were far more prevalent such as those by S6, '*They are evil people living in denial*' and those by S9 who thought '*South African people are self-centred and are too proud for nothing,*' S10- also thought '*South African people are lazy and depend too much on the government to provide for them,*' while S11 claimed that '*South African people are not good people the majority of them hate foreigners.*' Other respondents described South African more harshly for example (S12) perceived South Africans as people like other people but '*they are more selfish than other Africans. They want everything for themselves*' and S13 commented on communication skills by

stating '*I think South African people lack communication between people and they fight for everything*'. Similarly S14 thinks '*they are frustrated because they feel that the government only cares about foreigners and not them, which is not true*', and S16 thinks that '*South African people can be kind if they want to but they are very stubborn and don't forgive easily*'.

One respondent S17 thinks '*South Africans can be egotistic and with that kind of attitude it will always make them unhappy people*' while another respondent S18 thinks that '*they must learn to respect everybody and stop blaming foreigners for their unhappiness*'. Another respondent S20 suggested '*South African people are good but need to be educated about foreigners*'.

From the responses above it emerged that the majority of respondents hold what may be termed negative perceptions of South Africans for example one respondent claimed, '*South Africans can be egotistic and with that kind of attitude it will always make them unhappy people*' while another respondent commented that '*they must learn to respect everybody and stop blaming foreigners for their unhappiness*'.

Other respondents described South Africans either as lazy, selfish or not taking responsibility for their lives but instead using foreign nationals as 'scapegoats' in internalizing their social and economic plight.

## Conclusion

Although children and youth living in South Africa are protected by national and international legislation this study has shown that foreign learners continue to be violated by local South Africans. Analysis of the findings also suggest that issues influencing xenophobic attitudes are around the views South Africans have of foreign nationals in terms of their own social and economic deprivation. Foreign nationals are perceived as hard working and dedicated individuals hence depriving locals of employment opportunities. The findings further demonstrate the 'social exclusion' of children and youth through the threat of violence and intimidation which should be addressed by the state and civil society at large. South Africa must ensure the protection of the rights of foreigners through engagement with all critical formal and informal role-players. Educating South Africans in accepting that South Africa like any other country will always be host to foreign nationals and that international policies protect their rights, may assist in helping South

Africans to reduce their antagonism and xenophobic attitudes towards foreign nationals. The South African government has an important part to play in ensuring that foreign nationals are not seen to be ‘robbing’ local people of jobs, economic and other state benefits.

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## Appendix 1: Demographics of Interviewees

Respondent	Q1: Age	Q2: Gender	Q3: Nationality	Q4:Country Of Birth	Q5: Age When Attacks Occurred
S1	22	Female	Rwandese	Rwanda	17
S2	20	Male	Burundese	Burundi	15
S3	18	Male	Mozambique	South Africa	13
S4	22	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	17
S5	20	Female	Burundese	Burundi	15
S6	21	Male	Rwandese	Rwanda	16
S7	21	Male	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	16
S8	21	Male	Burundese	Burundi	16
S9	19	Male	Kenyan	Kenya	14
S10	20	Male	Kenyan	Kenya	15
S11	22	Male	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	17
S12	20	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	15
S13	19	Male	Congolese	D R Congo	14
S14	20	Male	Rwandese	Rwanda	15
S15	21	Female	Rwandese	Rwanda	16
S16	18	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	13
S17	20	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	15
S18	20	Female	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe	15
S19	18	Female	Ugandan	South Africa	13
S20	20	Female	Ugandan	Uganda	15
S21	21	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	16
S22	19	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	14
S23	20	Female	Congolese	D R Congo	15
S24	20	Female	Burundese	Burudi	15

# **The May 2008 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: Antecedents and Aftermath**

**Goolam Vahed  
Ashwin Desai**

## **Abstract**

This article revisits the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa in order to grapple with key questions around the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, measures that can be taken to address xenophobia and ways in which diverse but inclusive communities can be built. A particular focus of the article is how state institutions reinforce anti-foreigner sentiments especially against those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. In a context where poor South Africans are struggling to find work and find promises of service delivery empty, it is African foreigners with whom they live side by side who become the targets for anger and frustration. The challenge for those wanting to confront xenophobia is how to build coalitions that transcend foreigner/local boundaries. This is made difficult because foreigners tend to coalesce into tighter groups as forms of protection which only exacerbates their outsider status. The prognosis in the short term for movements confronting xenophobia is the struggle to change attitudes, build defence units against violence, while agitating for better living conditions and decent housing. This is a difficult terrain to organise in because there is the perennial danger that the struggle for a better life can translate into attacks on foreigners.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, racism, immigration, refugee camps, South Africa, state of exception

## **Introduction**

Somalian Abdullahi Wehliye opened a shop in Phillipi Township outside Cape Town after losing his shop in neighbouring Khayelitsha Township during the 2008 xenophobic violence. Speaking to a reporter, as he served customers through a metal grill, Wehliye said that his new shop had been robbed seven times since opening in 2010. In 2012, his brother was killed during a botched robbery. Almost all 60 Somali shopkeepers in the neighbourhood have been robbed, mostly at gunpoint. Ward Counsellor Thobile Gqola said that in his area 60% of residents were unemployed, while foreign nationals owned over half the businesses. ‘The problem starts’, he said, ‘when it comes to business.’ Most of the violence in the area is directed at Somali-owned ‘spaza’ shops (Hiraan 2013).

In 2008, Somali shopkeeper Abdul Aziz Husein also faced a tough choice: stay in Dunoon to try and save his shop or leave to save his life. With the help of a neighbour, he escaped. ‘In five minutes’, he recalled, ‘my shop was empty. They even took the fridges.’ This was during the night of 22 May 2008, the same night that African National Congress (ANC) MP Lumka Yengeni was due to speak to the community of Dunoon in order to subvert possible xenophobic violence. The meeting never took place, due to a crowd of locals who went on the rampage. They killed one Somali man, injured many, looted shops, and displaced thousands. Husein returned to his shop but found that people were stoning it. He tried to reason with the agitated crowd, as many were his neighbours and customers, but was advised by the police that they could save his life, but not his goods, and that he should leave. He took refuge at the Blue Waters ‘camp’ in Strandfontein where ‘conditions were tough’. It was winter, the camp was near the sea and all he had to keep warm at night was one thin blanket. ‘It was a troubled life there.’ Hussein returned a few months later when locals pleaded with him to do so but still lives in fear of another outbreak of xenophobic violence.

Mohamed Osman, another Somali shopkeeper, is also based in Dunoon. He conceded that the local community did not like Somalis but patronised their businesses because they sold good quality merchandise at cheaper prices than elsewhere. He said, ‘every day’s a fight. Sometimes they say we have no stability. They say we must go home’ (Samodien 2013).

Samodien and Hiraan’s reports on which the above accounts are based were published to mark the fifth anniversary of the May 2008

countrywide xenophobic attacks that attracted international headlines. Ironically, barely two weeks later, there was a recurrence of these attacks. In the last week of May 2013, residents in Diepsloot, a township near Johannesburg, rioted against Somalis, while other incidents occurred in Booysens Park, outside Port Elizabeth. The trouble in Diepsloot started on the evening of Sunday, 26 May 2013 when a Somali shop owner, Bishar Isaack, allegedly shot dead two Zimbabweans after an altercation at his shop. Following his arrest, his shop was stoned and looted. Eighteen other Somali shops were looted and burnt down. In the wider Vaal area, police received more than a hundred complaints about looting of both local and foreign-owned shops. Reporter Siyabonga Sithole visited some of the shop owners after the violence (*City Press* 2 June 2013):

This week's violence left many foreign shop owners with nowhere to sleep. Some loitered at the local police station for three days, while others returned to their looted shops, some of which had been burned. Among them was Issa Jimale, who has run his shop in Diepsloot for three of the 16 years he has lived in South Africa. 'I have nothing, nowhere to go, and we sleep here at the police station without food'. His last meal was scooped up off the floor of his looted shop, situated two streets away from the police station. Nearby stood Pakistani shopkeeper Asim Nawaz, who has run his cell-phone and electronics shop in Diepsloot since 2007. He had to flee during the xenophobic attacks of 2008 and lost everything then. This time he has lost 'everything' again – between R45 000 and R50 000 in stock. 'It is difficult to build a shop like this from scratch because as you can see, the equipment is expensive', he said. 'Even if I were to come back and rebuild, it would take me eight months or more to recover'. Diepsloot's Ethiopian shop owners decried the looting, saying they did nothing to deserve it. 'We are a peaceful nation. We do not carry guns. We do not kill South Africans, but our shops are looted', fumed Desalegn Foge Gande, who moved to South Africa in 2004. He opened his grocery store in Diepsloot last year after fleeing attacks in Atteridgeville in 2011. The Ethiopian Community Association in South Africa said 80% of their members ran spaza shops or worked as door-to-door salesmen in townships. 'It has

become dangerous to conduct business in South Africa. We appeal to the South African government to protect us', said Fanna Dereje.

By the following Monday evening, the conflict had spread to Port Elizabeth's Booyens Park. Residents petrol-bombed police vehicles, blockaded roads with rocks and burning tyres, and burnt down Somali-owned shops. By Thursday, all the Somali shop-owners in the area had packed up and left (IOL News 31 May 2013). This description of the murder of a Somali man in Port Elizabeth is particularly harrowing:

An anonymous bystander in Booyens Park filmed the savage attack on Somali shopkeeper Ahmed Abdi. Abdi was chased down by local residents who have been attacking Somalis and looting their shops since Wednesday. The footage shows Abdi lying naked on the road and appearing to have already suffered a beating. A man in a light-blue shirt picks up a cement block and throws it on Abdi while a crowd cheers in the background. From the side a boy in school uniform - probably between the ages of 10 and 12 - runs and jumps on Abdi. Another boy - presumed older than the first boy - hurls a rock at Abdi's genitals. The two then stamp on the weak man who tries in vain to protect his head, which is kicked at least 20 times. Abdi is hardly moving by this stage. The final blow came when the young boy in the blue jersey picked up a rock from the victim's chest and smashed it onto his head (Censor Bugbear 1 June 2013).

The scale and intensity of violence in 2013 did not reach the levels of the 2008 xenophobic attacks. However, while government claims that South Africa has moved on from the 2008 attacks, which they portray as an aberration, the 2013 incidents show that attacks on foreign nationals are a feature of South African life and can be sparked at any moment. A report by journalist Nicklaus Bauer in the Mail and Guardian (28 May 2013) cited the following instances of major xenophobia-related incidents since 2008:

- June 2009: Business people from four of Cape Town's impoverished communities held several meetings to discuss ways of ridding their communities of foreign-owned shops.

- June 2010: A group of eminent global leaders called the ‘Elders’ claim xenophobia may erupt in South Africa after the Fifa 2010 World Cup as jobs become more scarce. Fortunately, this does not occur.
- October 2011: Alexandra-based group, the ‘Alexandra Bonafides’, call for foreigners to vacate Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses in the township within seven days.
- July 2012: More than 500 foreign nationals are displaced in xenophobic attacks at Botshabelo in the Free State.

In the same report, Gosiame Choabi, national programme coordinator of Anti-Xenophobia Action South Africa, said that government was failing to attribute the violence to xenophobia, but rather treated it as part of the crime problem. In most cases, he said, it was ‘xenophobia disguised as crime - not vice versa’. He called for policy interventions: ‘We can’t stand by and simply say this is part of our crime problem. Foreigners are easy targets and are being victimised – we can’t sit by and do nothing.’

Many explanations have been put forward to account for these attacks. They include the absence of a clear immigration policy, porous borders, corrupt police and Home Affairs officials, socio-economic inequities in the country, and even the ANC’s poor service delivery record which is resulting in ordinary South Africans venting their frustration on foreign nationals.

This article revisits the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in order to grapple with some thorny questions. What are the causes of xenophobia in South Africa? What is required to fight xenophobia in South Africa and how can we build diverse yet inclusive communities? Is it possible to produce an alternative vision of an inclusive citizenship, just as South Africans did in 1994? Can points of similarity be found between refugees / migrants and locals? How do researchers / academics express empathy for foreign nationals, represent their experiences, and encourage them to make their voices heard, while at the same time taking cognisance of the circumstances of locals?

## The 2008 Attacks – The Camps in Gauteng<sup>1</sup>

### **River Road Camp**

Following the May 2008 attacks, most of the refugees in Gauteng were herded by the authorities into makeshift camps. The River Road refugee camp overlooking Alexandra was one of many that became ‘home’ for a short while to foreign Africans who had been hounded out of various townships during the xenophobic attacks that swept South Africa. A visit to the camp in July 2008 revealed that it was fenced in and overlaid with barbed wire. Guards kept an eye on ‘inmates’<sup>2</sup>, while access was closely monitored through a single gate. These images were made all the more troubling by the fact that the inmates had, until recently, been living within the very communities that had expelled them to these camps. In other words, they were not refugees who had directly escaped some foreign trauma to seek shelter at these camps but had been, by and large, neighbours, renters, commuters, consumers and, if not citizens, then, to all intents and purposes, fellow township dwellers.

Migrants and refugees, like many others in present day South Africa, occupy a liminal space between their homeland and what might become ‘home’. Their experiences of leaving their home countries and making their way to South Africa where they wait nervously, often surviving illegally on the margins, to be granted permanent residence and the rights enjoyed by citizens, locates them in a transient space physically and emotionally. Anthropologist Victor Turner, who has written widely on the concept of liminality, describes it as a stage of being between phases. While Turner was writing about rituals, the concept is relevant for foreign migrants and refugees who are no longer members of the countries from whence they came, nor yet members (citizens) of the group (South Africa) to which they

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the research material on camps was drawn upon in Ashwin Desai, 2008. Xenophobia and the place of the refugee in the rainbow nation of human rights. African Sociological Review, 12, 2: 49-68 (particularly around pages 54-57).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Inmates’ is a term frequently used in the literature to describe refugees in camps.

aspire to belong: ‘liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between’ (Turner 1969: 95).

Many of the ‘victims’ of the May 2008 xenophobic violence were ‘insiders’, in the sense that they lived amongst South Africans but were regarded as ‘outsiders’ and treated as such during a particularly traumatic moment of crisis. Their camp experience was another moment of liminality that has come to mark the lives of foreign African refugees and migrants in South Africa.

Sibonile Mabhena left his homeland of Zimbabwe in 2004 at the age of 19 because he was ‘starving’. On the night of 10 May 2008, a crowd, including his immediate neighbours, gathered outside his shack in Alexandra and chanted for him to ‘vacate the shack immediately’. Sensing that his life would be in danger if he did not comply, he bundled what he could together and slept with his family in an open veld. The following day, he sent his wife and three year old child to Vereeniging while he went to sleep at his place of work, a panel beating business that belonged to a fellow Zimbabwean. On 12 May 2008 the business was attacked by people from Alexandra who, according to eyewitnesses, were brought there by taxi. Equipment was stolen while vehicles were stripped to their bare shells. The panel beating shop now serves as a makeshift parking lot for taxis. Sibonile arrived at the River Road camp without documents, family, home, or work.

Violence soon spread across Johannesburg and into the East Rand. In the Brazzaville informal settlement near Atteridgeville, Chamunorna Kufondada was beaten and set alight, the fourth person killed during attacks in the area, which culminated in 25 businesses being destroyed and 50 people injured (Sosibo 2013: 2). In the Madelakufa Section of Tembisa, a fight between two youngsters resulted in the death of one. When a sectional meeting was called to discuss the incident, the perpetrator was identified as a Mozambican (McBride 2008). Following the meeting on 18 May 2008, two Mozambicans were murdered. The first unidentified victim was stabbed 49 times while the second victim, Phineas Ndlovu, had barely arrived back from work when he was pulled out of his shack ‘in front of his wife/girlfriend (44 years old) and their child (three and a half years old) and slaughtered while both his wife/girlfriend and child were watching’ (McBride 2008).

*Jonathan Crush*, Director of the Southern African Research Centre at Queen's University, reported that 62 people were killed during the May 2008

xenophobic attacks across South Africa. According to official reports 342 shops were looted and 213 were gutted, while 1,384 people were arrested (Crush *et al.* 2008: 11). Loren Landau, Director of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, notes that as a result of the violence:

the government's legitimacy and the post-apartheid order were called into question by a world watching horrific images of families fleeing from buildings and men who had been set alight. ... the essence of citizenship was at once revealed and subtly defined.... [The violence] exposed a demon: a society capable of horrific violence.... In this violence we see the imperative to exclude and the means of achieving that exclusion: hand-to-hand, street-level violence.

Many South Africans greeted the attacks with horror as they wondered how this could happen in a country with an international reputation for reconciliation whose people were dubbed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu the 'rainbow nation of God', in recognition of their seemingly 'miraculous' ability to overcome three centuries of racial division and oppression. South Africa is also widely acknowledged for its founding constitution and emphasis on human rights, supported by a relatively well-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC).

Whilst pursuing a strategy of fairly quiet diplomacy, the ANC government blamed unidentified 'Third Force' elements, a reason proffered by many anti-apartheid activists to explain the fighting between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and ANC in the run-up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. The most outlandish claim was probably that of the then Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, Manala Manzini, who linked the violence to people seeking to disrupt the 2009 elections: 'We believe that as South Africa prepares for another national election early next year, the so-called black-on-black violence that we witnessed prior to our first election in 1994 has deliberately been unleashed and orchestrated' (M&G Online 23 May 2008). There was little acknowledgement that xenophobic violence has been a feature of post-apartheid South African society, a point that is taken up later in this article.

### **Glenanda Camp**

Prior to arriving at the makeshift camps, most refugees had been living on the margins of the system, trying to get their children educated, earn a living and find shelter. This sometimes required that they change their appearance to blend in with the locals. Following the attacks, camp occupants who barely knew one another quickly united around issues such as schooling, defending the camps against attacks and food distribution. Turner's point that liminality produces *communitas*, that is, a feeling of comradeship (Turner 1982: 44), is relevant for camp inmates. While there was a broad division between those from Francophone and Anglophone African countries, for the most part, leadership within the camp represented all inmates.

The state's response to the plight of the refugees was harsh. At Glenanda, south of Johannesburg (Rifle Range Road camp), the state initiated a registration process for inmates to obtain temporary permits. The official notice to inmates left them with no choice: '[f]ailure to register [will] have negative consequences including the termination of assistance and protection by government, and may lead to your removal from the Republic of South Africa' (AI 11 2008). As Amnesty International (AI) noted, the consequences of camp residents' signing the 'Individual Data Collection Form' were not explained to them. One of the provisions was that those who registered could not apply for social grants, government housing, South African identity documents, or passports (AI 2008 11). This removed an important right as many of the residents of the camps, who had originally entered the country as refugees and asylum seekers, were entitled to register for social grants and could remain in the country for longer than six months. Afraid of losing these rights, many of the camp residents decided not to register (AI 2008: 11 - 12) and were consequently deemed to be 'troublemakers'.

On 16 July 2008, five unidentified men entered the camp and were confronted by inmates on security alert. The police arrived in force and in the ensuing stand-off, 23 inmates were shot by rubber bullets and some were charged with 'kidnapping' the five intruders. On 22 July, police re-entered the camp, forced inmates into waiting police vans and herded them to the notorious Lindela Holding Facility. Those with valid asylum-seeker or refugee permits were allowed to leave. They had nowhere to go and set up camp on the side of the R28 highway, using the opportunity to attract media

attention so that the state would not summarily deport them. On the fifth day, with around 400 inmates still on the roadside, the state acted decisively. Two hundred and eight men were arrested for contravening the National Road Traffic Act while women and children were taken to the Riet Family Guidance Centre (Algotssohn 2000).

While in custody, the men were pressured to surrender their rights as refugees and asylum-seekers and sign affidavits expressing their desire to return to their countries of origin. They were promised that in return, charges against them would be dropped. They refused and on 6 August, they were transferred to Lindela and put through an ‘accelerated asylum determination procedure’. As AI pointed out, this was done improperly as the men did not have legal representation and the consequences of signing the documents were not explained to them - it would terminate their refugee or asylum-seeker status and lead to deportation as opposed to voluntary repatriation (AI 2008: 19).

Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) managed to consult with almost all the detainees but by the end of September, only 42 of 208 remained at Lindela. Most were returned to their home countries in defiance of the law (LHR 2008; in AI 2008). Scepticism amongst Glenanda inmates about the temporary permit, which allowed a lawful stay of up to six months, was to prove well-founded. Government authorities announced in August that the permit did not preclude the right of the authorities to deport inmates (AI 2008: 12). The Glenanda camp was closed at the end of September. Journalist Kanina Foss described the scene: ‘It was a time for gathering possessions and wondering where the night would be spent... By mid-afternoon, large piles of packed belongings were the only indication that the plot of land on Rifle Range Road had been home to thousands of xenophobia victims for five months’ (*The Star* 1 October 2008).

While inmates of the camps had won a reprieve to keep the camps open until at least 20 November, Glenanda inmates accepted the equivalent of a month’s rent from Unicef and UNCHR to leave early. Many could not return to their homes in Johannesburg and sought accommodation in the inner city amongst other African migrants, where they felt safer. Finding jobs was an entirely different issue.

### ***Akasia Camp***

One of those displaced by the May 2008 violence was Abdul, a twenty-two year old refugee, who was born in Kismayo, Somalia. Abdul was a child soldier who endured great hardship before he made the treacherous journey to South Africa to escape his life of ‘horror and sadness. I always used to see dead people in the streets’. Abdul stated that he did not enjoy a childhood as he was ‘carrying an AK since I was fourteen’. The bullet wound on his leg is testimony to his struggles. His seven year old brother was shot dead. In Somalia, he convinced a man from a local mosque to sponsor him so that he could get an education, but he failed to complete his course due to the ongoing conflict in the country. He hoped to continue his education in South Africa, but his primary task became ‘to save my life – to stay alive’. He was also confronted by the challenge of obtaining proper documentation. ‘Even when your papers are valid’, he said, ‘South African authorities will make it difficult for you to get anything done.’

Abdul runs a tiny ‘spaza shop’ amidst the flats in Newtown, Johannesburg, with his uncle, selling goods cautiously through a grated window. He has also been subjected to violence in South Africa. He is often robbed by locals but dares not report it for fear of being assaulted. ‘All you think about is how to make it not happen again. That’s all you can do.’ He was once robbed of airtime and cash by a customer called Tshep who, ‘to this day, still comes to my shop. He smiles at me. He greets me. I greet him. He knows there’s nothing I can do. I’m Somali. I have no rights. And the owner of the shop that we are renting, his son is a policeman! He knows what’s going on and he does nothing about it.’ The worst moment of Abdul’s life came in May 2008, when around 800 Somalis were displaced by the violence and placed in a temporary camp.

