

Mixed Narrative Discourses: Analysing the South African Government's Response to Xenophobia in 2015

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Abstract

This study examines the South African government's responses to the xenophobia of 2015. As xenophobia attracted political interest from opposition within South Africa, statements from certain government officials were embedded in mixed narrative discourses, some bringing trouble while some were accountable. South Africa is a country that prides itself on its Bill of Rights and Foreign Policy that promote global peace and human rights for all which comes with a huge political responsibility. Even though the South African government had some positive responses, such interventions were not effective to curb violence against foreign nationals in the country. This study is grounded on qualitative research designs that included critical discourse of media reports and random interviews. Hence, the study underscores the complex dynamics of contextualisation of xenophobia and placing the South African society under international scrutiny. The government's mixed responses have led to manipulation of xenophobic tendencies among corrupt political, societal and international constituents, crumbling law enforcement systems, increasing (including illegal) migration and debilitated urban spaces, and poor communication between the central government and ordinary residents. This article concludes that, for the South African state to address xenophobia, it must firstly contextualise xenophobia and its attacks to better render suitable interventions to end xenophobia in the country.

Keywords: xenophobia, narratives, government, immigration

Background to the Study

Scholars have highlighted various factors that sparked xenophobic tendencies towards foreign nationals in urban spaces of South Africa. The focus of this essay is on the South African government's responses to xenophobia in 2015. What is unique in this study is that it not only highlights some of the problematic areas in the government's attitude towards xenophobia in 2015, it also draws attention to some of the systematic challenges that the government faced in its response to the dynamics of violence on the ground where xenophobia occurred. This paper is presented based on qualitative research designs, using both secondary and empirical data. The empirical data, in the form of interviews, was conducted and collected randomly from Durban (Mayville) in 2017, among five participants. The empirical data complemented the secondary data drawn from published sources, media accounts and official reports by various commissions and committees. The study argues that, while the attitude towards xenophobia at the higher echelons of the state was dismal, there are also socio-economic and political challenges within the government. These cracks in the system have presented their own administrative challenges on the ground and contributed to the government's failure to deal with xenophobia aggressively to protect the rights and dignity of foreign nationals in post-apartheid urban South Africa.

At the end of March 2015, Durban (Ethekwini) witnessed the outbreak of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals which started in Isipingo, south of Durban, and spread to other areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and other provinces in South Africa. This episode was the second intense occurrence since 2008 (Bekker 2008; Bekker 2010). Between 2009 and 2015 violence spread. National Statistics in 2011 showed that, on average, one person per week was killed, 100 injured and 1000 displaced (*Daily Maverick* 28 May 2013). The attacks were characterized by the looting of foreign-owned shops (*South African History Online [SAHO]* 17 April 2015). Incidents were triggered by various factors, including alleged killing and theft committed by foreign nationals, and a desire by local residents for revenge (SAHO 17 April 2015; *Talk Radio 702* 16 April 2015). Some observers cited scarcity of effective conflict resolution mechanisms within locations where violence occurred, sense of impunity among perpetrators and the manipulation of local residents' sentiments against foreigners by local community leaders to strengthen their power base (*Daily Maverick* 28 May 2013).

Contemporary literature views xenophobia as one of the contributing

factors to urban violence in some parts of Africa, and a threat to urban management (Crush & Ramachandran 2009; Hassim *et al.* 2008). Tevera (2013) posits that the convoluted spaces of deprivation in urban areas should form part of the discourse on violence in urban South Africa. The connection between urban poverty, xenophobia and violence in industrialised and developing countries is not a uniquely South African phenomenon (Rodgers 2010; Morapedi 2007; McKnight 2008). However, fragile economies and political instability in certain regions in Africa have triggered large flows of migrants from their home countries to South Africa (Tevera 2011; Crush & Tevera 2010; Rusinga *et al.* 2012). This has produced competitive multicultural urbanscapes and administrative challenges in such cities as Durban and Johannesburg. Added to this, townships as urban African spaces are not directly linked to the wider urban economy, hence there are restricted economic pursuits in them (Grant 2013). The expansion of foreign-owned street trading has produced business competition between foreign and local shop owners. The study by SAMP (Southern Africa Migration Project) revealed that the majority of locals in Botswana and South Africa wanted their governments to devise policies that would make it difficult for foreign nationals to operate street trading or obtain citizenships. Such scholars as Tevera (2013:17) would thus wonder if the attitude towards foreigners is xenophobia, 'or could it be a reflection of a societal symptom characterised by emerging violent entrepreneurship whereby business competitors often resort to physically attracting opponents?' Media has also been criticised for negatively profiling or demonizing foreign nationals for urban social ills such as drugs and other crimes (McDonald and Jacobs 2005; Tevera 2013).