According to Abdul, the Akasia camp ‘was in a bush, man, just a bush.’ He stayed there during June and July. Eight big tents were provided for the women while the men stayed in shacks made of boxes and blankets. It was the middle of winter and they had no ‘hot water [and] temporary toilets that they don’t even clean. We had to go into the forest to ‘toilet’. It was zero humanity in those camps.’ While much is written about the role of volunteers in the aftermath of the violence, there is no mention of the role of the Somali Association of South Africa (SASA), mainly run by volunteers, which Abdul is a member of. He facilitates anti-xenophobia workshops in communities,

sponsored by the Nelson Mandela Foundation,<sup>3</sup> an organization involved in a myriad of activities from research to raising money for a children's fund, with its primary focus on *ubuntu*, or reconciliation, and has worked hard to solidify networks with other refugees and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). According to Abdul, due to the difficulties that they are experiencing in South Africa, Somalis are looking beyond clan and regional rivalries to build networks of support that not only traverse South Africa but move through Somalia into Europe and the United States.

Despite his situation, Abdul has no choice but to remain in South Africa. However, his life is one of fear, as the state and police are no help. According to Abdul:

The worst problem is the police. I am a member of the Community Policing Forum in three areas: Newtown, Brixton and Johannesburg. After one meeting I got a lift back to Mayfair. On the way, I saw a Somali guy being chased at night. He was carrying cash. The robbers knew he was going to buy stock for the next day. There's nowhere to go for help. They (police and other authorities) know that everybody there (8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Newtown) is Somali and you don't deserve to be served. Same with the justice system – there's no pressure to pursue criminals or facilitate court processes. The attitude is: don't worry. It's only f---in' Mkwerkeres [derogatory term for foreigner]. The police watch incidents happen and don't do anything about it. In fact they also assault and rob people. You've got to pay money to them all the time.

Abdul bravely continues the fight to survive, deepening his networks with other Somalis and finding cracks in the system. Unfortunately, his story is not uncommon.

## **State Assault on the Camps**

In its report on the camps, published at the end of September 2008, AI con-

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<sup>3</sup> This was set up in the aftermath of Mandela's one term presidency and was involved in a myriad of activities from research to raising money for a children's fund, with its primary focus on *ubuntu*, or reconciliation.

cluded that there was a concerted effort to force inmates to leave the country, particularly from July onwards. This was confirmed by the accelerated asylum system without procedural safeguards in Gauteng, which created the possibility of forcible return to countries where the person may be at risk of persecution (a rejection rate of 98%); misuse of criminal charges, unlawful detention and threats to deport individuals who failed to co-operate with administrative procedures at camps; obstruction of access to humanitarian, legal and other support organisations; threats of the premature closure of camps and a reduction in the level of essential services, including access to food (AI 2008: 2).

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) reported that by the end of June, children at the Blue Waters Camp were ‘unable to attend school because of a lack of transport... Residents have little contact with the outside world, and they have feelings of isolation and abandonment’ (SAHRC 2008: 6). The SAHRC was of the view that ‘the camps created to house non-nationals are inhumane’ and recommended that they be closed to minimise trauma and that non-national residents be either ‘reintegrated, repatriated, or resettled, based on their informed decisions’ (SAHRC 2008: 7). Fatima Hassan of the AIDS Law Project (ALP) said after visiting various camps that ‘the situation is worsening and it’s a deliberate ploy to make sure that people will be forced to leave the camps, that they will have no other choice’ (News24.com 18 September 2008).

Marti Weddepohl, camp coordinator of the Blue Waters camp near Muizenberg in the Western Cape, told reporters that the government expected her to make ‘things as unpleasant as possible - if not impossible - for the refugees to stay here and I can’t do it anymore.’ Weddepohl felt that she was expected to run ‘a concentration camp’. She painted a picture of sickness, disease and malnourishment: ‘Every day I see people with sores around their mouths and increasingly people have to be medically treated’ (*Mail & Guardian* September 26 to October 2, 2008).

During the last week of September, the infamous Red Ants, a private security company known for its ruthless approach to evictions, forcibly removed tents from the Akasia camps in Gauteng, using coercion and intimidation. Their methods included ‘removal of identity cards from residents, removing their property including clothes, arresting residents for ‘trespassing’ and then withdrawing the charges after a weekend in detention’

(*Mail & Guardian* September 26 to October 2, 2008). On 6 October 2008, the Red Ants effectively destroyed the Klerksoord refugee camp, north of Pretoria. Hundreds of women and children were left without food and shelter. Bishop Jo Seoka of the Tshwane Faith Forum described the withdrawal of food and water as inhumane and called on South Africans to treat migrants and refugees justly, ‘Foreigners are human and their dignity must be protected by all of us by treating them as we would like to be treated if we were in that situation’ (*The Citizen* 8 October 2008).

## **The Makings of a Xenophobic Environment**

The violent 2008 xenophobic attacks were generally greeted with shock by South Africans. However, numerous studies showed that xenophobic attitudes had deeply penetrated South African society. These studies also revealed that organs of state like the police had strongly embedded xenophobic attitudes.

Politicians themselves made reference to high migration figures and these sentiments coalesced with metaphors in the media which invoked terms such as ‘floods’ and ‘waves’ when referring to African migrants. While the dawn of democracy removed the last vestiges of apartheid, this did not signal openness to African migrants. During December 1994 and January 1995, African foreigners were attacked in Alexandra and their homes were destroyed when their neighbours marched to the police station to protest against them. The mobilisation was named ‘Operation Buyelekhaya’ (‘go back home’) (Minnaar & Hough 1996: 188-99). In Olievenhoutbosch near Pretoria in Gauteng, groups of South Africans attacked foreign Africans living in the Choba informal settlement in December 2005, burning their shacks and looting their businesses. Over the next two years, ‘attacks on foreign nationals escalated in their brazenness and brutality.’ During 2007, more than a hundred Somali nationals were killed and many businesses and properties were looted and burnt (Crush *et al.* 2008: 21).

The May 2008 attacks did not take place in a vacuum. Surveys have regularly pointed to strong xenophobic attitudes. A 2006 survey by the South African Migration Project (SAMP) found that 50% of those surveyed supported the deportation of foreign nationals, including those living legally in South Africa; 75% were against increasing the number of refugees; and

50% supported refugees being placed in border camps (Crush *et al.* 2008). The SAMP carried out another survey using the same set of questions and reported in June 2013 that 50% of South Africans want foreign nationals to carry their identity documents on them at all times; 63% support electrified fences on the country's borders; 50% believe that migrants should not receive police protection without proper documentation; 41% support mandatory HIV testing of refugees; 30% want a total ban on all migration to the country; and 14% believe that all migrants enter the country to commit crime (Crush 2013).

Physical attacks on foreign nationals are often accompanied by a heightened language of hysteria and a demeaning 'Othering' of African migrants. The most obvious manifestation of this is 'normalisation' of the word Makwerekwere which, as Francis Nyamnjoh, an anthropologist based at the University of Cape Town points out, refers to 'one who also hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa... In terms of skin pigmentation, the racial hierarchy ... Makwerekwere are usually believed to be the darkest of the dark-skinned, and even to be less enlightened' (Crush *et al.* 2004: 39).

While xenophobic sentiments against African immigrants are pervasive at various levels of South African society, what distinguished the May 2008 attacks were their breadth and scale. Thousands of foreign Africans were displaced: approximately 15,000 Mozambicans were forced to leave the country in a convoy of buses, while thousands of others sought sanctuary in camps and makeshift shelters.

## **Policing and Xenophobia**

An HRC study of police methods in 1999 revealed that 'there was substantial failure of law enforcement officers to comply with even minimal requirements' of the law (HRC 1999: xx). This is the case, for example, regarding people's ability to provide identification to law enforcement officers. South Africans are not required to carry identification documents (IDs) and police policy has been to accompany individuals to retrieve their IDs 'if an officer suspects that they are illegally in the country but they allege they have valid documents' (HRC 1999: xxi). The HRC found that people were usually not afforded this opportunity and were instead arrested

immediately; when an ID was produced it was sometimes torn up (HRC 1999: xxvi).

It appears that from the top down, police believe that they can act with impunity against foreign Africans. An AI report dated 3 March 2010 on attacks on Ethiopian refugees in Siyathemba Township, 80 kilometres south east of Johannesburg made the following observation regarding police attitudes:

Over 130 adults and children were affected by the violence on 7 and 8 February [2010]. They lost their livelihoods when an armed crowd of several hundred people looted and destroyed their shops. The South African Police Service (SAPS) failed to prevent the violence from escalating and delayed seeking emergency back-up from organized police units with crowd control capacity.... In South Africa there is a persistent culture of impunity for crimes committed against refugees and migrants. For this reason they are particularly vulnerable to attack. Xenophobic attitudes amongst South Africans, including police and immigration officials, fuel the violence.

Roni Amit, a senior researcher at the Centre for African Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, attributed part of the blame for xenophobia to ‘ineffective’ policing. There were reports of police officers standing idly by as mobs looted and burnt down Somali shops. Hussein Omar, a spokesman for the Somali Association of South Africa told reporter, Darren Taylor: ‘In some areas the police are doing nothing and the criminals are just moving freely, while the traders can identify who comes to [attack] them, how they look and all that, and we’re not seeing the police doing anything.’ Amit added:

Unfortunately the South African police aren’t taking a very effective stance in terms of their response. These shops will be looted and the police will view their responsibility as saving lives but not saving property. [Foreigners] get intimidating letters saying ‘leave your shops by a certain day or else’ and the police don’t respond to that. Or they’ll respond by ordering the migrants to leave their shops and this just reinforces the efforts of the people who are attacking the

migrants' businesses. They feel they can attack the migrants and it's legitimate because nothing is being done to stop them (in Taylor 2012).

Omar cited instances where the police ordered Somali traders to close their shops in the evenings, the most profitable time for business, while South African-owned shops remained open. If Somali shop owners refused, the police tear-gassed them. Local government officials and the police also harassed Somalis with threatening letters and by-laws that targeted them specifically. Despite multiple incidents, Amit added, 'there are almost no prosecutions' (Taylor 2012).

The language of demeaning African immigrants is not confined to the townships but is evident in the media, and in parliament and state institutions, particularly the South African Police Services (SAPS). For example, Western Cape Police Commissioner, Arno Lamoer 'bemoaned the number of foreign nationals arriving in Cape Town.' Patel (2012) notes sarcastically that 'he was of course not referring to the American backpackers paying their way through Cape Town by waiting tables at Cape Town's more swanky spots' (Patel 2012).

As part of the fabric of South African society, SAPS members are likely to share the prejudices of their fellow citizens as they deal with migrants and refugees on a continuing basis, which possibly exacerbates their biases (Hall *et al.* 1978: 49). Many observers believe that this explains the 'barbaric' incident on 26 February 2013 when Mido Macia, a 26 year old taxi driver and Mozambican national, was handcuffed by police officers to their van and dragged for several hundred metres through the streets of Daveyton, a township east of Johannesburg. He was later found dead in a police cell. The state charged nine police officers for his murder only after widespread domestic and international outcry.

## **Immigration Officials and Xenophobia**

It is known that officials in the Department of Home Affairs and at various points of entry into South Africa tend to 'drag their feet [about the treatment of foreign migrants], partly because of political sensitivity over the rights of foreigners' (Murray 2003: 453). Immigrants seeking refugee status are

initially given the status of asylum seekers and it could take up to six years for applications to be processed by Home Affairs (Harris 2001: 14). Turner's concept of liminality is captured powerfully in this waiting game, as refugees live in limbo, unsure what is to become of them. Between 2002 and 2008, around 30,000 people applied for asylum per annum (Vigneswaran 2008: 5). There is a massive backlog in processing applications at Home Affairs and thousands are unsure whether they will ever be attended to.

Home Affairs spokespersons often reinforce the perception that African immigrants overwhelm South Africa, thus denying a better life for South Africans. The Department of Home Affairs 1999 White Paper accused migrants and refugees of weakening 'the state and its institutions by corrupting officials, fraudulently acquiring documents and undeserved rights, and tarnishing our image locally and abroad' (quoted in Harris 2001: 20). The White Paper also introduced the idea of local communities becoming involved in the 'detection, apprehension and removal of 'illegal aliens'.' In introducing the Bill to Parliament, the Minister of Home Affairs was quoted as saying that South Africans who considered themselves 'good patriots', would 'report' illegal (many activists prefer the term 'undocumented') immigrants (Valji 2003: 11). After the 2008 attacks, government spokesperson Cleo Mosana advised that failure 'to take action against illegals would be setting a bad precedent' (Sosibo 2011). Williams rightly reflected more than a decade earlier that 'it is likely that the actions of South Africans will not be limited to mere reporting. There is a danger of South Africans taking the law into their own hands, even considering it their patriotic duty to take action against 'illegal aliens' (1999: 2). This forecast came to fruition in 2008.

An indication of the deep-seated prejudices against foreign Africans is also provided by the example of immigration officials at O.R. Tambo International airport who refused 125 Nigerians entry into South Africa in early March 2012 for alleged possession of fake vaccination cards. The passengers were deported. This sparked public outcry in Nigeria and the Nigerian government retaliated by turning away 131 South Africans. The government was forced to apologise to Nigeria and institute new immigration procedures to end the diplomatic row. South African immigration officials now require a foreign ministry official's consent before turning away large groups of travellers. Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Ashiru accused the South

African authorities of targeting Nigerians: ‘What you see playing out is what we call xenophobia by South Africans against all Africans - not just Nigerians - including even those from their neighbouring countries’ (African Spotlight, <http://africanspotlight.com/2012/03/south-africa-unveils-new-immigration-measures-as-nigeria-accepts-apology/>).

The backlash against foreigners in South Africa in 2013 prompted a number of appeals from African leaders to protect their citizens in South Africa. The Prime Minister of Somalia, Mr Farah Shirdon, sent an open letter to President Zuma: ‘I appeal to the government of the Republic of South Africa as a matter of urgency to intervene and contain this unnecessary and unfortunate violence against Somali business communities’ (*Business Day Live* 4 June 2013).

Landau makes the critical point that unlike citizens, in the case of non-nationals, ‘exclusion is both bureaucratically institutionalised and socially legitimate.’ It is not only the physical marginalisation such as imprisonment and denial of services that counts, but also ‘the nationalist discourse evoked to legitimise and explain them’ (2011: 8). State policy is designed to protect advantaged insiders and its bureaucrats are trained to do so. This desire to control explains South Africa’s reluctance to embrace the policy imperative of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to facilitate the free movement of people.

## **Coordinated Elimination of Foreign Nationals?**

Roni Amit attributes part of the blame for xenophobic attitudes to indirect consent from those in authority. Many Somalis interviewed by Amit believe that influential political and business figures support the violence against them (in Taylor 2012). For example, former National Police Commissioner, Bheki Cele announced that foreign-owned ‘spaza’ shop owners had ‘economically displaced’ South Africans and warned that locals could ‘revolt’ unless things changed (Taylor 2012).

In *New South African Review* 1, Landau, Polzer and Kabwe-Segatti (2010: 225) make the point that in areas witnessing group-based violence against foreign nationals:

There is a culture of impunity that makes people who attack foreign

nationals feel that there will be no negative consequences for them.... There is a political vacuum or competition for community leadership so that unofficial, illegitimate and often violent forms of leadership emerge. Such leaders then mobilise residents of the area against foreign nationals in order to strengthen their own power base.

While those in authority may not condone violence per se, inflammatory statements can influence locals to believe that it is acceptable to attack foreign nationals. According to Landau (2011: 1), in many townships across South Africa ‘community leaders have continued to issue threats, and draft ultimatums demanding that foreigners get out. Where words are not enough, business associations and gangsters kill foreign shopkeepers, residents and other purported competitors.’

In many parts of South Africa, migrants face the persistent and daily threat of violence. Writing in the Sunday Times a few months after the attacks, Victor Khupiso observed that ‘on Friday nights in Ramaphosa squatter camp, it’s time for what locals call their “Kwerekwere-Free (Foreigner-Free) Society’ campaign”’. Gangs of young people spread out over the camp to hunt down foreigners. One of the youngsters told Khupiso that he could ‘proudly say foreigners had decided to leave our area because they know what would happen to them if they are found. They would burn. Hell is waiting for them. We have stored some tyres’ (*Sunday Times* 26 July 2008).

The experiences of those who were displaced by the May 2008 attacks are instructive in terms of how difficult it is for foreign migrants to survive in their adopted country, South Africa. Francisco Nobunga, who fled the Ramaphosa shack settlement in Ekurhuleni during the attacks, returned to his dwelling and his South African born wife, Sylvia Nosento, but was killed three weeks later. He produced a South African identity document as demanded by his attackers but, fatally, it contained his Mozambican address (*The Star* 22 July 2008).

However, the problem does not rest solely with local communities. Some of the proposals made by academics and researchers to address xenophobia are cause for concern. An HSRC study, for example, called on the government to restrict RDP housing to South Africans and move foreign migrants to private accommodation or house them in temporary

accommodation in designated areas until they are able to move into private residences (HSRC 2008: 9-10). Rather than solving the problem, this is likely to lead to further ghettoisation of African immigrants as most are too poor to acquire private rental housing.

While South Africa has one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, the question is whether or not it provides protection for immigrants and refugees. In light of the xenophobic attacks, Nyamnjoh questioned the ‘purportedly liberal, South African constitution’ because it leaves little room for the rights of migrants, as citizenship is ‘defined narrowly around the rights, entitlements and interests of nationals .... [This] is clearly at variance with all claims that South Africa is building a “culture of human rights”’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 4041).

Nyamnjoh argues that instead of being protected, migrants are subjected to police brutality, deportation and violence from fellow South Africans. It may be argued that the problem in South Africa is that the creation of a culture of human rights requires massive funding to feed, house, provide health care and provide social grants to all South Africans, including immigrants, in a context of massive underemployment and a small tax base. While the obligation of citizenship has huge financial and legal implications, this is no comfort to those who are victims of xenophobic attacks.

## A Coalition of the Willing?

There is no magic wand to solve the problem of xenophobia against foreign Africans in South Africa. One important constituency in the fight against xenophobia is township residents who, while forming key social movements to unite in service delivery protests, also operate in an environment of scarce resources in which African migrants are seen as competitors. Strong xenophobic attitudes persist even amongst members of social movements. Noor Nieftagodien of the University of the Witwatersrand, for example, has recorded that the Alexandra Homeless Youth and Families (AHYF), an organisation that began as a radical voice in the struggle for housing, ‘began to direct their anger against local foreigners and vowed not to allow them in their houses’ (Nieftagodien 2008: 73).

Resentment against migrants is deep-seated. In June 2012, Songezo Mjongile, provincial secretary of the ANC in the Cape, told a journalist that

it was ‘unnatural that almost all shops in townships are owned by foreigners.... It creates tension.’ Loyiso Doyi, a member of a retailers’ association in Khayelitsha Township in the Cape felt that foreign nationals were parasites since they did not ‘empower locals as they employ their own. There are over 600 foreigner spaza shops in Khayelitsha. Can you imagine how locals could survive? They are killing locals’ (in Taylor 2012).

Pointing to these local developments and broader economic prescriptions, Trevor Ngwane observes that South Africa’s historically uneven economic development and the commodification of the basic essentials of life inherent in neoliberalism have intensified competition for scarce resources (2009).

For many ordinary South Africans, the citizenry of the country does not constitute all who reside within its borders, but those who reside in localised entities such as Diepsloot or Booysens Park. This is what they seek to defend. It is in these localised spaces that they want to exercise their economic and political rights and keep out ‘illegitimate others’. Foreign nationals have no guarantee of protection just because they have documents legitimising their stay in South Africa. Many township residents do not want to share the little they have with foreign nationals irrespective of whether they are legitimately or illegitimately in the country. Judging by various comments in the media and on call-in programmes on radio, their concept of citizenship is a normative one that should bestow on them the fruits of their decades-long struggle against white minority regimes - jobs, houses, basic services, education, amongst others. As Patrick Craven, spokesperson for the trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) stated:

The demons of violence and of xenophobia frequently appear in community service-delivery protests. While we must condemn such violence, especially the destruction and looting of foreign-owned businesses, schools and libraries, we must understand people’s frustration at the quality, or even absence, of basic services in poor areas (*Business Day Live* 30 May 2013).

While there are some counter-tendencies in civil society who assist foreign migrants in times of need, ‘the message of love and tolerance’ of these

organisations and the middle and upper classes who denounce xenophobic violence, ‘will have little traction’, if, as Suren Pillay (2011) points out, ‘it is not accompanied by a political struggle against structural violence that places vulnerable people in situations of poverty and inequality, and leads them, sometimes, to do awful things to each other.’

This brings us to workers who, like many township residents, believe that migrants are taking their jobs or reducing wages where jobs are available. Many Africans migrants are employed as low wage casual labour, some illegally. As Reitzes and Simpkins point out, ‘one reason why foreign migrants enjoy a competitive advantage is because their unprotected status makes them more exploitable’ (1998: 22). This brings foreign migrants into competition and conflict with organised labour as well as unemployed South Africans.

Organised labour should take seriously the idea of uniting with organisations of African immigrants in an anti-xenophobia movement to petition for the legalisation of African migrants who are illegally in the country in order to reduce the likelihood of them taking low paid work. Speaking at a seminar hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand’s African Centre for Migration and Society on 10 May 2013 to commemorate the May 2008 xenophobic violence, ZwelinzimaVavi, the (suspended at the time of writing) general-secretary of Cosatu, said that the exploitation of foreign workers by South Africa businesses and farmers was increasing xenophobic tensions.

Business is taking advantage of foreign nationals, especially illegal ones, to use them as a buffer against South African workers. This forces workers into a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of wages and working conditions. It creates insecurity and anger. Mass unemployment creates conditions for the demon of xenophobia, which we remember today, five years after the disgraceful episodes when worker fought worker, African fought African ....

Vavi insisted that problems such as xenophobia, corruption, and gender-based violence are rooted in unemployment, poverty, and inequality. He urged South Africans to stop blaming workers from other African countries for these problems and, instead, to work to address the ‘capitalist system of

production, distribution, and exchange' (Vavi 2013). The paradox in the post-apartheid period, which Vavi referred to, is that the economic policy adopted by South Africa opened borders to trade (but not to workers), which resulted in South African companies moving production to foreign countries where labour was cheaper. This led to the shedding of many manufacturing jobs.

Given that most migrants are not legalised and hence do not have access to basic services and grants, denying those who are deemed 'illegals' of the opportunity to earn a living may well exacerbate problems such as crime and violence. This is not to suggest that employers should disregard the law and illegally hire foreign migrants. Rather, it is time that the state finds creative solutions to the problem. One possibility is to legalise migrants and afford them the protection of labour legislation, and offer amnesty to long term residents.

There are precedents for such measures. At the beginning of the democratic transition, a flexible approach was taken on the question of South African citizenship. Migrant workers who entered South Africa legally before 13 June 1986 were regarded as 'ordinary residents' and received voter registration cards and South African IDs (Harris 2001: 22-23). Following the 1994 election, amnesty was granted to some foreign miners working on contract in South Africa, as well as Mozambican refugees living primarily in the rural areas of the country near the Mozambican border (Crush & Williams 1999: 2-3). This represented flexibility that went beyond indigeneity as a basis for citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

How should South Africans respond to xenophobia in the short term and close the gap between migrants and citizens? Writing about liminality, the anthropologist Victor Turner postulated that rather than focusing on the anxieties of those who appear to be neither 'here nor there', as appears to be the case with refugees and many migrants, liminality provides the possibility to reorganise society and therefore has potential for 'future developments and societal change' (1982:45). Sociologist Mathieu Deflem also observed that liminality provides observers and participants with an opportunity to 'reconsider their situation and undertake a revolutionary re-ordering of the

official social order,' including moral and legal rules, social structures, and individual roles (Deflem 1991: 11).

The key issue is whether, given the current socio-economic climate, this is possible or likely, or whether it is simply academic idealism. Is the scenario painted by Turner and Deflem a realistic possibility? There is a strong and powerful sentiment in the country that 'the law is the law' and that 'illegal is illegal'. Should laws be determined only by practical concerns or should humanitarian considerations influence decision-making? An approach that focuses solely on the 'law' will not resolve the crisis around foreign migrants in South Africa. At various points in South Africa's history, white women, Africans, Indians, Coloureds and those who did not own property were denied full citizenship rights. Yet they were eventually granted such rights. Granting undocumented or illegal migrants full citizenship may seem inconceivable at this point in time, but it should be remembered that laws are social constructions and attitudes can change.

While the presence of foreign migrants, legal and illegal, appears difficult to manage economically, politically, and socially, these individuals cannot be eradicated as a group. Several measures can be implemented. Landau, Polzer and Kabwe-Segatti suggest that in the short term, steps should be taken to 'strengthen local conflict resolution mechanisms such as conflicts over scarce resources, maintain respect for the rule of law and reduce vigilantism by effectively and publically prosecuting perpetrators, and supporting and monitoring accountable local leadership' (2010: 226).

However, such measures alone will not get to the root causes of the problem. Government needs to improve service delivery, as xenophobic attacks are often directly or indirectly related to frustration over poor service delivery. Xenophobia attracts support in poor, under-educated and economically stressed areas. In the comments made in the media by ordinary South Africans following xenophobic attacks, a point made repeatedly is that government only listens when people become violent; in other words, such attacks are an expression of popular democracy and the 'will of the people'. As Landau (2011: 3) puts it, the 'politically entitled by an economically deprived citizenry took on the obligation to alienate and exclude those standing in the way.'

Xenophobic attacks also demonstrate the need for government and even the private sector to conceive of programmes that address economic

deprivation and development in South Africa as well as in the region, as the country will continue to receive migrants and refugees fleeing neighbouring countries for political and especially economic reasons. This will continue to exacerbate existing tensions between ‘locals’ and foreign Africans, whether legal or illegal.

A final point to consider is that restricting immigration into South Africa is unlikely to solve a problem that is an international one, as witnessed in Mexicans’ attempts to enter the United States, Indonesians trying to enter Australia, Bangladeshis making their way to such faraway places as Brazil and South Africa, and North Africans trying to make their way to Europe. When over 400 people drowned in one week in October 2013 when the ships taking them to Europe capsized, the Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat made a plea: ‘We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a cemetery.’ The problem of illegal immigration is a consequence of global interactions affecting low wage workers everywhere, and is unlikely to be resolved at the national level while dominant global economic institutions are enthusiastic about the mobility of capital but not labour.

Like the poor and the marginalised of this new global world, xenophobia is going to be with us throughout the twenty-first century. Most organs of civil society are geared to mitigating its effects rather than ending xenophobia. Given the increasing unemployment rate and deepening inequality in South Africa, xenophobic attitudes are likely to persist and increase. The task of those confronting xenophobia is thus mainly a defensive one in order to prevent attitudes from turning into violence. In the short term, it is hard to see how to turn this around.

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# **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 neighbouring 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 where 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 Experience**

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 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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# **Crime, Fear of Crime, and Xenophobia in Durban, South Africa**

**Yasmeen Vahed**

## **Abstract**

Crime, violence, and a corrupt police force are some of the issues preoccupying South Africans in the contemporary period, judging from the work of fiction writers, media headlines, and websites of various policing forums. Xenophobia is another feature of contemporary South African society, with foreign nationals across South Africa subjected to on-going violent attacks, and perceived to be the cause of crime and fear of crime. This article examines these two issues, crime and xenophobia, in the context of Ward 33, a mixed income suburb in Durban, focusing on how residents and police view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community and the social, economic, and political factors shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals. This study found that demographic change, particularly foreign nationals moving into the neighbourhood, is one of the factors leading to greater levels of distrust and generating stereotypes (drug peddlers, prostitutes, unemployed foreigners / potential criminals) about newcomers. From a policing perspective, the crime threat is seen to emanate from urban decay and the presence of 'undesirable' elements, particularly foreign nationals. The narratives associate crime with race and nationality. The 'unpredictable stranger' remains the target of generalised as well as specific anxieties, for which there is no short-term solution. The significance of this study, focusing on middle class elements in society, is that xenophobia is not confined to a 'lunatic fringe' of South African society. Urgent government intervention is therefore needed at multiple levels to address the problem.

**Keywords:** fear of crime, policing, moral panic, Durban, violence

## **Introduction**

Crime, violence, and a corrupt police force are some of the issues that preoccupy South Africans in the contemporary period. The works of Anthony Altbeker and Jonny Steinberg, amongst others, address crime, policing and criminal justice in post-apartheid South Africa. Altbeker's best-selling works, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: A true story of murder and the miscarriage of justice* (2010), *The Dirty Work of Democracy* (2005), and *A Country at War with Itself* (2007), speak to issues of crime, violence, and policing in South Africa and how to address these problems, which resonates with ordinary South Africans. Jonny Steinberg's *Midlands* (2001), *The Number* (2003), and *Thin Blue* (2008) are award winning explorations of crime, violence, the police, and the judicial system in South Africa. The popularity of these works underscores the concerns of many ordinary South Africans regarding these issues.

Xenophobia is another feature of contemporary South Africa. A combination of the Greek words, *xenos* (foreign) and *phobos* (fear), the term 'xenophobia' is defined by most dictionaries as a 'hatred or fear of foreigners.' This manifested most violently in South Africa during May 2008 when more than 60 foreign nationals were killed and thousands more were displaced or subjected to mass looting and the destruction of their homes and businesses countrywide. While there has not been a repeat of these mass attacks, foreign nationals continue to be targeted in various ways. In 2011, for example, around 50 people were killed, 100 seriously injured and more than 1,000 displaced (Daily Maverick 31 May 2013). A 2012 survey found that 60% of South Africans believe that 'people from South Africa are superior to those from other parts of Africa' while 60% regarded themselves as South African but not African. Foreign Africans were also seen as robbing South Africans of jobs and being responsible for criminal activity. Eighty percent of those surveyed believe that foreigners are preferred to South Africans because they are prepared to work for lower wages while 55% believe that 'most criminals in South Africa are foreigners' (Kuper 2013).

In the week that I was writing this article (the end of May 2013), mainly Somali-owned shops were attacked and looted by residents in Diepsloot, Johannesburg and Booysens Park, Port Elizabeth. At least 15 shops were ransacked and two Somali nationals killed (*The Mercury* 31 May 2013). This article seeks to marry these two issues, crime and xenophobia, by

examining the perceptions of residents in Ward 33, Durban of whether and how foreign nationals are contributing to crime in the neighbourhood. Specific questions include: How do residents view the presence of foreign nationals in the local community? How do the police view foreign nationals? Are they seen as contributing to urban incivility and higher rates of crime? What are the factors shaping attitudes towards foreign nationals? (Bauman 2000). The first part of the article provides an outline of the study site, a brief explanation of the methodology employed and the extent of the fear of crime in the area (Hartnagel 1979); the second part focuses on attitudes towards foreign nationals and the relationship of these attitudes to crime.

## **Study Site**

Ward 33, the site of this study, comprises of three suburbs – Umbilo, Glenmore and Glenwood – which are diverse in terms of their residents. While parts of Glenmore and Glenwood would be classified as ‘middle class’, Umbilo is a largely working class or lower middle class area. Glenwood is one of Durban’s oldest suburbs, with colonial-style mansions higher up in the vicinity of the University of KwaZulu-Natal as well highly priced apartment blocks. The area has bustling business activity with the presence of the Glenwood and Davenport Centres and St. Augustine’s hospital. In the Bulwer, Ferguson, and Davenport Roads area, a number of homes have been converted into restaurants, boutiques, coffee shops, medical practices, and guest houses. Glenwood High, Durban Girls High, tree-lined streets, and parks all add to the image of order and affluence. There are many pedestrians and shoppers during the day.

Glenmore is located to the south of Glenwood, making it further from the Berea. The area comprises of free standing homes for middle to upper income people as well as cheaper priced apartment blocks. Unlike Glenwood, however, Glenmore does not have the same level of daytime retail business activity. Umbilo is a mainly middle to lower income suburb, further from the university and closer to the harbour area. The area has many free standing homes, which probably date to the 1940s and 1950s. Umbilo also lacks the daytime business activity of Glenwood and the homes and grass verges are not as well maintained. However, the area had / has many businesses, particularly factories, in the Umbilo / Sydney Road areas and this

adds to its feeling of being derelict and not as well maintained as Glenwood.

Respondents underscored the changing demographics of Ward 33 over the past two decades as a result of residential deracialisation and the influx of foreigners. These residents are not imagining demographic change. A comparison of the 2001 and 2011 Census figures shows that there has been significant change in Ward 33.

**Table 1: Population, Ward 33**

	2001	2011	Difference	% Change
Black African	7280	11525	+ 4245	+ 58.31
White	16455	11778	- 4677	- 28.42
Indian or Asian	2191	2659	+ 468	+ 21.36
Coloured	1078	1421	+ 343	+31.81
Other		298		
Total	27,003	27,681	+678	+2.5

Source: Census 2001 and 2011, Department of Statistics.

There has been a dramatic decline in the white population which dropped from 60.93% in 2001 to 42.54% in 2011. In contrast, the Black African population increased from 26.95% to 41.63% over the same period. This census data most likely does not take into account another change the presence of students during the academic year, who may not have filled out the census form, either due to tardiness or because their parents did so in their areas of residence, as well as foreign refugees and migrants. This ‘blackening’ of the ward is important because of the link that is often made between race and crime in the post-apartheid period (Letka 2008).

## **Methodology**

This study is based primarily on qualitative research methods which were deemed the most efficacious way to probe responses to the crucial questions outlined above. Key informants interviewed ( n=12)for this study included members of the police force and Community Policing Forums (CPF), as well as ordinary residents. In addition, I attended several meetings of the Umbilo CPF and took field notes. Qualitative research means different things to different people but in its most general sense it is ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible’. Such research may include the use of life stories, interviews, observation, case studies, visual texts, and so on. Together, these sources of information may be used to describe the ‘routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 4-5).

In research on fear of crime, qualitative techniques were originally employed by feminist researchers in the 1970s who felt that quantitative surveys failed to account for experiences such as sexual harassment and domestic violence. Qualitative methods allow researchers to get closer to the respondent’s point of view through ethnography and interviews. Qualitative researchers can also appreciate the constraints on the everyday lives of their subjects because their research focuses on the details of specific cases (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 17).

Qualitative research is, however, potentially problematic. It is not a neutral process because interviewers wield power over the process by interrupting informants by asking questions when they are speaking and even editing the recorded transcript, possibly to support their own arguments (Abrams 2010: 129). The assumption that the interviewer and interviewee have shared understanding of the questions asked and the responses given is not necessarily true, while interviewees may not provide an honest assessment of their feelings. As Gadd and Jefferson point out (2009: 132):

subjects are ... psychosocial subjects with a split consciousness, constantly unconsciously defending themselves against anxiety. This affects what and how anything is remembered, with painful or threatening events being either forgotten or recalled in a safely modified fashion; it also affects how such memories are

communicated to any interviewer, given that the context of the interview may be more or less threatening. At both stages, the act of remembering and the act of communication, meaning is rarely straightforward – and never wholly transparent. The interviewer too is a defended subject, and so the same applies; the meanings – of the questions asked and how answers are understood – will also be affected by the interviewer's dynamic unconscious with its own 'logic' of defensive investments.

Once the data are collected and analysed, the researcher has to interpret the material. Qualitative interpretations are then constructed. This interpretive practice is both 'artistic and political', as there is no single interpretive truth but rather 'multiple interpretive communities' (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 35).

Despite these potential problems findings can be tested for their reliability and validity. While qualitative studies do not use formalised sampling methods and the operational procedures used to assess validity and reliability in quantitative research have no corresponding operations for qualitative research (Trochim 2006), this is done through testing for transferability instead of external validity, dependability instead of reliability, and confirmability instead of objectivity (Golafshni 2003: 600-602). While a strong argument can be made that objectivity can never be achieved, validity can be determined by answering such questions as 'Are these findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implications? Would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them?'

Guba and Lincoln (2008: 271-275) identify several criteria of 'valid' inquiry: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to balance, that is, that all stakeholders' views, concerns, and perspectives are represented; ontological and educative authenticity refers to the raised level of awareness by individual research participants and by individuals with whom they come into contact; and catalytic and tactical authenticity refer to the ability of the research to prompt action on the part of the research participants and the ability of the researcher to provide training in particular forms of social and political action.

## **Crime and the Fear of Crime**

Crime Statistics for Ward 33 were obtained from the website of the Institute for Security Studies' Crime and Justice Hub at the website '<http://www.iss.co.za/crimehub/pgcontent.php?UID=1000205>'. The Institute has developed a 'crime map viewer' where information can be accessed on the different types of crimes that occur in specific localities. This data are gathered by recording the crime statistics for each police precinct within the country as recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS). This provides an opportunity to compare the different crime levels of police precincts for specific categories of crime as well as a means to compare the annual changes in specific crime categories since 2003. Statistics for Ward 33 are based on data recorded at the Umbilo Police Station. These statistics are for the whole area, thus making it impossible to distinguish between the three suburbs that make up Ward 33. If people from the area report their experiences of crime at other police stations, these might not be reflected in these statistics. Conversely, if people from other areas report crimes at Umbilo Police Station, these will be reflected in statistics for this ward. However, such instances are not expected to affect overall trends and the inferences that we draw from them.

The 'Ward 33 Crime Statistics 2005-2011', which run to several pages and cannot be included here, show that incidents of crime per 1,000 people for Ward 33 increased in cases of assault, sexual crimes, residential robbery, and carjacking (that decreased from 2009 to 2011); while they declined in cases of common assault, residential burglary, culpable homicide, general theft, murder, aggravated robbery, theft out of motor vehicles, common robbery, and attempted murder. Notwithstanding the statistics, interviewees are adamant that they are besieged by crime, in particular serious crimes such as carjacking, residential housebreaking, and street robberies. The perception that crime is rampant, and that white South Africans in particular are targeted, is a national phenomenon even though, as De Wet (2013) shows, 'the risk for rape, aggravated assault and robbery, as well as murder and attempted murder is considerably greater for the poor black township dweller than say, a rich white person.'

Why is the perception of rampant crime so strong if it is not supported statistically? To get to the heart of this problem we need to ask, as Hall *et al.* (1978: viii) do with respect to Britain: 'How has the 'law and

order' ideology been constructed? What social forces are constrained and contained by its construction? What forces stand to benefit from it? What real facts and anxieties is it mobilizing?' The role of the media (Heath & Gilbert 1996), police, and social networks suggests that, in addition to actual victimization, the construction of fear of crime has a social as well as a statistical or legal basis. According to Hall *et al.* (1978: 52), agencies of public significance such as the police and media do not simply 'respond to 'moral panics'. They are part of the circle out of which 'moral panics' develop. It is part of the paradox that they also, inadvertently, amplify the deviancy they seem so absolutely committed to controlling.' Information about criminal activity or potential criminal activity received through the media, social networks, government agencies, citizens' groups, and the police increases residents' perceptions of levels of crime in the neighbourhood and their anxiety over it. Such information, at the very least, reminds residents that being a victim of crime is very likely in the neighbourhood and that they should be aware of potential risks.

Aside from the media, marginality is another factor possibly generating fear. Criminal activity and reaction to it, does not occur in a vacuum. The relationship between the majority of respondents in this study and those perceived to be the cause of criminal activity has a long and acrimonious history that very likely has a bearing on present perceptions. Feelings of marginalisation among minority groups in South Africa around issues of politics, economics, sport, education, work, and so on are contributing to a general feeling of being 'under siege'. The moral panic around crime is part of a wider crisis of 'belonging' and should be seen in relation to insecurities which include personal anxieties as well as national and international concerns which, cumulatively, are producing 'anxiety which might find an outlet in crime talk' (Enders & Jennett 2009: 202-203). The root causes of the fear run deep and finding solutions is not as simple as beefing up physical security measures around homes.

While statistics may indicate that residents' perceptions of crime risk are not objectively warranted, does it really matter whether fear of crime matches the reality of crime? Many residents are so consumed by fear of crime that it is an everyday topic of conversation and even influences the kinds of preventative measures they are taking, including areas or persons to be avoided.

## **Foreign Nationals and Fear of Crime**

One of the factors associated with rising crime and fear of crime in the ward is the presence of foreign nationals. Mary, who has lived in the ward for several decades, related her experience of being a victim of crime:

Robbers came and broke into our house. You know, the 30 second thing before the alarm company comes and they just came, five of them, and smashed the doors down and grabbed everything and ran. This is three months ago. It was June [2012]. They came, smashed, got in, smashed the front door, tried to make off with everything, my laptop and tried to grab everything within the time but they were chased. We have a very strong neighbourhood watch in the area and they were chased by the neighbourhood watch.

In Mary's case, fear of crime resulting from victimization has resulted in her taking steps to reduce the likelihood of being a victim in the future. It subsequently emerged that the perpetrators of the crime were 'illegal immigrants'; she feels strongly that 'the issue of illegal immigration has to be clamped down on' as they are negatively impacting crime in the ward.

The role of foreign nationals in causing crime was also emphasised at an Umbilo CPF meeting on 12 November 2012 when Brad, a security consultant and guest speaker that evening, spoke of the nefarious influence of 'Nigerians and the like' in the ward, expressing xenophobic sentiments that reflect negative stereotypes widely held in the ward. When a member of the audience complained about the presence of a nightclub in the area, Brad said that every area had a similar nightclub with 'drug dealers and prostitutes' because the police were 'thinly stretched,' lacking the resources and 'courage to do anything, and the local security companies don't have the teeth to do the things we would like them to do - like raid these clubs or try and close down drug dealers.' The result is that 'foreigners have flooded in here. How are they making money? Out of drugs and buying stolen property ... [and] prostitution.'

Several interviewees complained that prostitution was rife in the ward and they linked this to crime. For example, Sarah said, 'I tell you right outside your gate, when I see them I see red [because] it definitely brings unsavoury characters into the area.' At the same CPF meeting, several

speakers linked prostitution to crime. As Brad explained,

These women have a drug dependency or alcohol dependency problem, so they attract the Nigerians, and all of a sudden you have got everybody attracted here just because of the prostitutes. If you get rid of the prostitutes I guarantee you, you will get rid of the rest of the bulk of the petty crime, because it all follows.

The literature does not point to a clear relationship between crime and prostitution. Some studies suggest that where prostitution is illegal it can result in increased crime and violence, and that there is a reduction in crime when it is legalised (Liberatory 2004). However, judging from the response of those who attended the CPF meeting in Glenwood, residents of Ward 33 as well as interviewees, view the presence of prostitutes as proof of the overall decline of the area into one that attracts unruly elements, including drug dealers. Such perceptions are contributing to the overall ‘moral panic’ about crime in the area.

Naomi, who moved to Durban from Cape Town in 2005, noted a significant ‘decline’ in the ward over the past six years. By ‘decline’, she was referring to an increase in ‘levels of crime and grime’ due to ‘a lot of, excuse me, Blacks moving into the area’ who are ‘not very worried about litter. You see them walking, and they are eating something and [they] throw it on the ground. When we first moved in here, it was so beautiful.’ With regard to crime, Naomi is convinced that ‘as much as the police say it’s not increasing, I don’t know whether it’s because we are so aware now that we are hearing about everything, but crime is definitely on the increase here in Glenwood.’ Naomi identified an area known to locals as ‘Whoonga Park’, situated under a bridge on a railway line where Che Guevara Road meets Maydon Road, as problematic:

They call it Whoonga Park, I think its Albert Park, I am not sure, under the bridge where the railway line is, down Moore Road, where you turn off to go to Maydon’s Wharf and to south coast, there are about 200 people that are there and they are all foreigners. And the amount of prostitution!!! It was in the Sunday Tribune. They call it Whoonga Park and, of course, that is where all the crime is. They run

there and they hide amongst the people and I have found that the crime, as much as the police say it's not increasing, I don't know whether it's because we are so aware now in the last year, two years that we are hearing about everything, but crime is definitely on the increase here. The police say it's not but I don't believe it.

Place is important in crime and criminal activity; within neighbourhoods, certain spaces are more prone to criminal activity and are usually avoided by locals (Eck & Weisburd 1995: 1). Warwick Chapman, former longtime Democratic Alliance (DA) councillor for the ward, provided another example:

About halfway up to the Berea Centre on your left hand side is a tiny little lane called Morans, it's one way, from Berea to Moore. And on the right hand side of Morans for almost the entire length is a park. Drive past it and hang your camera out of the window. It's a dumping ground. It's a taxi rank, it's a construction yard and when I say hang your camera out the window, hang it out carefully because there is also loads of undesirables hanging around. But it's worth having a look at that public open space. And then say to yourself what impact does that have on the local community? You know, you have got a couple of gangs living there, you have got foreign nationals there.

Councillor Chapman was concerned that gangs and foreign nationals are taking over parts of the ward, leading to the perception of urban decay and the collapse of 'law and order'. Academic research supports the notion that people feel confident and safe visiting certain places and associate other places with the threat of physical harm and avoid those even though criminal activity can take place anywhere (Wolfgang 1985). Locals usually avoid the places mentioned by Councillor Chapman and other informants. As noted, crime statistics, news reports, and word of mouth help to establish a psychological link between the likelihood of a crime occurring in a particular place and a person's fear of being a victim.

Visual cues based on a place's geography can influence perceptions of how bad crime is - or is not - in a neighbourhood. Areas that are densely

populated, have physically deteriorated, have a substantial number of transients, and contain ‘less-than-desirable’ commercial establishments are associated with high crime and deviant behaviour (Stark 1987: 894). According to our respondents, parts of Ward 33 fit this profile and cause them to associate the ward with crime. The ‘broken window’ thesis, as this perspective is known, argues that neighbourhoods characterised by decay generate fear of crime among residents and indicate to potential criminals that residents are unlikely to act in the event of criminal activity. Perceptions are important because people are less likely to walk in areas that they regard as unkempt and which are associated with danger, and more likely to walk in well maintained places. Outsiders also perceive such environments as dangerous and this fear has a snow-ball effect. Urban flight can lead to abandoned buildings which, in turn, in the opinion of residents, may attract more of the kinds of people that compound the crime problem. In this context, crime can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## **Policing and Foreign Nationals**

According to Captain Patrick of the Umbilo SAPS the arrival of foreign nationals, as refugees, migrants, and illegals, is affecting the demographics of the ward negatively as they are ‘not being housed properly and there is no proper structure to deal with them, they have also contributed to the crime.’ Warrant Officer Percy is also concerned about foreign migrants and refugees, and places the blame squarely on South African foreign policy:

If you look at our foreign policy it’s like the biggest detriment to this country because I don’t think there is any country in the world where they allow a person to come here seeking refugee status with no place to live. You understand, like in England if you apply for refugee status you get registered with the Home Affairs Department or whatever, they put you, they give you a subsistence to live that you will be able buy a loaf of bread and you will be able to live. Here, in South Africa, it’s like those pictures I showed you. Those are all foreigners. They all have got refugee status so that is a potpourri of people from all over Africa. So the only thing, the only recourse, they have got, they sell drugs and there is prostitution and

there are common petty crimes to feed themselves.

At the CPF Area 1 meeting on 4 October 2012, which I attended, Captain Marais of the Umbilo SAPS reiterated this discourse when he said that many foreigners were living in abandoned or partially demolished buildings in the area. They ‘steal anything to make a buck, be it copper or bins’. Unemployed and homeless, they ‘walk around all night scrounging in the bins for food’. From a police perspective, foreigners, whether refugees or migrants, and whether legal or illegal, are contributing to crime in the ward.

‘Whoonga Park’ presents special problems for the police. The park is named after whoonga, a local marijuana variant containing rat poison, HIV medication, heroin, crystal meth and detergents such as bleach or ammonia. Also known as Nyaope, this street drug came into widespread use in the townships of Durban around 2010. The park is seen as a key supply area. A front page report in *The Mercury* (23 May 2013), titled ‘Criminals go underground to flee through stormwater tunnels’, pointed out that criminals were using ‘an intricate web of storm-water tunnels extending for kilometres beneath Durban’ which they used to escape after committing crimes. The two metre high tunnels run from the Durban Harbour to the area known as Whoonga Park, near Albert Park. From there, the tunnel splits into three, with one stretching up Berea Road and the other two running through the lower Berea area. Further splits take the tunnels through to Umbilo and Glenwood. Police Inspector Eugene Msomi was quoted as saying that the police would inspect all the tunnels and find ways to close them to the public. Previous attempts to fence the tunnel openings failed as criminals jumped over the fences. Hoosen Molla, a senior manager at the Inner City eThekweni Regeneration and Urban Management Programme (iTrump), said that the tunnels could not be closed because of the need for stormwater flow. This made it impossible to prevent residents of Whoonga Park from using them for criminal activity. According to the newspaper report, while police were inspecting the tunnels, ‘South African and foreign nationals who live in Whoonga Park and appeared to be high on drugs, sang and shouted insults at the police and media.’

Xenophobic tendencies are apparent in the ward and often relate to being a victim of crime. Both Captain Patrick and W/O Percy pointed to what they viewed as an irony; Premhid pointed out that the foreign nationals

who are seen as a ‘problem’ rent accommodation from white landlords. ‘Who else is going to pay R5000-R6000, to stay in a scrawny old Umbilo house where you have got borer coming out of the floor, the place is all dilapidated?’ The same landlords, he added, belong to the Umbilo Business Forum (UBF), CPF, Umbilo Action Group (UAG) and other civic organizations that complain about crime, drugs and police inaction in the ward. It is unclear whether this is based on perceptions or fact, but the Captain felt that residents were contributing to problems for which they blame the police. At the CPF meeting on 4 October 2012, Captain Glen Eagle of the Umbilo SAPS made the same point.

Police work has a social and structural context, and at the present time there are strong feelings of xenophobia in the country at large. As noted earlier, xenophobia is a national problem in South Africa. Members of the police force are part of South African society and, as such, may not be immune to such prejudices. The fact that the police deal on an on-going basis with migrants and refugees may, in fact, exacerbate their prejudices (Hall *et al.* 1978: 49). Some commentators attribute the ‘barbaric’ incident on 26 February 2013 when a 26 year old taxi driver, Mido Macia, a Mozambican national, was handcuffed by police officers to their van and dragged several hundred metres through the streets of Daveyton, just east of Johannesburg to such prejudice. He was later found dead in police cells. Nine police officers have been charged for his murder. African National Congress (ANC) secretary-general Gwede Mantashe responded, ‘if you are a foreigner and killed in our country, it is xenophobic.’ In this case, the roots of xenophobia are to be found within the police force and not among Daveyton residents who offered their full support to the deceased and his family (Kuper 2013). Dennis Matusse of the International Community Unifiers (ICU) issued a statement that ‘actions like this from the police only helps to increase perceptions that lives of other Africans living in South Africa are cheap, thus fuelling Xenophobic attacks’ (ICU 2013).

Captain Patrick is adamant that the Daveyton killing was ‘a once off. You can interview the members, how they felt. And I’m telling you, this is a sorry incident.’ However, it is dangerous when police, without hard evidence, begin to see some part of the population, such as foreign migrants, as potential criminals and a threat to ‘law and order’ because this may determine who they focus on in their day-to-day policing functions. Police

have limited (hu)manpower and resources and, from their perspective, it makes sense to deploy these in areas where they are most needed. A focus on the so-called ‘problem’ group may result in more arrests within that group which, in turn, is likely to increase the crime statistics relating to that group and thus create a ‘crime wave’ around certain kinds of crimes or individuals. In this way, the police may inadvertently create the crime wave itself and through issuing these statistics, shape the general public’s attitude to and fear of crime (see Hall *et al.* 1998: 42). While CPFs are meant to bring the police and community closer together, because the ‘problem’ segment of the ward is not integrated into the local community, the gap between them and the police remains wide and the relationship is one of suspicion and fear.

## **Understanding Xenophobia**

Demographic changes in Ward 33, in the form of more Black people moving into the neighbourhood, and particularly the presence of foreign nationals, are amongst key factors leading to greater levels of anonymity and distrust in the neighbourhood and a feeling that the old order is collapsing, and is generating stereotypes (drug peddlers, prostitutes, unemployed foreigners / potential criminals) about newcomers. These mechanisms are one of the means by which residents categorise individuals and places to make sense of their world. As Sacco (2005: 135) points out:

Increases in levels of ethnic or racial heterogeneity contribute to a sense of discomfort on the part of the neighbourhood residents who feel that their neighbourhood is undergoing a decline. Dramatic increases in the number of ‘strangers’ make the environment seem less familiar and perhaps more threatening.... While it may be politically incorrect to express racist attitudes openly expressions of anxiety about crime and criminals are usually regarded as perfectly appropriate forms of public discussion.

There are many ‘threats’ to the neighbourhood from a policing perspective. Within the neighbourhood, the crime threat is seen to emanate from urban decay and the presence of ‘undesirable’ elements, particularly foreign nationals. As crime and word of crime is spread through various media,

residents' fear of crime increases (Lemanski 2006). The narratives associate crime with race. Although respondents tried not to couch their views in racial terms, the terms 'crime' and 'black crime' or 'foreigners' crime' sometimes appear to be synonymous. The movement of people across neighbourhood, provincial and national borders is likely to intensify in the future as social cohesion is seen to decline (Beauvais & Jenson 2002). In this era of great mobility, Farrall *et al.* (2009: 108) observe that, 'we have less direct knowledge about those around us,' and the 'unpredictable stranger' is the target of generalised as well as specific fears and anxieties. Across South Africa, the number of xenophobic attacks is increasing. In the local context, the term 'stranger' is increasingly associated with South Africans of colour and African foreign nationals.

Increasing xenophobic violence can be attributed to various economic, social, political, and historical factors. One view is that it is a protest against the ANC government's poor service delivery record, with citizens' anger directed at innocent foreigners (Alexander 2010). Another explanation is that foreign nationals are competing with the poorest of the poor South Africans and are seen to be taking away their jobs and life opportunities. The significance of this study, focusing as it does on middle class elements in society, is that xenophobia is not confined to a 'lunatic fringe' of South African society. Urgent government intervention is needed at multiple levels to address the problem.

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# **‘Voices from behind Bars’: Xenophobia and Foreign Nationals Incarcerated in a South African Correctional Centre**

**Shanta Balgobind Singh**

## **Abstract**

At the dawn of democracy in 1994 South Africa has re-integrated itself with the global community and many have embraced the long awaited constitutional freedom despite numerous challenges. Since its integration into the global community, South Africa has witnessed a surge in migration from the sub-continent in search of opportunities which the new democracy has to offer. This surge of foreign nationals within the country was accompanied by many of the ‘social evils’ that confront a new democratic state, one of which was the increase in the incarceration levels within correctional institutions. The recent spate of crimes, allegedly committed by foreign nationals in South Africa, has prompted some South Africans to blame crime in general on immigrants. This article is based on research that aimed to record the voices of foreign nationals at the awaiting trial section of Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa, on their perceptions and responses to crime and criminality in the country. The article takes a cue from national incarceration statistics which reveals that there is a high level of incarcerated foreign nationals within South African Correctional facilities. Data for this article was utilised from personally administered questionnaires and focus group discussions with incarcerated foreign nationals. Information from this research reveals that the reason for xenophobic violence is multifaceted and that foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system. Their experiences provide evidence that foreign nationals experience many

challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

**Keywords:** South African Correctional facilities, incarceration, criminal justice system

## **Introduction**

Although 1994 marked a peaceful transition in South Africa from a dictatorial and oppressive society to one of free democracy, in 2008 the world watched in shock as South African citizens attacked foreign nationals in different communities throughout the country. Xenophobia is not a new occurrence in South Africa. Xenophobic violence in South Africa has been increasingly brought under the media spotlight since 1994, yet there is a lack of empirical data that reliably discusses and debates the alleged involvement of foreign nationals, in the rise of the national crime rates. South Africa's crime levels, escalating unemployment and the alleged abuse of social services, are repeatedly blamed on foreigners. Such allegations are difficult to prove but contribute to serious strain between South African citizens, law enforcement agents and foreigners. The rise of xenophobia cannot be isolated from the country's apartheid past of racial and class division and hostility, racist immigration policies, a siege mentality and attitudes of exclusivity and superiority towards the rest of Africa. Equally it cannot be isolated from new migration streams, legal and irregular, to post 1990 South Africa (Crush *et al.* 2008). Post 1994 the number of documented and undocumented foreign migrants from all parts of Africa increased tremendously.

Drawing on annual statistics from the Department of Correctional Services concerning foreign detainees within the South African Correctional facilities, this research article reflects on the extent to which foreign nationals have exposed dangerous levels of xenophobia among many South Africans. The main aim of this article is to record the voices of foreign nationals who are awaiting trial at the Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa, on their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality. It seeks to document the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial, in order to add their voices to the debate on crime, migration and xenophobia in South Africa. Their experiences provide evidence that

foreign nationals experience many challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

## **Research Methodology**

Research for this article began in 2008 when there were strong xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa. This study was conducted at the Awaiting-Trial section of Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre, Durban, South Africa. Data for this article was gathered through three methods: firstly, in April 2008, questionnaires were administered to a sample of a hundred awaiting trial detainees. Secondly, observations and group discussions (groups of approximately twenty-five) were conducted with the detainees in order to record their personal stories and describe their experiences as foreign nationals who have come into contact with the South African criminal justice system. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used in order to ascertain the various problems experienced these detainees within the correctional centre. Detainees were asked various questions which were thought to be significant to them as foreigners', some of which were: their reasons for coming to South Africa; their length of stay in the country; whether they entered the country legally; alleged crimes that they were incarcerated for; reasons for the commission of offences and against whom were the alleged crimes committed. Thirdly the principle researcher conducted individual interviews with foreign nationals. Interviews, both telephonic and personal were conducted on several occasions with correctional officials after arrangements were made with them. Officials were cooperative and provided the researcher with detailed information concerning the incarceration of foreign nationals within the correctional institution. The data was captured in the form of transcribed taped interviews and extensive field notes. Voluntary participation in the research was communicated to inmates prior to the interviews. Detainees were required to sign a consent form before participation in the research.

The awaiting trial section, Medium A of Westville Prison was constructed in 1986, at the time of the establishment of the penal institution, and is the biggest awaiting trial centre in KwaZulu-Natal. Medium A has 21 units of which C 1-6 housed awaiting trial foreign national detainees. These units were designed to accommodate approximately 25 people but

accommodated 70-80 (300% overcrowded). This research was administered within in the courtyard of C1-6, an area that housed only foreign nationals who were awaiting trial. At the time of the research, (April 2008), there were approximately 400 awaiting trial foreign detainees in the correctional centre. The total number of awaiting trial inmates at the Westville Prison, of all nationalities was approximately 4000.

Foreign nationals awaiting trial at the Westville Correctional centre were informed about the study by correctional officials and the researcher. One hundred questionnaires were administered to foreign national detainees but only forty-seven questionnaires were returned.

Analysis of the biographical data revealed that five detainees were between the ages 18 to 20 years, 19 between the ages of 21-25 years, 13 between 26-30 years, 9 between 31-35 years and 1 was over 36 years. All were Black African male detainees. Twenty one were from Mozambique, 8 from Tanzania, 5 from Zimbabwe, 4 from Nigeria, 3 from the DRC, 2 from Burundi and 1 each from Malawi, Zanzibar, Cameroon and Kenya. Interestingly enough, 4 had South African citizenship yet they were incarcerated as foreign nationals because of their country of birth. Although the first language of only one detainee was English, most of them spoke the language fluently.

Fifty-two were single, 15 married, 11 widowed and 6 divorced. Six had primary school education, 24 high school education, 5 tertiary education, 9 an unknown foreign qualification and 3 no education at all. Thirty-eight were employed before being detained and 9 were unemployed. Thirty-one migrated to South Africa in search of jobs and a better life, 9 because of political problems in their country, ‘home problems due to politics’, because ‘the trouble is bad in my country’ and ‘for protection’, 4 because they had family in the country and 3 in order to study.

Six were in South Africa for less than a year, seventeen for between 1-5 years and twenty-five for more than 5 years. Twenty four entered South Africa legally and 23 illegally. Fourteen came to South Africa under political asylum, ‘for protection’, and ‘because of trouble in their country’, and 33 were for other reasons. Focus group discussions revealed that 7 of the interviewees lived in South Africa for a long period, more than 8 years, 2 for four years, 1 for 3 years and two for less than a year. Three were asylum seekers whereas others came to South Africa ‘seeking greener pastures’.

## **Contextualisation of Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

The term 'xenophobia' is defined in the dictionary, as a 'hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture' (Collins English Dictionary, 1991, p.1775). A foreign national is defined by The Free Dictionary as 'a person present in a country who does not currently have the right to permanent residency of that country'. There are various types of foreigners that live in South Africa, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and immigrants. According to the White Paper on International Migration (1999: 52) an immigrant is defined as 'those who enter another country in order to make one's permanent life and home there'.

Foreign nationals, whether documented or undocumented, are often considered as an associated category of 'illegal aliens'. 'Illegal aliens' have been accused of 'taking the jobs of locals, lowering wages, increasing crime and spreading diseases' (Maharaj & Rajkumar 1997: 267), and, as a consequence, have become targets of resentment, hostility, and verbal and physical abuse. In line with this xenophobic debates exist around this category and form the basis for hatred, disagreement and hostility between South African citizens and foreigner nationals.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2009), violence against foreign nationals did not begin with the May 2008 attacks. Since 1994, hundreds of people have been harassed, attacked, or killed because of their position as outsiders or non-nationals. For many within and outside of government, earlier attacks were an unfortunate but largely unimportant consequence of South Africa's rapid social transformation and incorporation into the worldwide economy. Furthermore IOM (2009) reveals that there are three ways of understanding the May 2008 attacks:

there is the official definition of crime, which constructs the May violence as criminal; there is a social construction of crime, which sees foreign nationals as criminals and attacks against them as a form of social-law enforcement. Building on the perception that foreigners are an inherent social and political threat, the most nefarious perspective codes the May attacks as a form of control; a legitimate

form of vigilantism designed to protect the South African national territory.

Over the past nineteen years different political parties reacted to the influx of foreign nationals in South Africa. Attempts to stereotype foreign nations became more prevalent and the following responses from South African officials will confirm. For example in 1994 the Zulu-based Inkata Freedom Party (IFP) threatened to take ‘physical action’ if the government failed to respond to the apparent crisis of undocumented migrants in South Africa. In the same year the IFP leader and Minister of Home Affairs affirmed in a parliamentary speech:

if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring in South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme (allAfrica.com 2008:2).

In 1995 a statement from the Conference of Southern African Bishops attests:

there is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country .... One of the main problems is that a variety of people have been lumped together under the title of ‘illegal immigrants’, and the whole situation of demonising immigrants is feeding the xenophobia phenomenon.

In 1997 Defense Minister Joe Modise connected the concern of undocumented migration to the increase of crime in South Africa. In the same year Minister Buthelezi claimed that ‘illegal aliens’ cost South African taxpayers ‘billions of rands’ (allAfrica.com 2008:2-3). In November 2000 appalling images of police violence and abuse against three ‘illegal’ Mozambican immigrants was portrayed on national and international news. (Crush 2001:1).

In 2002 former Director-General of Home Affairs, Billy Masetsha commented on migrants involvement in criminal activities in the following way:

Approximately 90 per cent of foreign persons who are in RSA with fraudulent documents, i.e. either citizenship or migration documents, are involved in other crimes as well ... it is quicker to charge these criminals for their false documentation and then to deport them than to pursue the long route in respect of the other crimes that are committed (IOM 2009).

In February 2008 police were accused of promoting xenophobia after a search on the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. Cardinal Napier confirmed: 'the police action was entirely inappropriate, uncalled for and an unwelcome manifestation of xenophobia. It is not how refugees should be treated' (Swart 2008:4). In 2008 there were numerous incidents of xenophobic violence characterised by assaults on foreigners and the destruction of their possessions (Swart 2008:4).

On the 7 June 2013, five years after the 2008 co-ordinated attacks exploded across South Africa, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) said that xenophobia attacks in South Africa have not ended (Cote 2013). Cote said the reason xenophobia ended was because nothing had really been done to end the attacks, or begin the healing process.

Even more disturbing is the government's denial of the real threat of xenophobia. Hate crime legislation, which would prioritise such crimes, has been languishing in committees for years.

## **Legislation Governing Migration in South Africa**

Immigration policy during the 1990s must be contextualised within South Africa's political transition from apartheid to democracy, which is, from an authoritarian state legislated on racism, to a democracy governed by constitutional equality. By and large hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of immigrants have crossed into South Africa over the past two decades to share in the promise of a new and vibrant nation. Official estimates on the number of undocumented immigrants living illegally in South Africa vary widely, ranging from less than one million to 12 million (Murray 2003:445). The major piece of legislation governing migration policy in South Africa is the Aliens Control Act, enacted in 1991 and consolidated into one piece of

legislation a number of provisions regulating entry and residence (Peberdy & Crush 1998: 33).

As a direct consequence of political change, two groups of people crossing borders for political reasons, namely, returning exiles and refugees became central to South African politics. The development of institutional measures to deal with returning exiles resulted in the simultaneous development of instruments to recognise and accommodate refugees. (Harris 2001:24-25). Although the early 1990s were marked by political change, and institutions such as the UNHCR were admitted to South Africa, immigration policy was generally manipulated by the apartheid state in a bid to 'entrench the policies of the past and set the parameters within which reform and reconstruction would take place' (Peberdy & Crush 1998b:33). Peberdy and Crush (1998b) explain that the 'apartheid government introduced its only major piece of immigration legislation, the Aliens Control Act, as recently as 1991' (33). This act

consolidated the numerous acts controlling the entry and lives of immigrants into a single omnibus piece of legislation. Many of the act's provisions were inherited from existing legislation, which had been passed by governments of the apartheid and pre-apartheid eras to serve racial and other imperatives and to extend the absolute powers of the state, unfettered by democratic checks and balances. The act also entrenched the 'two gates' policy, which distinguished between white immigrants and black migrants. Section 41 retained the exemption clauses, that allowed white farmers and the mining industry, to recruit migrant labour outside the country under special dispensation (Peberdy & Crush 1998b: 33 - 34).

Often hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999).

The Aliens Control Act of 1991 ensured that racism remained entrenched within immigration policy. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, the act maintained racism during the early 1990s and guaranteed that the alien remained a black alien across that period. Secondly, it formed the basis for the 1995 Aliens Control Amendment Act. Despite certain amend-

ments to the 1991 Act, contemporary immigration policy has been built on a racist foundation (Peberdy & Crush 1998b). The 'serious questions' surrounding the Aliens Control Amendment Act of 1995 have resulted in the development of three legislative instruments to redress immigration in contemporary South Africa. These are The Green Paper on International Migration (1997), The White Paper on Refugees (1998) (enacted in April 2000), and The White Paper on International Migration (1999). The Green Paper challenges the existing focus on 'control and expulsion rather than facilitation and management implicit in previous immigration policy' (3). It suggests that migration is managed and planned, rather than reactive, and it offers a human rights-based alternative to the racism contained in the Aliens Control Amendment Act of 1995 (Harris 2001:26).

The White Papers on Refugees (1998) and International Migration (1999) have both developed out of the Green Paper on International Migration (1997). However, in the process of their development, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has made various amendments to the recommendations of the Green Paper. These amendments have been criticised for being conservative and punitive (Cooper 1999; Williams 1999). Cooper (1999) contends that Home Affairs is becoming increasingly hard-lined about foreigners. She explains that the institution has adopted a strong sovereignty principle of governance in favour of international and constitutional emphasis on individual human rights (Cooper 1999). The potential for human rights abuses is strong within both White Papers. This is because the legislation imbues the Department of Home Affairs with vast administrative powers, powers that multiply the potential for corruption and bribery because there is not a democratic system of control over the granting of status in the country, as either a refugee or a legal immigrant or migrant (Harris 2001:26). The legislation also locates responsibility for surveillance and control of foreigners within the hands of the public. It enlists public participation in the 'detection, apprehension and removal of "illegal aliens"' (Williams 1999a:2).

## **Foreign Nationals Incarcerated in South African Correctional Facilities**

In February 2013, Correctional Services Minister Sbu Ndebele (Ndebele

2013) said that South Africa has the highest prison population in Africa. Ndebele was speaking at a meeting with senior leadership of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union and the Public Servants Association of SA in Pretoria. He stated that currently South Africa is ranked ninth in the world in terms of prison population, with approximately 160 000 inmates. Of this figure at least 30% of those detained were awaiting trial. Ndebele indicated:

That our offender population has remained constant, whether you remove pass laws, group areas, or apartheid laws, should make us search more urgently for answers to the high prison population in South Africa.

Drawing on available statistics from the Department of Correctional Services for the year February 2011 indicates that South Africa had a total prison population of 162 162, of which 112 467 had been sentenced, while 49 695 were awaiting trial. Foreign nationals, of whom the majority were Zimbabweans and Mozambicans, made up 8 580 of inmates. A total of 4 868 of these nationals had been sentenced, while 3 712 were waiting to be sentenced. The inmates were being held in 243 facilities operated by the Department of Correctional Services. The average cost of keeping each of these inmates behind bars costs the taxpayer R123.37 daily (Department of Correctional Services 2012).

According to Correctional Services Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula (2011) South Africa shares its land borders with six other states in the region, but by far the majority of foreign nationals serving time in its prisons come from just two of them - Zimbabwe and Mozambique. A written reply by Correctional Services Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula to a parliamentary question on the 26 June 2011, states that more than two-thirds (67.5%) of foreign sentenced inmates come from these two countries. Of this total, 1 913 come from Zimbabwe, and 1 449 from Mozambique. There are a further 3 931 foreigners in prison awaiting trial, a group correctional services refers to as 'remand detainees'. Of this total, 1 887 are Zimbabweans, and 916 come from Mozambique. In contrast, 605 sentenced offenders come from Lesotho, 100 from Swaziland, 11 from Namibia and 10 from Botswana. There are also 426 Nigerians behind bars, of whom 184 are sentenced offenders and 242 in the awaiting-trial category (Nqakula: 2011).

Between 1990 and 2004 Mozambicans had the most number of deportations than any other foreign national group (Department of Home Affairs, 2004-2005). At the end of December 2006 the number of Zimbabwean migrant deportations increased tremendously, approximately 80 000 (Department of Home Affairs 2006).

An important and interesting piece of information that emerged from the research interviews conducted with awaiting trial detainees at the Westville Correctional Centre in 2008 was that xenophobia was prevalent even within the correctional facility. It was learnt that prior to 2006, foreign inmates were incarcerated together with South African inmates. But there were periodic fights between South Africans and foreigners incarcerated detainees. In 2006 there was a major violent confrontation between the South African and foreign detainees where both foreign and local inmates were stabbed. One of the reasons postulated for the rift between South Africans and foreigners within the correctional facility was the perception that foreigners have money and they are involved in gang activities. The South African detainees also felt that the presence of foreigners in their communities was the main reason challenging their economic and physical well-being. They perceived foreigners to be criminals; troublemakers; threats to their livelihoods and carriers of diseases.

Thus since 2006 because of the xenophobic behaviour displayed by South African detainees, the decision was taken to house foreign nationals and the South African detainees awaiting trial in separate sections of the correctional institution. Discussions with correctional officials (3 of them) stated that overcrowding was a serious problem and often severely short staffed, which negatively impacted on the efficient running of the facility. Interestingly enough, the correctional officials in charge of the foreign nationals stated that although inmate on inmate violence was a common occurrence, this section (awaiting trial – foreign nationals) was one of the least problematic sections. The ones consisting of adult South African males were by far the most problematic. One official stated that in the 15 years that he has been working for correctional services, it was the first time that he encountered researchers who were interested in research pertaining to foreign nationals.

During the interviews conducted with foreign detainees at the awaiting trial section in April 2008, it was learnt that the awaiting trial cells

accommodated three times the number of inmates for which they were designed. There were up to 75 inmates in cells that were designed for only 25. Inmates slept in toilets with neither sponges nor lights. They were locked at 2 p.m. and unlocked at 7.30 am— keeping them confined to their cells for more than 17 hours of the day in close proximity to each other with no air flow and with the use of only one toilet and one shower per cell. Overcrowded conditions in the South African correctional facilitate allows an easy spread of communicable diseases among inmates, of which HIV/AIDS has become the most problematic.

The tables below represent the increase in the number of foreign nationals in South Africa's Correctional Facilities over a six year period; i.e. 2006-2011. Detainees were classified in accordance with 5 categories of crime committed, namely economical- some of which are commercial crimes, shoplifting, fraud, etc.), aggressive (of which murder, assault, robbery etc. are included), sexual (some of which are rape, sexual offences, prostitution indecency, etc), narcotics (which includes drugs, possession of drugs, driving under the influence of alcohol, etc) and other (which includes all crimes not mentioned elsewhere within the crime categories stipulated by the Department of Correctional Services).

### **Representation of Incarcerated Foreign Nationals in South African Correctional Facility 2006-2011**

**Table 1: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2006**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	670	1278	<b>1948</b>
Aggressive	755	1416	<b>2171</b>
Sexual	146	228	<b>374</b>
Narcotics	236	400	<b>636</b>
Other	137	312	<b>449</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1944</b>	<b>3634</b>	<b>5578</b>

**Table 2: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2007**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	733	1288	2021
Aggressive	852	1393	<b>2245</b>
Sexual	139	181	<b>320</b>
Narcotics	222	424	<b>646</b>
Other	204	233	<b>437</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2150</b>	<b>3519</b>	<b>5669</b>

**Table 3: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2008**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	881	1415	<b>2296</b>
Aggressive	1117	1458	<b>2575</b>
Sexual	164	181	<b>345</b>
Narcotics	293	434	<b>727</b>
Other	320	719	<b>1039</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2775</b>	<b>4207</b>	<b>6982</b>

**Table 4: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2009**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1294	1700	<b>2994</b>
Aggressive	1629	1719	<b>3348</b>
Sexual	267	231	<b>498</b>
Narcotics	260	512	<b>772</b>
Other	328	271	<b>599</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3778</b>	<b>4433</b>	<b>8211</b>

**Table 5: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2010**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1294	1700	<b>2994</b>
Aggressive	1629	1719	<b>3348</b>
Sexual	267	231	<b>498</b>
Narcotics	260	512	<b>772</b>
Other	328	271	<b>599</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3778</b>	<b>4433</b>	<b>8211</b>

**Table 6: Foreign Nationals Crime Categories- 2011**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>Unsentenced</b>	<b>Sentenced</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economical	1385	1845	<b>3230</b>
Aggressive	1549	1899	<b>3448</b>
Sexual	239	246	<b>485</b>
Narcotics	294	560	<b>854</b>
Other	245	318	<b>563</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3712</b>	<b>4868</b>	<b>8580</b>

**Table 7: Total number of crimes committed by Foreign Nationals (Sentenced and Unsentenced): 2006-2011**

<b>Crime Categories</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Economical	1948	2021	2296	2994	2994	3230
Aggressive	2171	2245	2575	3348	3348	3448
Sexual	374	320	345	498	498	485
Narcotics	636	646	727	772	772	854
Other	449	437	1039	599	599	563
<b>Total</b>	<b>5578</b>	<b>5669</b>	<b>6982</b>	<b>8211</b>	<b>8211</b>	<b>8580</b>

The above tables, 1 to 6, illustrate the inmate composition of foreign nationals both sentenced and unsentenced by the Department of Correctional Services for the various crime categories in the years 2006 to 2011. Of this population 43, 26% were awaiting trial and 56, 74 % sentenced. The tables reveal that there has been a 54% increase in foreign national inmates, (sentenced and uncentenced combined) for the period 2006 to 2011. The sentenced inmate population increased by 34% and the unsentenced (awaiting trial) by 91% for the same period. Due to the fact that this article records the voices of awaiting trial inmates on their perceptions and responses to crime and criminality in the country, the statistics for this segment of the correctional inmates will be focused upon.

The records from awaiting trial inmates detained for alleged offences for aggressive, economical<sup>1</sup>, narcotics and sexual acts indicate that these offences has steadily increased from 2006 to 2011. Inmates held in relation to crimes of a violent or aggressive nature (unsentenced) is consistently the highest and accounts for more than 45% of the foreign national awaiting trial inmate population. This is followed by sexual and economical offences which accounted for 49% and 43% respectively for the year 2011.

If the total foreign national inmate population, i.e. sentenced and unsentenced, are analysed, inmates held in relation to aggressive offences account for approximately 40% followed by economical offences ,38% ; narcotics 10% and sexual, 6%. This has important implications for correctional centre management and security classification of inmates. The implications of the increase of these statistics on understanding xenophobic attacks are important because it indicates the relationship between crime and foreign nationals in South Africa.

## **The Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

The subsequent results are reported in the arrangement of the written survey and will be supported by answers from the focus group discussions where appropriate. In the justification that follows, the analysis will be an

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘economic’ and ‘economical’ are used interchangeably in this paper as the department of correctional services has a category termed ‘economical’ yet the current scholarly usage is ‘economic.’

integration of both the responses to the survey and group discussions. The inmates direct spoken responses will be presented in Italics. It is of vital importance to demonstrate the findings in this manner, so that the voices of the foreigner nationals could be ‘heard’ and the fundamental meanings in the communication analysed. Data will be further categorised according to three main themes that emerged from the information. Voices of the inmates bring various aspects regarding xenophobia, access to justice, drug peddling and their vulnerability as inmates within the South African justice system to the fore.

When detainees were asked the reason for their incarceration and the alleged offences that they were awaiting trial for, the response were as follows:

**Table 8: Alleged Offences Committed by Foreign National Detainees**

<b>Offence</b>	<b>No Of Detainees</b>
Theft/Damage to Motor Vehicle	14
Robbery/Housebreaking	12
Drugs	5
Fraud	4
Assault	4
Rape	2
No Crime	6

The response to this question revealed that 16 (34%) were awaiting trial for aggressive offences including robbery and assault to cause grievous bodily harm. A further 18 (38%) were in prison for economic offences such as theft, housebreaking and fraud; five (11%) for narcotics related offences such as drug consumption and drug trafficking; and two (4%) were awaiting trial in prison for sexual offences such as rape. Six (13%) alleged that they did not commit any offence. Not one of them was awaiting trial for murder.

**Table 9: Reason for the Commission of the alleged offence by Foreign Nationals Detainees**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No Of Detainees</b>
Claim to be innocent	28
Better life/Money	9
Misunderstanding	3
Mental Illness	1
No Response	6

Table 9 represents the reasons given by the inmates for the alleged offences. Sixty percent of the detainees claimed to be innocent. Reasons given for this claim were various. Some of the comments made seemed like a passionate appeal to me to understand and believe in their reasons and disclosure for being detained. One detainee said to me:

I did not commit the crime but wonder why I am in jail because I didn't even commit the crime. I just pray to God that you take me out of here. Thank you to see you people and just explain my problem to you.

## **Treatment of Foreign Nationals by the South African Criminal Justice System**

Comments made by the respondents on their treatment by the justice system and their alleged crimes shows that often the problems of the social ills of housing settlements, i.e. crime, unemployment and lack of housing have all been attributed to foreign nationals. Thus the foreigner has becomes a scapegoat for antagonism and violent behavior.

One respondent said:

I did not commit the crime but the policeman abused us foreigners because I was just sitting down with my friends and just talking stories suddenly the police came and arrested us.

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Another stated:

I did not commit the crime but the guy who complained and said I robbed him, he paid money to police and they came and arrest me in my house. When I tried to ask them they say I have nothing to say but I will explain everything to the court.

I was walking on road about 5 am, the time I went to help my brother at the garage so from now I don't know what my charge is. Its 7 months until now I'm still in prison.

It's not true. Another Indian man did it. He was my friend. When it was done he pointed me to be the one who did it alone to such circumstances that police pick whoever is there that's why I'm here.

When the detainees were asked if they had any other comments to make, a heartfelt appeal was extended to me:

Only one thing I can just tell you, is that us foreigners we are being too much abused here in South Africa without causing any problem. I thank you to come for visiting me.

Please I use this opportunity tell everyone to treat we foreigners as same brothers and sisters because most of us suffer innocently without being proved. All my valid document are with me to prove but they refuse to listen to me because they view all Nigerians as thieves which is unfair and they should not delay to take any illegal back to their country please here is suffering for nothing waiting to be deported. South African justice is totally against foreigners. We are always taken for granted.

Foreigners have been treated unfairly. Bails have been denied for no reason. Even if you have completed all the requirements which allows one to be granted bail. If really foreigners are committing crime, I will suggest that the government itself is to be blamed,

because they do not take seriously issues of foreigners in this country.

## **Vulnerability of Foreign Nationals**

Some detainees said that they resorted to crime for food and for a better life,

'because for money for food'. Because South African way of living is very different and even with my standard of education to get employment is impossible so I have to resort to crime

My God Jehovah knows from my heart that I did not commit the crime. I went to home affairs with my passport and the person that stand for me and get me my papers and work permit to work through registration. Because it was not done according to our region I got arrested.

When detainees were asked against who was the alleged crime committed, 61,7% stated that it was committed against a South African, 21,28% against another foreign national or illegal immigrant and 17% gave no response. 8,5% indicated that they worked for a syndicate and 91,5 indicated that they did not work for any syndicates. Some comments were:

I committed the crime with a group of Mozambicans and a group of South Africans. The people who committed the crime were South African, but I was driving the car.

When the detainees were asked if they were in prison before, 32% responded in the affirmative and 61, 70% in the negative. The remainder gave no response. Seventy two percent of the detainees were within the correctional institution for more than 12 months. According to South African Immigration law a foreign national is only allowed to stay for 30 days awaiting trial. From the above it is evident that this is not the policy. The average they are kept for was over 12 months.

## **Foreign Nationals used as ‘scapegoats’**

In keeping with the questionnaires and the group discussions, 4 of the interviewees said that they were framed for the crime, viz, the Nigerians involved in drugs. The foreign national prisoners experienced xenophobia, especially from police officials. One stated:

I want to say that in South Africa the police have intimidation on the Nigerians-they want to put the Nigerians inside. There are a lot of people here who didn't do anything. It's not proper, it's not right.

While detainees are subjected to and become vulnerable to human rights abuses, one of which is being housed in overcrowded correctional cells, interviews conducted with awaiting-trial detainees revealed that when apprehending suspected foreigners, police personnel had assaulted them and extorted money.

One interviewee spoke about the manner in which he was used as a scapegoat for drugs.

Because of hatred, they hate us. I am not the first one here for any reason. They charge you because you are a Nigerian-you have drugs/sell drugs-put drugs in the house, pocket. Police make different dockets- with wrong information-so that it's difficult in court to prove otherwise.

A demand from an interviewee was:

I don't know if you people can help us-Some of our Nigerians have not committed any crime-we didn't do anything-the cops are using the opportunity-they come to you asking for money. If you don't give them money they will just say that you have to suffer. They put their hands in their pocket-I don't know where they are getting the drugs because everyone know that the Nigerians are dealing in drugs, that's why they are using the opportunity to treat us bad. They think that this person is a dealer.

In light of the above statements which document the voices of detained foreign nationals it sheds insight into the perceptions of foreigners contributing to the level of crime and xenophobia in South Africa. According to Peberdy (1999: 296) African foreigners are linked to chaos and disorder. They are also presented as illegal and therefore, as criminal. This suggests that the depiction of African migrants as 'illegals', 'illegal aliens', and 'illegal immigrants' implies both criminality and difference. The persistent use of 'illegals' to describe undocumented migrants suggests a close connection with crime and criminal acts. The SAPS (South African Police Service) also provide the number of 'illegal aliens' arrested in crime swoops, or stop and search operations. Although these figures may improve the arrest rates of the SAPS, the conflation of arrested criminals and arrested undocumented migrants creates forged links between crime and undocumented migrants. Just as African foreigners are criminalised and tainted, so xenophobia is presented as a contaminant in South African society. It appears as an unstoppable and irrational fear or plague, sweeping across the country. Through metaphors of disease, floods and the laager mentality, xenophobia is pathologised. That is, it is represented as a pathology, as something abnormal and unhealthy (Harris 2002: 10).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article reflects on the extent to which foreign nationals have exposed dangerous levels of xenophobia among many South Africans. This article records the voices of foreign nationals on their perceptions and responses of crime and criminality at the Medium A, Westville Correctional Centre in Durban, South Africa. It documents the experiences of foreign nationals awaiting trial, in order to add their voices to the debate on crime, migration and xenophobia within South Africa. Hostility towards foreigners has become one of the most significant features within South African society. The eruption of xenophobic attacks in South Africa during May 2008 was some of the most horrendous action of crime against mankind. Whether in South Africa, or any other part of the world, xenophobic violence is destructive. Although the criminal justice system in South Africa has accomplished much considering the challenges it has faced since 1994, violent crime still remains one of the biggest challenges that it faces and

responses to crime are strongly determined by the attitudes and mechanisms of the Criminal Justice System. The increase in the crime rate in South Africa since 1994 is more often than not blamed on immigrants, without any justifiable proof. Over 5-10 million immigrants in South Africa are judged by the criminal acts of a small number of immigrants who are almost constantly working with South Africans to commit crime. The perpetual negative stereotyping of foreign nationals in the South African media and from popular public figures as 'drug peddlers', 'hijackers', 'violent criminals', and 'job stealers', fuels the negative perceptions and victimisation of foreigners.

This research has shown that in order to combat crime effectively, it is essential to identify and acknowledge the source. The reasons for xenophobic violence is multifaceted. Xenophobic violence emanates from unemployment, a lack of service delivery and accountability by the Government, the criminal element in society, the current economic situation, the lax South African migration policy and a conviction by the poverty suffering South Africans that, migrants were receiving benefits that were owed to locals. Information from this research reveals that the reason for xenophobic violence is multifaceted and that foreign nationals believe that they are treated unjustly by the South African criminal justice system. Their experiences provide evidence that foreign nationals experience many challenges in terms of crime and xenophobia and they actually become victims of the South African criminal justice system.

There is a necessity to examine xenophobic crime in South Africa in order to increase the frameworks of analysis and intervention. There should be an examination into the multiple causes of xenophobic behaviour and the study of the association between the micro and macro structures. South Africa will continue to attract economic and other migrants. Gaps in migration policy have to be addressed while at the same time acknowledging that South Africa is a state very dependent on foreign labour. Most importantly, the brutality of the xenophobic violence during May 2008 by South African citizens is indications of very deep-rooted scars that remain from the culture of violence that is an inheritance of apartheid. Nineteen years post-democracy these scars still remain and require urgent consideration by all sectors of the South African nation.

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# **Non-Governmental Organisations and Xenophobia in South Africa: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers (GOTG)<sup>1</sup>**

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Goolam Vahed**

## **Abstract**

This article examines the response of a Non-Governmental Organisation (GOTG) to the 2008 xenophobic attacks and more broadly reflects on the role of NGOs in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and in conflict situations more broadly. NGO responses to emergencies transcend the nation-state in many instances and they need to be sophisticated in their operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists. This study is based on interviews with key officials of GOTG, visits to refugee camps, and an analysis of publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG. While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier report was published by Ashwin Desai, ‘Responding to the May 2008 Xenophobic attacks: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers.’ The report can be accessed at: [http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/all/modules/filemanager/files/12\\_Gift\\_of\\_the\\_givers\\_c.pdf](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/all/modules/filemanager/files/12_Gift_of_the_givers_c.pdf). This case study was part of a larger project on xenophobia in South Africa, which resulted in the publication of a 500 page report titled *South African Civil Society and Xenophobia. Strategies and Tactics*, which was published in July 2010 and can be accessed at <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/report-south-african-civil-society-and-xenophobia>.

xenophobia, this study shows that NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role by providing material help to victims. One of the criticisms of NGOs is that they respond to crises without engaging in long term strategic planning. We show that the ability to respond effectively at short notice is important because many crises require urgent intervention in a context where Government is unable to do so. NGOs also provide a channel for ordinary individuals to contribute in various ways to a crisis. This article does argues though that NGOs can do more by helping to raise awareness of xenophobia and mobilizing civil society to prevent attacks, pushing government to confront xenophobia through clearer policies and stricter laws, and being more vocal in exposing those who indulge in xenophobic discourse. GOTG's position of 'not taking sides' makes it hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience but this has not diminished its contribution.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Organisations, xenophobic attacks, refugee camps, humanitarian aid

As long as your stomach is full, you will know nothing about the condition of the starving; as long as your house is warm, you will not understand the actions of those who live without heat; as long as your own feet are well shod, as long as you have thick clothes to wear, you will have no idea of the state of those who go barefoot and unclad. Satisfy the hungry, so that Paradise may love you. Clothe the naked, so that you may not be bare on the coming day of Resurrection, when all the rest are naked. Become aware of the condition of all those paupers and orphans, for your own wife may become a pauper and your own children orphans. The wheel of fate turns. None of us knows what is to be: what great wealth may be doomed to extinction or how many, now despised, may rise to heights of dignity and honour (Muzaffer Ozak 1992: 233 – 'Inspiration' behind Sooliman's Gift of the Givers organisation).

In May 2008, xenophobic attacks in South Africa left more than 60 African migrants and refugees dead and thousands homeless. Many of the displaced congregated outside police stations, arriving with just the clothing on their backs. It was the middle of Gauteng's winter. One of the first organisations to respond to the crisis was the Gift of the Givers (GOTG). Within a week of the attacks, GOTG moved over R1 million worth of goods to refugee centres in Alexandra, Cleveland, Primrose and other parts of Gauteng. This included tents, blankets and food parcels. Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who founded GOTG, was emphatic: 'To me, the real spirit of South Africans has been shown. We are not a xenophobic nation.' It appeared as if GOTG had anticipated the attacks and was prepared for them. Over the next few months, GOTG constantly provided support and followed the refugees as they made their way to camps across Johannesburg, the ironically named eGoli (City of Gold).

Sooliman had landed at Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo Airport just as the first attacks commenced. He was returning from Malawi where he had gone to inspect projects that GOTG was running in that country. As soon as he was informed of the attacks, he told the GOTG Gauteng head of operations, Allauddin Sayed, to prioritise support to the victims. Sayed lives in Bramley, which is situated quite close to Alexandra Township, the scene of some of the very first and most violent attacks. Sayed immediately arranged for bread and blankets to be sent to the Alexandra Police Station. When he got to the police station, Sayed realised the enormity of the task at hand and the need for far more resources than was initially anticipated.

This article examines GOTG's response to the attacks and more broadly reflects on the role that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can play and are playing in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and their role in conflict situations. This is an important area of investigation given that responding to emergencies has for many organisations gone beyond the nation-state; many NGOs perceive their role as a global one. As we write various NGOs, including GOTG, are involved in countries like Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mauritania. NGOs need to be sophisticated in their conduct and operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists in a conflict. They are also required to display high levels of project management skills, target setting, monitoring, and accountability. GOTG makes a compelling case study in this context (Duffield 2001: 46).

This article is largely based on interviews with key members of GOTG following a visit to a camp in June 2008 where those displaced by the xenophobic attacks were accommodated and provided with food, blankets, and basic goods. Field work included visits to various camps and other projects run by GOTG. Publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG and Sooliman were also analysed.

## **GOTG: The Beginnings**

Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder and present head of GOTG, is a well-known figure in the world of humanitarian missions. He started GOTG in August 1992 as a one-room operation in his Pietermaritzburg home. By the time of the 2008 attacks, GOTG laid claim to being the largest private humanitarian disaster relief organisation in Africa<sup>2</sup>. GOTG followed in the footsteps of private, as opposed to state-sponsored, organisations that have been sprouting since the 1970s and have a global reach. Rony Brauman, one of the founders of Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières), observes that the 1970s witnessed the rise of what James Rosenau has called ‘sovereignty-free actors’ who ‘positioned themselves on the international stage that previously had been reserved for states, but without all the problems of state-controlled national sovereignty in the classical sense.’ Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders / Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), and Oxfam are examples of this kind of organisation. As Brauman points out, there is a dark side to this development:

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<sup>2</sup> At this time it listed the following projects: Disaster Response and Rehabilitation; Primary Health Care Clinics; Water Provision; Hunger Alleviation; Nutrition Supplements; Hospital Interventions; Malaria Prevention; Agricultural Inputs; Skills Development, Entrepreneurship and Job Creation; Bursaries and Scholarships; Education Support; Open Source Computer Labs; Road Safety; Adelaide Tambo School for the Physically Challenged; Winter Warmth; Shoe-ing the Nation; Sports Development; Cultural Projects; Counselling Services; Life Skills; Toy Distribution; Meat Distribution; Wheelchair Distribution; Research and Development; Interfaith Unification.

It is not as if some ethical force suddenly took hold of the world, though: this phenomenon also applies to terrorist groups, to religious movements, to businesses, to revolutionary movements. With urbanisation, instantaneous communication, and the democratisation of transport (invention of charters), we are witnessing a ‘revolution in the abilities and aptitudes of the individual’- to borrow Roseneau’s formulation. It is within this context that private organisations of all kinds have been multiplying and developing at a rate that would have been unimaginable at any other time. This new ‘revolution’ allows private groups to begin establishing themselves in areas that up until now have been reserved for states (Brauman 2004: 406).

NGOs have played an important role in the development field as well as humanitarian assistance since the 1970s. While northern NGOs grew from the 1970s, those in the South emerged from the 1990s. According to one estimate, even omitting food aid, the assistance that NGOs provide to the South exceeds that spent by UN agencies (Duffield 2001: 53). The importance of NGOs can be gauged from the fact that by the end of the 1980s, many donor governments channelled aid through these organisations. In fact, NGOs are implementers of UN programmes in many instances, including in conflict areas (Duffield 2001: 55). As NGOs are usually politically neutral, they have an edge in that they are able to gain access to information and certain areas which are no-go zones for many governments (Duffield 2001: 57).

The immediate inspiration for the formation of GOTG came during a trip Sooliman made to Turkey, but his past experience suggests a natural progression. Sooliman and his wife Zohra were both members of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and the Muslim Youth Movement in the 1970s and 1980s and were involved in community projects aimed at socio-economic redress. After qualifying as a medical doctor, Sooliman opened a practice in Berg Street, Pietermaritzburg, adjacent to the city’s bus rank, catering almost exclusively for the city’s poor African working class population. He subsequently opened a practice in an underprivileged ‘Coloured’ township and juggled his time between these sites. Sooliman was also a member of the Islamic Medical Association (IMA), formed in the late

1970s to provide free medical services in African townships (such as mobile clinics run by volunteer doctors).

The Gulf War in 1990 shaped Sooliman's life in important ways. He was an outspoken critic of the war because of its humanitarian consequences and channelled aid to that country through the Gulf War Relief Fund. Shortly thereafter he got involved in providing relief in Mozambique, where the Kuwaitis were funding a hospital in Nkala in the northern part of the country. When war broke out, the Kuwaitis discontinued their funding and a single Sudanese doctor was left to run the entire hospital. The African Muslim Agency stepped in and asked Sooliman to head a relief project. When a cyclone struck Bangladesh in April 1991 (leaving 135,000 people dead), Sooliman responded, this time under the banner of the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA).

On a whim, Sooliman contacted the South African Foreign Affairs Department for assistance. He persuaded the department that the mission presented an opportunity for South Africa, an international pariah for decades, to change its image in the midst of sensitive political negotiations with the majority African population (non-racial democracy would come in 1994). It was, according to Zohra Sooliman, a 'shot in the dark but the response was unbelievable. They told us that it would be too expensive to provide the three aeroplanes that were required but that they would instead provide a ship. We were overjoyed and accepted the offer.' Sooliman recalled what transpired at his meeting with the South African Navy top brass, as Bangladesh did not have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa.

I was a bit nervous because here was all these admirals and stuff and I was by myself, this lone Indian. But within fifteen minutes, I tell you, we were like old friends. They said 'What do you want?' and whatever I asked, they said 'OK'. I was amazed. But the Bangladeshis ... sent me a long list of what we couldn't do - plus a few things we could. I simply cut out the bits I didn't like, pasted them together, tipp-exed (glued) it to clean it up a bit and showed the navy: 'Here, we're got authorization!' (Schmidt 2006).

This was followed by Sooliman's life changing visit to Turkey:

I went to Turkey in August 1991 and met a Sufi Master. I saw people of all religions, colour, nationality coming to a Muslim place, and he told me that religion doesn't bring friction nor violence; it teaches love and compassion. The formation of the Gift of the Givers was instructed by the Sufi master Mohammed Saffer Effendi in Turkey a year later on 6 August 1992. It was my second meeting with him. All he said is that we will form an organisation whose name will be the Gift of the Givers in English – *Waqful Waqifin*. He said, ‘This will be your job for the rest of your life. Your lesson for the rest of your life will be “The best among people are those who benefit mankind”’ And he said that the emphasis was on the word ‘mankind’, not Muslim. And the emphasis should be on Africa, he insisted. ‘They need it most. You will not be judgemental, you will honour the difficulty of every human being, no matter what their circumstances, and you will serve mankind unconditionally – it doesn't matter if a person is Hindu, Jew, Muslim, or Christian, what his political affiliation or social station is. And don't expect anything in the return, not even gratitude’.

Sooliman returned to South Africa to fulfil the instructions of his Sufi master<sup>3</sup> by combining his spiritual and humanitarian commitment in an organisational form - GOTG.

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<sup>3</sup> Sufism refers to the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. While some Sufis fall outside of Islam and see themselves as constituting a universal movement predating Islam, Sufis in South Africa mostly follow one of the orthodox Islamic traditions but attach themselves to a Shaykh who provides guidance in all aspects of life. He would prescribe certain prayers or dhikr ('remembrance of God') that would allow the follower to turn his or her heart away from everything other than God. The followers of a Shaykh usually consult him on all major and minor issues and follow the advice given. The Sufi tradition has a long presence in the Cape but has been spreading over the past two decades among Indian Muslims in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Adherents compare Shaykhs to physicians. While the latter takes care of the body the Shaykh sees to the maladies of the heart.

Sooliman and Zohra had three children when Gift of the Givers (GOTG) was formed. He was running three medical practices and she was a pre-school teacher who was completing a degree in Social Work and Psychology via correspondence through the University of South Africa (UNISA). They subsequently had two more children and Zohra fondly refers to GOTG as her sixth child since it was ‘born’ in their Pietermaritzburg home. As GOTG’s operations expanded and required their full-time attention, Sooliman gave up his medical practice and Zohra her teaching job. For Zohra, this was not a difficult decision, as she grew up in a household where her parents were always involved in philanthropic work and the lesson she absorbed from them was that philanthropy was an extension of her religious conviction.

More than two decades later, GOTG’s headquarters is still in Pietermaritzburg, but the organisation now has offices in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Malawi, and the Republic of Yemen. According to GOTG’s website, its work has broadened to include 25 categories of projects, ranging from bursaries to humanitarian aid in more than 20 countries across the globe, delivering hundreds of millions of rands in aid. According to Zohra Sooliman, GOTG underwent an important transition around 1998 when a decision was made to be proactive rather than reactive to crises. Innovations included the world’s first containerised mobile hospital and primary health care unit, the high energy protein supplement, Subisiso, and establishing the largest Open Source Computer Lab in Africa. At the time of writing in October 2013, GOTG and Sooliman had received more than 80 national and international awards for their humanitarian work, including awards from the presidents of four countries. In 2010, Sooliman received the Order of the Grand Counsellor of the Baobab: Silver award from President Jacob Zuma for his contribution through GOTG to humanitarian aid nationally and internationally.

While one can label GOTG a private humanitarian organisation, it is different from organisations such as Greenpeace and Oxfam in important respects. GOTG is Africa-based, its main source of funding is South African, and its central focus of operations is Southern Africa. In contrast, most of the NGOs that provide assistance to the South originate in the North and raise their monies in the North (Duffield 2001: 53).

## **GOTG's Immediate Response**

When the xenophobic attacks started, GOTG was in the middle of its winter warmth project in partnership with two popular radio stations, East Coast Radio and Jacaranda Radio, which are based in and have large audiences in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng respectively. This was the beginning of three weeks of non-stop action. Sayed describes what happened:

That night we came with tents. We put up 40 in Alex and six at Bramley police station. We gave the displaced food. By then xenophobic attacks were in full force. At 3:00 am Disaster Management gave 3,000 blankets (donated by us) to Primrose Park and Germiston. People threw stones at us when we arrived at night at the Germiston Municipal Hall. We were not ready for this. It flared up on 12 May in Alex. Third night, Disaster Management came - Nigel, Springs, Kwa-Tema ... all came for help. Germiston district and the police could not cope and the head of Disaster Management contacted Imtiaz. Next day, 2:00 am, we loaded the vehicles we had at hand. Government Disaster Management sent their fire trucks. I've never experienced anything like that. It was a war zone. We emptied our stores – mattresses, food, blankets, everything. There were no camps at that stage. We realised that by the time government wakes up it will be too late. We mobilised churches. Pritchard Street Bishop Paul Verryn from the Methodist Church was great. There were 150 women and children cramped in a foetal position on the floor, and a woman gave birth in that position at 2:30am ... just like that. The Methodist Church in Primrose opened up its doors.

We started having centres. Village Walk was our most successful collection point. Ambassadors from all over made donations in that first week of xenophobia. I got a call from one of the journalists about a girl whose uncle was burnt alive. She ran for miles because they wanted to rape her. She stayed at my place. We got her papers sorted out and sent her back home to Mozambique. Then camps were made – Midrand, Rifle Range, Collett Drive, Springs (near Nigel), Germiston– are the areas where we were involved. Muslim groups wanted halaal (kosher) food – Azaadville people. This was not

working. Many Ethiopians only eat dairy products... Lots of Somalis, who had to be catered for, moved to camps in Pretoria. We sent two to three million rands worth of goods to Cape Town. We set up a clinic in Primrose where we provided gloves, bandages and medical supplies to Doctors without Borders.

Aid packages to camps included tents, blankets, sleeping bags, food parcels, new clothes and shoes, plastic dishes for food, plastic dishes to wash clothes, sanitary pads, disposable nappies, tooth paste, tooth brushes, body soap, soap for washing clothes, towels, and face cloths.

According to Zohra Sooliman, Director of GOTG's Careline, the dangers that could result from local anger against foreign Africans did not enter the equation when they offered assistance:

During the struggle [against apartheid] many of our people got shelter in neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia. They gave us refuge and how could we do this? It is not in the character of South Africans to turn on people who helped us. It was not good for the image of our country for the world to see us killing innocent people. As an NGO we had no choice but to act. We know that some locals were unhappy but we did not look at the politics. We only saw that these were people were in distress. We are only interested in the humanitarian aspects.

As the work of GOTG grew and word spread of its ability to provide on-the-ground support, major corporates became involved for the first time. Some, like Investec (R300,000) and Momentum (R121,000) offered cash. Pick n' Pay Hyper donated cool drinks; A.A. Wholesalers donated foam mattresses; Ossie Tayob of OSGO Wholesalers donated soap and wet wipes; the International Federation of Women Lawyers (South Africa) donated food vouchers; and Independent Newspapers made a contribution of R1.5 million to GOTG's coffers. GOTG's Johannesburg office spent more than R6 million in 2008 in its response to xenophobia.

When people were moved to the camps, GOTG followed them and this soon resulted in cooperation with other organisations and sharing of resources. According to Sayed, GOTG worked with a number of

organisations, such as Doctors without Borders, Government Disaster Management, the Methodist and Anglican churches, the South African Police Service (SAPS), and various women's networks. International partnerships included the United Nations (UN) Development Programme and Oxfam, to whom GOTG provided food parcels until May 2009.

## **The Government's Response**

Government opened its camps in June 2008. According to Sayed, 'that's where GOTG's biggest involvement came. We worked for 24 hours. We never slept as we supplied mattresses and other things.' There were about 50,000 people in total in 200 camps. GOTG did more than simply feed, clothe and provide shelter. According to Sayed, they also got involved in education:

In the Midrand camp there were children with no education so we hired minibuses to transport them to school. We told the Education Department to offer education and we supplied tents where children could be taught. We did the same thing in Rifle Range, our largest camp. The children there were traumatised. We took Kung Fu Panda, the movie, and gave presents. Mothers cried that day as they said that throughout this trauma, this was the first time they were happy. We even brought in child psychologists. We gave the children sweet parcels. We gave books to kids. We made sure the books were inspiring and joyful to raise the spirit – no creepy stories, just fun and entertainment. You can't measure what we achieved in terms of rands and cents when you see the joy.

Perceiving a symbiotic relationship, GOTG's strategy was to work closely with government. According to Sayed:

We are not their opposition. We work within the system. Police escorts are waiting for us whenever we take a trip. We complain about a system in the camp or a police station, we get it straightened out. I was involved with the MEC of Safety and Security during this period and got full access – no limitations to the camps. There were

42 Malawians who were surrounded on a farm somewhere. A White lady phoned and said this was happening. We had full cooperation from the police to rescue them. Government knows that when we land anywhere we land with the South African flag.

GOTG paid for more than 4,000 meals over two months. They bought supplies worth R1 million and thousands of parcels of their food sustenance package, known as Subisiso, were distributed to camp inmates. In 2004, GOTG introduced Sibusiso ('the Blessing'), the world's first groundnut-soya, high energy protein food supplement which is used as a nutrient to tackle debilitating conditions such as malnutrition, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. According to GOTG's website, the product, Sooliman's brain child, is currently used by 230 health facilities in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho, and Botswana.

GOTG was faced with a difficult moral decision – whether or not to assist victims of the attacks to return home (see Jost 2012 on the difficulties migrants face in integrating because of xenophobia). Eventually, GOTG spent a considerable sum of money transporting people back to their home countries. According to Sayed:

The people were panicking in the camps. They wanted to go back to their home countries. They were thinking 'What's gonna happen to our children?' Family members from there were calling them to come back. When they said, 'We want to go!' we hired five buses. You know the Malawians are soft and sensitive. At R48,000 a bus trip, and that's 60 persons in a bus, each one with a food parcel. Two trains left from Park Station (800 people) ... Everyone had a blanket and a food parcel to go with. You will always see a green and yellow Gift of the Givers blanket. That was God. He made his mark. We had good relationships with embassies so borders and papers were sorted out. We even paid for disabled persons to get back home with hired kombis.

For GOTG, helping people to return to their countries of origin was the correct thing to do once it became clear that the government intended closing down the camps. Refugees had two options - repatriate or reintegrate. Critics

may argue that by assisting with repatriation GOTG was inadvertently supporting the intention of the perpetrators who wanted to get rid of ‘foreigners’. Sayed, however, disagrees with this point of view as he believes that providing such assistance was ‘complying with the victims’ wishes’. It was also something that their home governments and families supported.

### **Moyo: Story of an Inmate**

Takawira Moyo arrived in South Africa from Chegutu, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe, on New Year’s Day 2007. He had been chairperson of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the area while working as a clerk at a local bakery, and was on the run from ZANU youth and the Mugabe government’s intelligence officials. ZANU youth had previously frog-marched him out of his house and beaten him, and when he heard that he was to be taken to Harare for questioning, he decided to make for South Africa. After a long trip via Bulawayo, he finally arrived at the Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg.

Already a recognised figure in Zimbabwean exile circles, Moyo decided to lie low for six months before making his way to Springs in Mpumalanga Province where he secured a shack in Paineville, earning a living by painting and welding. Moyo’s business flourished and he employed three other Zimbabweans. He also opened a tuckshop alongside the shack. Moyo returned to Zimbabwe in early 2008 to bring his wife and two young children to South Africa. On the way back to Springs Moyo was robbed of his possessions. He left his wife in a village in Venda and walked from the Limpopo River to Polokwane, a distance of 200 kilometres. He did a few odd jobs until he secured enough money to make his way back to Springs where his younger brother Wisdom had looked after things while he was away. He recounts the events of May 2008:

At midnight I heard a noise at the door. I had on a t-shirt, shorts and socks. I could only wear socks because the long walk from Limpopo River to Polokwane left me with sores on my feet. The banging on my door continued. I opened the door. The first thing I got was a hard *klap* (smack). People rushed in. They ransacked my shack. My fridge and television were the first to go, then my clothes and the

goods in the tuckshop. My brother was stabbed twice in the back. We just ran for our lives.

Moyo went to the local police station where he found around 4,000 people, mainly Zimbabweans. After a week of sleeping in the open, they were housed in a big hall in the town centre. Moyo was elected chairperson of this group of dislocated persons who were transported from the town hall to the Selcourt Camp under the care of a ‘site manager’. They were initially given three meals a day, but this was reduced to two. The site manager refused access to outside help. When Sayed arrived with a representative from Oxfam at the beginning of July 2008, Moyo gathered inmates and met them outside the camp. The support offered by Sayed and GOTG, according to Moyo, came ‘exactly at the right time’. The food that they had been receiving was sometimes rotten and several refugees had fallen sick. GOTG’s food parcels were a lifeline for many inmates.

According to Moyo, health conditions were terrible. Inmates avoided the overflowing toilets and instead used the bush, compounding the health hazard. As children had no nappies, GOTG and the local Trinity Methodist Church supplied these. A big tent was set up for the children’s ‘school’ and GOTG supplied colouring books and toys. Moyo alleged that site manager sold some of the supplies provided by relief agencies to locals. Moyo participated in a series of meetings with Paineville residents to reintegrate displaced foreigners into the community. When residents refused to allow them back, the Ekurhuleni Municipality built shacks for many of the displaced in Extension 10 Kwa-Thema. Moyo moved with his family into a one-bedroom outbuilding in Springs. While his plan was to resurrect his welding and painting business, Moyo understood that the fear of African migrants and refugees were perennial as xenophobic attacks can occur at any time.

On the streets, Moyo and his fellow refugees received the message that after the 2010 World Cup there would be a ‘gnashing of teeth’, that is, all foreigners would be chased out of South Africa. The Somalis in the Cape and Bangladeshis in the Free State, amongst many others, who are continually subject to xenophobic attacks, can attest to this.

## **Life after the Camps: Thembi and Spiwe**

In reflecting on GOTG’s response to xenophobic violence one of the starkest

realisations is how little relief organisations did to support people once they left the camps. While GOTG supported those who wanted to go home, it could do little to reintegrate people into local communities. Many inmates had lost their identity documents, their homes and livelihoods and were leaving the camps in the same situation, as the following two testimonies indicate.

Thembi arrived in Johannesburg on 2 May 2007 from Zimbabwe. She made her way to Nigel where her mother had once lived and worked and obtained temporary accommodation through these networks. She shared a garage in Duduza township with two other Zimbabweans and got a job doing hair braiding. She has a young daughter and elderly mother in Zimbabwe to whom all spare cash is remitted. When Thembi heard of the attacks in nearby Tsakani in May 2008, she and the two people she shared accommodation with, took flight. They went directly to the police station and from there they were taken to the Nigel town hall. Although it was very cold, they were not given blankets or food. There were over 300 people in the hall by the morning, comprising a mix of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and a small contingent of Ethiopians. Thembi was anxious to secure her belongings and went to the garage to collect her stuff but found that it had been ransacked. Volunteers from nearby Duduza township helped to distribute blankets and one meal per day.

They were transferred to the Springs camp after a month. It was there that Thembi became head of the camp's health committee and attended to a host of problems. They were provided with two meals per day but Thembi claims that the food was often 'rotten' and many inmates got sick as a result. The Ekurhuleni Municipality did not provide any support. Her request to the municipality to sort out the over-flowing toilets was ignored. She helped to set up a crèche and distributed nappies donated by GOTG. For Thembi, this made a big difference in terms of the health of the children. Thembi's problems really began once she left the camp. She had lost all her belongings and could not restart her braiding business. She eventually found a job as a security guard in Brakpan, guarding repossessed houses. She worked seven days a week for R850 a month. While she was in the camp, inmates had been asked by Home Affairs officials to apply for asylum. All the applications were turned down. Her passport, which gave her permission to stay in the country for three months, had expired as had the card given to her by Home

Affairs. Thembi was required to go back to the Zimbabwean border and pay R800 to get her passport stamped for an extension. She did not have the money to do this and ‘lived in pain and fear’. She had not seen her daughter, now aged five, for two years.

Spiwe, aged 24 at the time of the interview in 2008, also finds herself in incredible difficulties because of her lack of ‘papers’ (identification documents). She jumped the border in May 2008 to join her husband in South Africa and almost immediately found herself in the Springs camp. Her three children cannot get birth certificates because of Spiwe’s lack of proper documentation. Spiwe has to return to Zimbabwe for a passport, which she cannot risk doing, and she does not have the money to pay for an emergency or long-term passport. Spiwe’s children cannot access formal schooling without proper documentation. Both Thembi and Spiwe said that there were no organisations that could assist in this regard. Both were appreciative of the food parcels and other material support that they received in the camps from organisations like GOTG, but stressed that once they were forced to leave the camp, there was absolutely no support and without documentation it was difficult to restart their lives.

## GOTG: Bureaucracy and Responses to Xenophobia

GOTG is run differently from most of the organisations mentioned in this article in that it is associated very closely with one individual. In examining GOTG’s publicity material and talking to its staff, or the public at large, it is clear that GOTG *is* Dr Imtiaz Sooliman who appears to be the originator of projects, makes the major decisions, and leads from the front. This has several implications. One is that without bureaucratic obstacles, GOTG is able to make rapid decisions. Sooliman is open about this. ‘I don’t like bureaucratic systems. I need a decision in five seconds, not five weeks’ (*Hofstatter, The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009). Sayed confirmed this: ‘I pick up the phone, call Imtiaz and say I want to start something costing R250,000. There’s no papers, no proofing. He just says, “Allauddin, go ahead!”’

In his influential analysis of charismatic leadership, Max Weber defined charisma as:

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional power or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Weber 1947: 358-359).

For Weber, opportunities for charisma lessen as societies become more bureaucratised and routinised. However, charismatic leadership tied to an efficient, professional structure persists into the twenty first century. GOTG is, arguably, an example of this. Sooliman's reason for setting up GOTG as inspired by his Sufi master gives his mission a divine quality. The name of the organisation, derived from a saying from the Quran, adds to this. Furthermore, his mission to 'build bridges between people of different cultures and religions' is also derived from a Qur'anic injunction:

O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Almighty is (he who is) the most righteous of you (Sura Hujurat/the Inner Apartments, Chapter 49, Verse 13.)

Sooliman's work is written up in a way that gives him the status of one possessing 'exceptional' qualities. He is undoubtedly a charismatic leader and underlying this is well-oiled, rationalised and technically efficient machinery. This combination makes GOTG extremely effective. Some may argue that GOTG's mission to raise funds and respond to crises in the most effective way on the ground allows a single figure to be associated with the organisation and to dominate decision-making. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, cannot be dominated by individual figures because they represent a constituency and take up issues through collective action and mass mobilisation, often in a confrontational way. This dichotomy does not hold when one considers that organisations like the Treatment Action Committee (TAC) and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) are associated with larger than life leaders who have come to symbolise the

organisation, namely Zackie Achmat and Trevor Ngwane. This demonstrates that leaders don't become prominent simply because they are given importance or a high profile by others, such as the media. Interpersonal power, charisma and centrality to decision-making inside democratic organisations attach themselves to an individual or clique just as often (see Adair 2002; Andreoni 2006; James 2005 for discussions on leaders and leadership in an NGO context).

NGOs can become too large and unwieldy. Sylvie Brunel from Action against Hunger wrote that 'humanitarian organizations artificially swollen by the massive amounts of public funds made available to them become enormous machines, difficult to manage and slower to react' (2001: 337). The response to the May 2008 xenophobic attacks showed that GOTG was able to react with speed and in a sustained and effective manner. This is viewed favourably by other stakeholders. For example, in January 2009, when the St. George's Cathedral made a small donation to GOTG, the Very Reverend Rowan Smith wrote: 'We admire your rapid response to the needs of the people there and want to encourage your being able to move in before the government has made a decision.'

Sooliman is not cavalier just because he is decisive. According to Zohra, he relies on information from a network of people whose judgement he trusts, including community leaders, business persons, local councillors, and other NGOs whose information and input is valued and valuable. He also monitors the news and follows crises that may be developing.

Sooliman usually chooses the target, conceptualises the project and determines the logistics, a point captured by journalist Michael Schmidt:

To watch Sooliman in operation is to watch a force of nature, a good natured *djinn*, whirling dervish-like around stroppy officials until they give him what he wants. And what he wants is usually super-sized: from fleets of trucks and tons of aid to air force transport planes and naval ships. He is constantly on the phone, wrangling some deal or other that would be the pride of the underworld if it were in any way shady, charming military brass from a range of starched collar regimes and twisting their arms until they simply gave in.... Sooliman's benign demeanour disguises his steel spine. He won't take no for an answer from officials, believing Allah will

make a way through any obstacle... Watching him, I'm tempted to believe that Allah truly does make a way for the faithful (*Sunday Times* 2 September 2006).

According to Zohra Sooliman, the decision to publicise the work of Sooliman and GOTG is a tactical one to 'demonstrate to ordinary members of the public that there is a relationship between their giving and the outcome. When they see something tangible happening, it makes sense to them to contribute.' Speaking to both Zohra and Imtiaz Sooliman, it is clear that media exposure is not sought after for self-aggrandisement. Sooliman sees his work as a divine mission and sees no reason to be reticent. Name recognition, for him, is one way of creating 'brand GOTG' which has opened doors with corporates, suppliers and ordinary members of the public who are willing to contribute to the organisation because of this trust. 'Brand GOTG' provides the organisation with protection in conflict zones while allowing it to highlight humanitarian tragedies globally. This strategy has worked well, as GOTG's budget and reputation have grown enormously over the past two decades.

Sayed, who runs the Johannesburg office, comes from a family with a long history of community and political involvement in the Western Cape. He describes himself as a person who 'loves to work on the ground.' While Imtiaz is somewhat withdrawn, Sayed is effusive and full of boundless energy. Now around 70, almost two decades older than Imtiaz, he appears the perfect foil. When Imtiaz wants to visit a project, such as a school in Soweto, Sayed makes the logistical arrangements. As much as the hierarchy is apparent, there is mutual respect and a strong working relationship (see Howell and Shamir 2005).

Sayed was at the centre of GOTG's response to xenophobia in 2008. The attacks brought back sad memories for him. He studied in Pakistan in the late 1950s when Muslims from India were still arriving in Pakistan, 'shivering, having lost everything, still with fear in their eyes'. He says that the 2008 attacks he says were like 'deja vu, people of the same colour attacking and killing one another.' Sayed is clear as to the recipe for GOTG's effectiveness: minimal red tape; having a surplus of supplies; going in 'with the heart, no politics, no taking of sides'; 'credibility' which comes from providing aid across racial and religious barriers; careful planning, which

‘means having a well thought out system’; recruiting the ‘kinds of people where a hundred people can do the job of 300’; and being humble rather than ‘seeing yourself as “The Man”’. Sayed explains that when people are in dire need, it is easy to believe that one’s intervention is that of a ‘saviour’ (see the growing literature on why people give to particular organisations, Verterland 2006; Piferi *et al.* 2006; Ostrower 1997).

## GOTG’s Impartiality

Like many other humanitarian organisations, GOTG insists that its approach is both impartial and neutral and that it is driven solely by the determination to get aid to those in need. Carole Dubrulle of ‘Action against Hunger’ believes that ‘impartiality is the real Hippocratic oath of a humanitarian organisation. This is an operational principle that seeks to match relief to need, in situations in which available resources are always limited.’ This does not mean providing equal assistance to all protagonists in a crisis. Humanitarian organisations carry out an evaluation that is ‘objective and not imposed by governments’ before deciding on who to assist and how much assistance to provide (2001: 224). Dubrulle argues that silence ‘would amount to connivance with the oppressor, to being an accomplice to the injustice committed’ (2001: 225). Humanitarian organisations have a ‘vocation to never remain neutral in the face of violations, especially when these are massive violations of human rights’ (2001: 225).

How does GOTG match these principles? It subscribes to this idea not through its public statements on xenophobia but through its public work in responding to xenophobia. GOTG’s claim to be apolitical does not imply that it has no sense of the political. In the aftermath of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, the organisation not only fed refugees in the camp near Alexandra but continued its weekly feeding programme in the township which catered in the main to South Africans. GOTG’s approach in both South Africa and Malawi is to have a close working relationship with the respective governments and get their endorsement for the projects being run.

GOTG differs from organisations such as the TAC which played a significant role in responding to the xenophobic attacks in Cape Town. Unlike the TAC, GOTG is not seeking to organise a collective response to confront those in power, build a constituency with branch structures that

elect people to positions of authority, be transparent and democratic, or even give voice to the subalterns in society. Like the TAC, GOTG does join those who have political power to roll out services but unlike the TAC, it co-operates with rather than challenges government. Sooliman insists, 'I will work with anyone to deliver humanitarian aid' (*Hofstatter The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009).

GOTG is clearly a major player in the South African humanitarian landscape. Its relationship with the government is important to its work. The 18<sup>th</sup> of July, the birthday of former South Africa President Nelson Mandela, was endorsed by South African President Jacob Zuma as a day on which the world should spend 67 minutes doing something useful to support humanity. GOTG marked the occasion in 2009 by co-hosting a function with The Presidency (Social Development) in Ivory Park, Johannesburg. In the collage of photographs, Sooliman is placed between photographs of Mandela and Zuma. In the blurb on the invitation, GOTG laid out its organisational imperatives:

Our assistance is purely humanitarian and unconditional. We assist irrespective of race, religion, colour, class, political affiliation or geographical boundary. We are entirely neutral in our approach to mankind in need, are non-judgemental and have an open-minded approach to all situations. We work with governments to get our assistance delivered but do not align ourselves politically to any party. We have an excellent partnership relationship with the South African government for the delivery of our local projects, as well as foreign aid delivery.

There is global debate on the nature of humanitarian aid. Is it enough to provide short term relief, important as it is? Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss argue that humanitarian relief should involve a long commitment to projects that promote people's self-respect. This requires moving from immediate humanitarian assistance to providing material and psychological succour to those who are affected to help them reconstruct their lives (in Smillie 1998). While this was difficult in the case of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, an examination of GOTG's projects suggests that it is very much part of their thinking. Since its inception, GOTG has established around 20 Primary

Health Care Clinics, invested in education programmes from early childhood to adult learning in all parts of the country, and is involved in sports development, entrepreneurship, agricultural sustainability, water provision, and a host of other initiatives in South Africa as well as other countries, suggesting that it has a long-term commitment to development and to improving the condition of people's lives. Both Sayed and Zohra Sooliman emphasised that they did not see a difference between humanitarian and developmental work. They are equipped for short term action during disasters but want to have a longer-term impact on the development of the countries where they are involved and in improving people's lives.

## **Conclusion**

Violent acts of xenophobia and hostile attitudes towards foreign nationals are a constant feature of post-apartheid South Africa. Many reasons have been postulated for these attacks, which are discussed by other articles in this volume. Rising anti-immigrant tendencies in South Africa are a worrying trend. Constant vigilance and opposition to xenophobia and racism in South Africa are more than ever a political imperative, as they present a threat to democracy and a challenge to human dignity.

While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting xenophobia, NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role in this struggle by providing assistance and material help to its victims. While this is appreciated by beneficiaries, NGOs can do much more. For example, GOTG could help to raise awareness of increased xenophobia and mobilise civil society to prevent attacks; it could push government to confront xenophobia through stricter laws and clearer policies and ensure that these are implemented; and it could be more vocal in exposing politicians and others in society who indulge in xenophobic discourse. However, as Heins (2008: 166) argues, while NGOs may heighten moral feelings and even outrage, this often leads to:

the paradox of the creation of a moral public of spectators that is more interested in the display of moral excellence than in political effectiveness. NGOs in international society have often proved to be brilliant, Hermes-like players who move ably between places and

geographical scales to dispatch their messages. But they are not good in involving the public in more than superficial ways.

One of the criticisms of organisations such as GOTG is that they are ‘CNNish’, meaning that they respond to crises but do not engage in long term strategic planning. This has been described as having the ‘single-mindedness and problem solving orientation of a fire fighter [rather] than ... the cunning calculations of an experienced military strategist in war zones’ (Hoffman & Weiss 2006: 197). There is a degree of truth in this in GOTG’s case. While Hoffman and Weiss see the absence of careful research and strategising as a weakness, we would argue that the fact that GOTG can move from crisis to crisis at short notice and with such effectiveness, is important because many crises are of short-term duration and require urgent intervention. GOTG does publish regular reports and analysis of how crises were handled and the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted.

GOTG has a clear position of ‘not taking sides.’ Working closely with government, means that the organisation is hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience. However, this does not diminish its contribution. The immediate material support provided to thousands of victims of the xenophobic attacks was critical in assisting them to make sense of their lives. Government bureaucracy means that it is often slow to react to crises and it should continue to support the role of NGOs such as GOTG who have proven their ability to respond swiftly. Ideally, governments and NGOs such as GOTG should be striving to prevent conflict rather than providing humanitarian aid. But neither the NGOs nor government have any meaningful short or long-term programme to address the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, whose core causes are complex, with no readymade solutions in sight.

NGOs have been criticised for mitigating contradictions, acting as the proverbial band aid. There is some plausibility to these claims. But as GOTG’s response to xenophobic attacks in 2008 indicates, whatever their limitations, NGOs have a critical role to play, especially in terms of their impact on ordinary citizens who may care but do not have the time to get involved in such crises. NGOs provide a channel for such individuals to contribute and get the task done (for debates about why people give, see Osili & Du 2005; Lindahl & Conley 2002; Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006: and

Marcuello & Salas 2001). Given that governments and global agencies such as the United Nations have less and less to give, this alone points to the vital role of NGOs and their continued efficacy in the twentieth first century where the nation-state finds its powers to act independently increasingly eroded, while NGOs with a global perspective are able to cut across red-tape and borders to support those in the frontlines of disaster.

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# **Immigrant Workers and COSATU: Solidarity versus National Chauvinism?**

**Mondli Hlatshwayo**

## **Abstract**

The literature on xenophobia in South Africa is comprehensive and covers various issues ranging from describing the nature and form of xenophobia and responses to xenophobic outbreaks. However, this literature has tended to focus on xenophobia at places of residence and trade like townships, cities and towns. While this is understandable as xenophobic outbreaks take place in these mentioned spaces, little is known about xenophobia and the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplace where immigrant workers spend most of their time. By extension, there have not been adequate scholarly debates on how the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which has over 2 million members and 19 affiliates has responded to xenophobia. Based on 50-in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, I argue that COSATU's policies on immigrant workers and xenophobia are contradictory in the sense that the federation claims to be opposed to xenophobia, but some of its policy utterances belong to what can be regarded as xenophobic discourse and national chauvinism. This perhaps partly explains why the federation has not been part of visible campaigns against xenophobia. Some immigrants also contend that COSATU has not used its public standing and relationship with the governing party – the African National Congress - to advance the cause of immigrants. Some immigrant workers interviewed argue that like the South African government, COSATU is only concerned about defending the rights of South African workers and this contradicts the federations' principles of international solidarity and a need to defend the rights of all workers. On the other hand, a tiny minority within COSATU and its affiliates has been seeking to forge links with immigrants by trying to organise immigrant

workers and provide humanitarian aid to immigrants during xenophobic attacks.

**Keywords:** national chauvinism, xenophobia, solidarity, organising, immigrant workers

## **Introduction**

With more than 2 million members and 19 affiliates organising various sectors and being in an alliance with the ruling party – the African National Congress (ANC) - COSATU remains a key player in the South African political and economic landscape. Formed in 1985, COSATU exclaims,

Racism, sexism, tribalism and xenophobia divide the working class (workers and the poor). ... Working class solidarity must transcend these divisive tendencies (COSATU 2009: 15).

One of the principles of COSATU is ‘solidarity’ which basically calls for the unity of the workers regardless of their nationalities. The principle of solidarity seeks to unite workers against the employers and all those who stand on the way of workers realising workers’ rights inside and outside the borders of South Africa (Baskin 1991; COSATU 2013).

Based on document-based evidence and interviews, I submit that while COSATU states that it supports the principles of international solidarity, solidarity with immigrant workers within South African borders and is opposed to xenophobia, the federation in general has not been able to actively campaign against xenophobia, especially during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. I argue that the unions have to accept that the phenomenon of the rise of immigrant workers is going to be a permanent feature of the South African economy and this largely has to do with the policies of the South African state and its multinational corporations acting as an economic power on the continent.

Despite an increase in the number of immigrant workers located within the South African borders, the union movement has not been able to pledge ‘solidarity within the South Africa borders’ with immigrant workers (Hlatshwayo 2011). It appears as if one of the main sources of the strain

between COSATU and immigrant workers is national chauvinism which seems to be based on COSATU's privileging the interests of South African workers at the expense of immigrant workers. As I will show in the article the belief that the unions and the South African state should prioritise the interests of South African workers and South African citizens is also held by shop stewards and COSATU members in general. In contrast, there is a tiny minority comprised of trade union leaders and shop stewards located in COSATU and its affiliates which is organised humanitarian support for immigrants during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 which led to massive displacement of immigrants and killings. This minority also tried to help immigrant workers to access their rights.

### **Locating this Article within the Literature on Xenophobia**

The literature on xenophobia in South Africa has exposed the violation of human rights of immigrant communities extensively (e.g. Crush 2001; Hawabibi 2008; Sigsworth *et al.* 2008; Verryn 2008; Landau 2008; Everatt 2011; Landau *et al.* 2011). Most of the exposition of xenophobia and violation of rights of immigrants in the literature is about violation of the rights of immigrants in places of residence, towns, cities and place of trade (Bruce 2002; Everatt 2010; Landau 2011 *et al.*; Sinwell 2011; Amisi *et al.* 2011).

Another strand of literature which seeks to examine social agency among immigrants in places of residence and trade is also emerging (Amisi 2010). For example, Polzer and Segatti (2011) have examined social agency of organisation of immigrant organisation in the Gauteng Province after May 2008. While the two authors conducted an excellent study document on various strategies used by immigrant organisations to push back the frontiers of xenophobia, they did not look at the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions in a context of the workplace where immigrant workers spend most of their time. The investigations into the specific conditions of immigrant workers and the relationship between these workers and trade unions, especially COSATU have lagged (despite some notable exceptions; e.g. Hlatshwayo 2011; Di Paola 2013). Therefore this article is a contribution to the thin literature on the relationship between immigrant workers and trade unions at the workplaces – a space that plays an important

role in determining survival of immigrants in South Africa. I seek to understand how COSATU responded to xenophobia and the increased presence of immigrant workers, especially in the post-apartheid era. For the sake of seeking some balance, the article also provides immigrant communities, their organisations and immigrant workers with a space to evaluate COSATU's responses to xenophobia<sup>1</sup>.

## **The Evolution of Immigrant Labour: A Synopsis**

Migration in Africa and southern Africa predates colonialism, capitalism and apartheid and the presence of immigrants in South Africa has its roots in the development of capitalism in South Africa. In southern Africa colonial conquest, land grabbing, early commercial agriculture, mining and the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in the late 1800s were violent processes which led to the creation of the working class. People who had access to land and lived on it were largely alienated from it and turned into workers working for a wage in order to survive (Callinicos 1980). South Africa has an extensive literature on production process in the mining sectors, the migrant labour, the role of violence in the mining sector, and the compound system (Abrahams 1946; Allen 2003; Callinicos 1980; Gordon 1978; Crush 1992; Dunbar 1994).

This scholarship also shows that the mining sector and the Witwatersrand in particular played an important role in the generalisation of the migrant labour system and the Witwatersrand became a 'pole of attraction' for migrant workers from South Africa and southern Africa. Later the other sectors of the economy such as the manufacturing sector employed workers from other parts of South Africa as well as other countries in southern Africa (Hlatshwayo 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> The research methodology adopted in this article is qualitative and includes 50 in-depth interviews conducted between 2009 and 2013 with COSATU officials, shop stewards, representatives of COSATU affiliates, labour commentators, immigrant workers and representatives of immigrant communities. The research was funded by the Atlantic Philanthropists.

Some of these workers became worker leaders in the trade union movement. For instance, Clements Kadalie who originally came from the then Nyasaland became the leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the 1920s and 1930s (South African History Online 2009). According to Dominic Tweedie, a former COSATU's *Shopsteward* magazine editor, two current national office bearers of COSATU are originally from the neighbouring states (Tweedie 2009, interview).

In other words, the development of the South Africa and its 'economy' is directly tied to other countries in southern Africa. So, the history of immigrant workers from other southern African countries is inextricably linked to the development of the South African industries and the economy.

## **Post-apartheid South Africa and Migration**

In post-apartheid South Africa immigration to South Africa is an issue that COSATU will have to navigate courteously as Crush (2008:1) argues that 'South Africa is increasingly seen by Zimbabweans as a place to try to build a new life, rather than a place of temporary respite and quick income'. The presence of immigrants and immigrant workers has increased since the dawn of democracy in the 1990s. South Africa's population is said to have increased to just below 53 million by the middle of 2013. According to South Africa's Statistician General Pali Lehohla, an inflow of migrants is the cause of the 1.2 million population increase since the 2011 Census. The South African Government News Agency said,

The population is expected to have grown from just under 51.8 million in 2011, to an estimated 52 981 991 next month. However, driven by a net inflow of migrants, the population grew slightly faster per year in 2013 than over a decade a year – having increased by 1.34% between 2012 and 2013, up from a 1.3% increase between 2002 and 2003 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

The agency states that the increase of inflow of migrants is not a new development. The agency argues,

An estimated 864 000 African migrants entered South Africa between 2001 and 2005, and this increased to an inflow of 974 000 between 2006 and 2010. An estimated 998 000 African migrants are expected to enter the country between 2011 and 2015 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

Writing about xenophobia in South Africa, Crush argues, ‘South Africa prides itself on having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. The Bill of Rights guarantees a host of basic political, cultural and socio-economic rights to all who are resident in the country. Yet there have been persistent reports that citizen intolerance of non-citizens, refugees and migrants has escalated dramatically since 1994 (Crush 2001:103). Migration to South Africa has also been accompanied by a violation of the rights of immigrants and immigrant workers in particular. Women immigrant workers from Zimbabwe tend to work under precarious conditions in places like Johannesburg. For example, these women are involved in sex work, domestic work and hospitality work (Hlatshwayo 2010). The Zimbabwean economic and political crisis has also contributed to the inflow of Zimbabwean immigrant workers into South African farming areas near the Zimbabwean borders. Again, these immigrant workers work under poor working conditions and earn low wages. Rutherford (2008:4010), argues, ‘Many of the border zone farmers are keen to employ them as their desperation for work typically predisposes them to work harder and often for lower wages than South Africans’.

South Africa’s positioning as a dominant economic power house, the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe, the economic liberalisation of African economies and wars on the continent are related causes of migration towards South Africa. All these factors are not caused by immigrants and immigrant workers. It is the South African state, some of its corporations which are multinational in character and the developed countries and their institutions that are responsible for these migration patterns in southern Africa and Africa. Bond and Manyanya (2002) indicate that South Africa also played a role in the de-industrialisation of Zimbabwe and by implication South Africa is also part of the cause of a flow of immigrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa. They argue,

All took advantage of the ESAP [Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes] years by opening shops in what was then a forex-rich Zimbabwe, and importing mass-produced consumer goods from their own South African supplier networks, to replace goods which were previously made locally in Harare or Bulawayo. But Zimbabwe's de-industrialisation meant that when forex began to dry up in 2000, it became more difficult to source those same goods as no local alternatives were available (Bond & Manyanya 2002:132).

In line with Bond & Manyanya's (2002) argument, Lehulere states,

On the contrary, it is the actions of the South African state that ensure that immigration into South Africa will continue with or without the Zimbabwean crisis. As an agent of South African capital, the South African state is responsible for policies that undermine African economies, it is responsible for policies that extract wealth from Africa into South Africa, and it is responsible for policies that are concentrating the capital of the continent – both human and financial – into South Africa (Lehulere 2008:36).

Lehulere further argues that South Africa's role and policies in Zimbabwe and other countries in the region are contributing factors to migration towards South Africa. He contends,

As sure as day follows night, the movement of people will always follow the movement of capital. The direction of migration in the Africa continent will be towards South Africa, and can only be changed once South Africa loses its position of hegemony on the continent (Lehulere 2008:36).

According to van Driel, economies of other African countries have also been weakened by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's (IMF)-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes. The destruction of jobs and services which were provided by the state in terms of these and their related adjustment polices in a context of a relatively stronger South African economy, makes South Africa to be a pole of attraction for immigrants from

other African countries. She expands on this point,

By the 1980s the so-called debt crisis hit Africa; and the World Bank and the IMF imposed economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAPs) on Africa. This deepened the social economic and political crisis in Africa. The repayment of the debt resulted in the transfer of wealth from the south to the north just to repay the interest on the debt. The ESAPs curtailed state expenditure, especially cuts on basic social services, introduced privatisation and user fees. This impoverished the working population even more (van Driel 2008:4).

Van Driel also states that South African state corporations and companies are dominant in Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria, and these companies export despotic apartheid labour regimes and destroy local industries. She further states that in 2008 ‘the trade imbalance between South Africa and the region is estimated as 7:1. South African companies’ profits are between 2-3 times higher than those earned in operations at home’ (van Driel 2008:7). In other words, the transfer of values or wealth from other African countries to South Africa leads to the decline of these economies and also makes South African to be attractive to immigrants from these other African countries which have fewer economic opportunities compared to South Africa.

Another factor that leads to migration towards South Africa is that countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic republic of Congo and Somalia, for instance, are confronted with civil wars and wars. This leads to displacement of people in these countries. The economic strength of South Africa on the continent and the perceived culture of human rights in South Africa are factors which make immigrants from these countries to end up residing in South Africa (Hlatshwayo & Vally forthcoming).

Deducing from the works of the abovementioned scholars, one of the realities of post-apartheid South Africa is that immigrants and immigrant workers are ‘here to stay’. Consistent with Lehulere’s (2008) contention is that the presence of immigrant workers from other African countries is going to be a permanent feature of the South African economy, Gordon reflects, ‘... there is a distinct probability that illegal migration will continue and even increase (Gordon 2005:76)’. Given that immigrant communities and immigrant workers seem to be a permanent feature of post-apartheid South

Africa, how has COSATU responded to xenophobia and the increased presence of immigrant communities and immigrant workers in post-apartheid South Africa?

## **COSATU's Policy Positions on Xenophobia and Immigrant Workers**

The September Commission of COSATU had a task of developing long-term policies for COSATU, its affiliates and the labour movement in general. The commission's report released in 1997 made a call for trade unions in southern Africa to work jointly in exchanging ideas and practical suggestions on issues of migration. In the same report of the commission COSATU espouses positions which undermine the freedom of movement of people and right to choose a country of work. COSATU is a member of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC) which adopted a social charter which says, 'Freedom of movement, residence and employment for workers throughout the region' (Jauch 2001:21). The contradiction in the commission's report is the fact that it calls for the South African government to implement 'voluntary repatriation and fair and proper control of entry of migrant workers into host countries' (COSATU 1997:30).

In 2000, COSATU made a parliamentary submission on the White Paper on International Migration. In line with the September Commission's report, COSATU proposes that the South African Development Community countries impose a quota system on the number of immigrant workers to be accepted by each country. The submission further calls for 'the state to impose heavy penalties' on those companies that 'illegal' immigrants (COSATU 2000). COSATU's statement published during the United Nations World Conference Against Racism and Xenophobia (WCAR) in Durban in 2001 stated that the federation is opposed to xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. Like the submission to the White Paper, the federation also argued that 'unscrupulous employers that are taking advantage of the situation' (COSATU 2001). Criticising COSATU for just blaming employers and not organising immigrant workers, Mike Abrahams, the spokesperson of SAACAWU, said, 'We cannot expect our enemy to do the job for us. We

have to organise and unite all workers regardless of their country of origin' (Abrahams 2009, interview).

COSATU is part of the 'Proudly South African Campaign'. Founded in 2001, the campaign promotes the purchase of local goods and services so that jobs can be created in South Africa (Proudly South African Campaign 2001). According to Malecki (1999), this campaign entrenched national chauvinism in the sense that it projects South Africans as important people who should be prioritised in employment and other economic opportunities at the expense of building African unity and workers' solidarity regardless of countries of origins. It does not also take into account the fact that people from other Southern African countries contributed to the building of the South African economy and the fact that South African continues to extract wealth from the rest of the continent. He explains national chauvinism in the unions,

The National Union of Mineworkers in Rustenburg called for a moratorium on hiring Mozambicans during wage negotiations. Meanwhile, the SACTWU has organised rallies protesting Chinese imports. At the COSATU congress, the bureaucrats raised a furore because some of the caps made for congress delegates had been produced in China (Malceki 1999:1).

Anele Seleka, a social movement activist in the Western Cape, further talked about this South African chauvinism and saw it as obstacle to building solidarity, African unity and combating xenophobia. He reflects,

They treat it [South Africa] like a small island that does not belong in the continent. Personally I do believe they should not be talking *proudly South African* but about solidarity in the continent, doing away with the borders and inheritance of colonial names like South Africa. We are stepping in a wrong step (Seleka 2009, interview).

Perhaps Fanon (1990) is worth quoting here. He said,

From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvi-

nism, and finally to racism. These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked ... (Fanon 1990: 125).

Fanon (1990) remarks that nationalism which defined struggles against colonialism in Africa can end up being national chauvinism in the post-independence period. Immigrants are then blamed for all the ills and sufferings of working and poor people in a country. In that context the African elite tied to powerful economies and corporations of the North which also calibrates and reinforces national chauvinism is absolved from any form of responsibility and accountability.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the corrupt elite which loots state resources in various forms and has presided over poverty and inequality uses the immigrants a scapegoat for its lack of delivering its promises to the poor and workers. Neocosmos explains,

Government departments, parliamentarians, the police, the Lindela detention centre, the law itself have all been reinforcing a one way message since the 1990s: We are being invaded by illegal immigrants who are a threat to national stability, the RDP, development, our social services, and the very fabric of our society (Neocosmos 2008:1).

Lehulere comments on COSATU statement released in May 2008 during the xenophobia attacks of May 2008. He identifies what could be interpreted as national chauvinism in COSATU's policy statement. He argues,

Cosatu blames employers for 'employing foreign immigrants, especially the illegal ones', and calls on 'employers to stop taking advantage of the desperate situation of foreign nationals'. No mention of the need to organise the workers (especially the 'illegal ones'!) into unions, but rather a call on employers to fire 'the illegal ones' (Lehulere 2008:34).

It seems as if COSATU faces a policy tension between solidarity with im-

migrant workers and what appears to be national chauvinism which has a pre-eminence and the privileging of South African workers over immigrant workers, especially the so called illegal immigrants. Some of the statements and the discourse used by COSATU in its policy positions borders along the lines of a xenophobic discourse and the ‘othering’ of immigrant workers. The use of words like the ‘illegal ones’ undermines any notion of solidarity as Lehulere (2008) suggests. The ‘othering’ of immigrant workers is also at the lower levels of union leadership. Moses Makhanya, a Provincial Secretary of SACCWU in KwaZulu-Natal, shared his views on organising migrants by saying,

The problem we have as a union [is that] for starters they employ them at a very low salary scale. Our South Africans end up not getting jobs because jobs are taken by those people who the employer regards as cheap labourers. I think that is the first point. The second difficulty is that it becomes extremely difficult to organise those people because some of them get paid, eat and enjoy themselves and think that it is the end of the world.

Makhulwe Ndwandwe, the COSATU Durban Central Local Secretary, interpreted COSATU’s policy to be meaning that the unions are not supposed to organise ‘illegal’ immigrant workers. She indicated,

We only organise those who are here legally and having proper documents .... No, that is not the policy but the LRA [Labour Relations Act] demands that only the people with documents must be employed, so we organise those who are employed.

The importance of education on xenophobia and the need to liquidate the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ was emphasised by Phillip Nkosi, a South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers’ Union (SACCWU) full-time shop steward at Southern Sun. He said, ‘As long as there is distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’, there will always be these differences. Education and education!

One of the responses of COSATU in the Western Cape and the Western Cape based Labour Research Service, the International Labour Research

and Information Group, and the Ogoni Solidarity Forum to the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 was the formation of the Migrant Workers Committee (MWC) – ‘a group of migrants and refugees which acts as an organizing platform for migrant workers and refugees’ (Imbula-Bofale 2010:1). Consistent with Nkosi’s advice on a need for education, the MWC organised a number of workshops bringing together immigrants workers, immigrant organisations, COSATU and NGOs with the view to raise awareness about the rights of immigrant workers and organise these workers into trade unions (COSATU *et al.* 2008). Perhaps the initiative can be seen to be ‘Pan Africanism from below’ because it also argues, ‘The partners also agreed to provide a referral and resource centre that will educate and empower a core group of migrants and refugees that would contribute to a pan-African migrant workers and African refugee support and advocacy structure’ and also states that ‘the country’s trade unions would serve as a home for workers from different part of the continent and a platform from where activists could challenge capitalism and oppression in the continent’ (Imbula-Bofale 2010:1). This initiative is not led by leaders of African countries and politicians, but has been established by immigrant workers, trade unionists and activists in the Western Cape.

In September 2009, almost a year-and-a-half after the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, the Tenth Congress of COSATU adopted a resolution on xenophobia and the organising of migrants. As a positive development from previous positions, it argues that the capitalist crisis is the cause of xenophobia. It also noted that some shop stewards and members of COSATU affiliates were also killed during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. In addition, the resolutions call for labour laws to cover all migrants. In order to raise consciousness among workers and the South African public about the continent, COSATU proposes that Africa Day be declared as a public holiday (COSATU 2009).

As part of attempts to develop its policies in a post-May 2008 period, in 2010 COSATU together with the United National High Commission for Refugee (UNHRC) hosted a policy seminar on xenophobia. A declaration of the seminar states,

Xenophobia is largely a scapegoat for frustrations arising from persisting socio-economic ills and lack of profound understanding of the

root causes of the crisis facing people from other countries and how they relate to our internal situation. This begins to shape social relations in a way that takes the form of them and us or ‘outsiders’ (COSATU & UNHCR 2010:1).

COSATU then committed itself to addressing xenophobia and also spoke about a need to organise immigrant workers,

We set ourselves the following tasks in pursuit of our common commitment to the fundamental eradication of xenophobia and its causes:-

- Review of migration dispensation to care for foreigners; and
- Organising migrant workers to fight for and defend their rights (COSATU & UNHCR 2010:1).

Perhaps some of the policy positions adopted after the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, especially at its 2009 national congress, are beginning to indicate some policy shifts which are beginning to engage the question of immigrant workers positively. Of course, the limitation of polices is that they do not always translate into concrete actions.

## **COSATU and Campaigns against Xenophobia**

Having examined COSATU’s policy position on xenophobia and immigrant communities and immigrant workers, I am now examining COSATU’s practical campaigns against xenophobia. Based on the interviews and documentary evidence, I argue that COSATU’s practical campaigns against xenophobia were lukewarm if not cold and this perhaps had to do with fact that the trade union federation, as stated earlier in this article, was ambivalent on how to relate to immigrants. On one hand, the union saw a need to defend immigrant communities against xenophobic attacks. On the other, the union had problems with the so called illegal immigrants and immigrants in general who were seen to be responsible for the lowering of

labour standards. For the sake of completeness, it has to be mentioned that a tiny minority within COSATU and its affiliates has been able to provide solidarity with immigrant communities, especially during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 (Di Poala 2012).

## **Humanitarian Assistance to Immigrants during the Xenophobic Attacks of May 2008**

As part of providing practical solidarity, some COSATU affiliates, provinces, and individuals provided humanitarian assistance ranging from food, clothing to shelter to immigrants who were under attack in May 2008. Western Cape COSATU's Mike Louw said, 'We quickly got together as various organisations and as civil society we were able to pull humanitarian resource together and reached the ground' (Louw 2009, interview).

Thulani Mabaso, the Chairperson of the COSATU local in Boksburg, spoke about how the local structure of COSATU with the assistance of the Gauteng Province of federation provided clothes, blankets and food to displaced immigrant communities in May 2008 and stated that it had to be noted that the East Rand was 'hard hit' by the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 (Mabaso 2009, interview).

Besides providing shelter to immigrants on the East Rand (Falkner 2009, interview), the South African Municipal Workers Union's (SAMWU) statement on xenophobia also highlighted the gender, women and children's dimensions of the violence. The statement read also said, 'We especially condemn the attacks that have been made on women, and the use of gender based violence to intimidate working class communities'.

In 2009, Mandela Day as a platform for pledging solidarity with immigrants from Zimbabwe. Momberg reported,

Cosatu Gauteng officials swopped their placards and protest boots for brooms and gloves to clean the Central Methodist Church and its surrounds in the Johannesburg inner city. This was done through dedicating 67 minutes - reflecting the 67 years of selfless service Mandela had given to the nation - to community work (Momberg 2009:1).

## **Awareness Raising and Mobilisation against Xenophobia**

For the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 were not just catastrophic events requiring general workers' solidarity. The union lost one of its leading shop stewards during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. The union issued a statement seeking to highlight that it had lost one of its leaders and also raised awareness about the ferocious nature of xenophobia. The union said,

Walter Ntombela, a Mozambican national who has been a shop steward for the past 10 years, was killed in his shack at the squalid Madelakufa Squatter camp, outside Tembisa township in Germiston (NUMSA 2008:1).

The NUMSA region on the East Rand to which the late Walter Ntombela belonged sent Mlungisi Rapolile, a NUMSA Regional Educator in Ekurhuleni, to a course on humanitarian disaster management (Rapolile 2009, interview).

Other COSATU affiliates such as the SAMWU and South African Transport Workers Union spread the anti-xenophobia message by printing T-shirts and posters. In KwaZulu Natal COSATU spread the message against xenophobia by convening meetings of the unions. According to Zet Luziphlo, the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Secretary of COSATU, 'We used our structures such as shop stewards council and the alliance in KwaZulu Natal to stop it' (Luziphlo 2009, interview).

Despite its sheer size, influence and history of active mobilisation, COSATU's campaign against the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 did not translated into active mobilisation in the streets. The only visible mass mobilisation against xenophobia was organised by the Coalition Against Xenophobia, a coalition of Gauteng-based social movements, immigrant organisation and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). With about 5 000 participants, the march was the noticeable public demonstration against the action of those who violated the rights of immigrant communities. In 2009, a follow up public event which sought to highlight the abuse of the rights of immigrants was held at the Lindela Repatriation Centre near Johannesburg. According to the Coalition, Lindela is known for being a centre that detains, tortures and deports those who are suspected of being the

so-called illegal immigrants. A number of South Africans have also been detained and were accused of being ‘illegal’ immigrants (Hlatshwayo 2011).

Stephen Faulkner of SAMWU reflects on COSATU’s lack of participation in the march,

Because the organisers were very clearly associated to the social movements on the far left, that time there was still antagonism on the leadership of social movements and COSATU unions. This dated back to two marches at WSSD [World Summit on Sustainable Development] and marches on Palestinian solidarity. I think that SAMWU was unusual to a certain point and clear about the need to have a working relationship with the Social Movements. Sometimes, despite sectarianism of COSATU and Social Movements themselves, we were very upset with the two WSSD marches. It is a really wasted opportunity and antagonism that is out there. Both sides have turned to focus on extreme polarised arguments around selling out and bankrupting of the alliance.

Faulkner had an optimistic outlook in as far the relationship between COSATU, social movements and an immigrant worker is concerned. He remarked, ‘I think the imbalance between that and xenophobia is because we have an undeveloped position [on xenophobia]. But trade unions are slowly addressing that’.

## **Organising Immigrant Workers?**

Despite calls for solidarity and a need to unite all workers, COSATU and its affiliates have not had a strategic discussion on how to organise immigrant workers (Luhelere 2008). Perhaps the question of organising precarious workers in general such as casual workers, workers working for labour brokers including immigrants is an issue that has not been taken seriously by the trade union movement (Buhlungu 2010).

What seems to have happened is that COSATU and its affiliates have been fixated with ‘palace politics’ which entails focussing most of the energies to power battles and positioning in the African National Congress (ANC) led alliance (COSATU 2012). This perhaps can be explained by the

fact that some of the leaders of COSATU have been able to use the alliance as a platform for upward social mobility which enables leaders of unions to leave the unions and occupy strategic positions in government and business (Masondo 2012). Put differently, immigrant workers are not the only section of workers that is not organised properly by COSATU and its affiliates. Be that as it may. For the sake of focus, the article is only looking at immigrant workers.

There are very isolated instances where union organisers and shop stewards have tried to organise these sections of workers, but these practices have not been generalised. Even these isolated instances tend to be accidental. Put differently, COSATU and its affiliates do not have an active campaign for recruiting and organising immigrant workers.

For example, COSATU affiliates such as SACCAWU, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) have been involved in a number of isolated attempts at organising immigrant workers (Hlatshwayo 2012). For example, Honest Sinama, a Provincial Secretary of SATAWU in the Eastern Cape, spoke about how the union is grappling with organising migrants and diffusing xenophobia in the security and transport sectors. He said,

As SATAWU we are able to explain to our members to say even ourselves we can be regarded as migrants because we have our drivers who travel as far [as] Zambia, Mozambique etc. So how would we feel if those people are treated with [the] same attitude as South Africans are showing to other people? .... In the security [sector] we have people who are from other countries who are also our members (Sinama 2009, interview).

In an interview with Glenn Mpufane of NUM he indicated that the NUM has always been organising migrants. He explained, ‘Concerning organising, we have organised irrespective of language or country of origin. At one stage NUM had a large membership from the neighbouring countries’ (Mpufane 2009, interview). The union demographics changed in post-apartheid South Africa. NUM’s inability to champion the needs and aspirations of migrant workers led to drill operators who are largely migrants from the Eastern Cape, Lesotho and Swaziland forming an independent workers’ committee

which took a direct mandates from striking mine workers in Marikana, a platinum mining area in the North West province. The workers were demanding a wage increase and felt that the union was no longer championing the needs of migrant workers. NUM lost credibility because it was seen by the striking workers as a union that defends the interest of the bosses and the state. In August 2012, during the strike, 34 workers were massacred by the police in Marikana (Jika *et al.* 2012; Vundla 2012). Given that some of workers killed during the massacre were from Lesotho, the Lesotho government held a memorial service for the victims of the Marikana massacre in 2012 (South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 2012:1).

Maybe De Lange made a more fundamental discovery with regard to a changing profile of immigrant workers. From what he argues, it seems as if NUM has really been transformed from a union which catered for immigrant workers to a union that caters for supervisors, technicians and lower levels of management who are regarded as South Africans in the mining sector. This is what de Lange said about the profile of NUM in 2012,

Secondly, and most importantly, a gradual change had taken place in the profile of the NUM membership over the last 15 years; one that nobody had taken notice of. The NUM was originally borne out of the lowest job categories of South African mineworkers, mainly from gold mines. More than 60% of its members were foreigners, mostly illiterate migrant labourers who were not interested in a career path. Nowadays that number has dropped to below 40%. On the other hand, an increasing portion of the NUM's membership comes from what can be described as white-collar mining staff ... (De Lange 2012:1).

## **'Papers' and the Question of 'Illegal' Immigrant Workers**

During the interviews the union interviewees were asked whether the unions do organise immigrant workers including those that do not have official documentation from the Home Affairs office. Documentation entail various 'papers' in possession of migrants and these range from work permits to refugee status documents.

Abrahamse, the Provincial Secretary of SATAWU in the Western Cape, said, ‘Most illegals (sic) outside our scope are not organisable’ (Abrahamse 2009, interview).

Judging from the abovementioned statement, one may assume that it is absolutely impossible for unions to organise the so-called illegal immigrant workers. However, in context of xenophobic attacks in De Doorns in the Western Cape in 2012 COSATU in the Western Cape called for the legalisation of ‘undocumented’ immigrant workers. COSATU in the Western Cape said,

We are shocked by dangerous attempts by farm owners to divide workers and to provoke xenophobia in cheap attempts to divide workers. We call for a documentation amnesty, to avoid bloodshed and mass displacement (Herron 2012:1).

## **Attitudes of Immigrants towards COSATU**

Immigrant communities and their representatives stated that COSATU was not visible during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. It could have used its public profile to send a clear anti-xenophobia message to South Africa and the world. There was also a concern about a lack of COSATU’s participation in the anti-xenophobia march organised by CAX during the attacks of May 2008. Ahmed Dawlo, the former Director of the Somali Association of South Africa, said, ‘COSATU has to come out with a very strong message against xenophobia and the loss of innocent lives of migrants’ (Dawlo 2009, interview).

James Mhlanga, a Zimbabwean immigrant worker working at a university in Johannesburg, arrived in South Africa in 1990 and has been working under precarious conditions since then. He was concerned about the fact that COSATU and its affiliates did not organise immigrant workers because they would have been able to strengthen the union and access their rights in the process. He said, ‘COSATU should organise all workers so that they can access their rights’ (Mhlanga interview, 2013).

COSATU in the Western Cape seems to have developed a close relationship with immigrant communities in the area. Concerning the working relationship between migrant organisations and COSATU in the Western Cape, Barry Wuganaale of the Ogoni Solidarity Forum remarked, ‘Their [COSATU Western Cape] leadership and the staff have welcomed the organisation that I represent .... This has been very encouraging’ (Wuganaale 2009, interview).

## **Conclusion**

While COSATU has adopted resolutions against xenophobia, the federation as a whole has not used its numerical and political strengths to mobilise against xenophobia. Besides humanitarian aid provided during the xenophobia attacks of May 2008, COSATU has not been able to develop a strategy which sees the prevalence of immigrant workers in South Africa as a permanent feature of the South Africa economy. In fact, a policy approach that organises workers regardless of their country of origin seems to be plausible because immigration to South African appears to be unstoppable. While the Food and Allied Workers’ Union (FAWU) and COSATU have adopted resolutions calling for the organisation of immigrant workers (COSATU 2012), only time will tell whether these resolutions will be implemented. Perhaps COSATU nationally and its affiliates have a lot to learn from COSATU in the Western Cape which has convened a number of discussions on organising immigrant workers. It has to be noted that these are not easy issues to resolve, but COSATU in the Western Cape is trying to subvert national chauvinism by emphasising solidarity ‘within’ the South African borders.

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