Some observers connect xenophobic attacks to socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and struggle for access to basic services in many urban areas (Hassim *et al.* 2008; *Daily Maverick*, 24 November 2015). Most of the xenophobic attacks intensified in the fringes of informal society where foreigners competed for survival with mostly unemployed and/or poor South Africans (*Daily Maverick* 28 May 2013). During service delivery demonstrations, foreigners were particularly targeted (*Relief Web* 9 December 2010). Allan and Heese (n.d.) use 'relative deprivation' to explain the feeling of exclusion and rejection (by the government and society) among protesters, in which foreigners became scapegoats for poor service delivery by the government (*Pambazuka News* 15 December 2010; Rusinga *et al.* 2012). Tevera (2013), however, argues that this

explanation does not expound why other poor urban communities have remained calm, or why only foreign nationals are mostly targeted during the violence. One of the residents in Mayville, Durban, said:

Well, generally criminals don't always care whether you are a local or a foreigner, what they want is your money or goods. However, when you are a foreigner you become a softer target because they have this thing that you have no one to protect you. Even those people who are not criminals can take advantage of you if they get a chance. But I must say, as a Mozambican, I have not had problems here (Respondent 1, 8 August 2017).

Nevertheless, in certain areas in Gauteng and Cape Town, local community leadership allegedly held meetings to find strategies to eradicate shops owned by foreigners (Rusinga *et al.* 2012). Some scholars (Misago 2009; Misago *et al.* 2009) thus blame the lack of institutional structures and trusted local leadership structures in the affected areas. Therefore, since the 1990s, xenophobia in South Africa has been connected to various factors.

The 2015 attacks were reportedly fuelled by public figures such as His Majesty King Zwelithini Zulu and Lindiwe Zulu, the then minister of National Small Business Development. His Majesty was criticized for inciting violence against foreign nationals in his March 2015 speech on Human Rights Day in Phongola, north of KZN. As the parliamentary report on xenophobic violence stated, 'the crux of the concerns over foreign nationals raised by the King in his speech suggests that foreign nationals have taken over and degraded entrepreneurship, while making communities ugly and unhygienic' (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015). In that speech, the King also reportedly reinforced the notion that the South African government had failed to protect South Africans from 'the influx of foreign nationals' (*South African Broadcasting [SABC] News* 21 April 2015; *Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015).

South Africa is committed to international protocols that promote human rights for all as outlined in its Bill of Rights. The country has invested resources in the promotion of peace in Africa and elsewhere (Hengari 2016; Hayem 2013). Thus the continued violence against foreign nationals reflected the 'government's inability to counter xenophobia or address the contributing causes' (Human Rights Watch 2014). Dr. Harold Ngalawa, an academic,

commented (in *Fin* 24 14 April 2015) that ‘South Africa is a giant economically and African countries respect this government, it is seen as a country that can be relied on’ (*Independent Online News (IOL)* 25 April 2015). Moreover, xenophobia attracted reactions from sub-Saharan African governments. Some threatened to deport South African nationals and their businesses in their countries (Visser 2015). *IOL* (25 April 2015). For example, Nigerian senators, Abdul Ningi and Nkechi Nwogu, urged the Nigerian federal government to recall its High Commissioner from South Africa and to have King Zulu indicted by the International Criminal Court for inciting xenophobic violence. In Swaziland, the Swaziland Anti-Xenophobia Society marched to the South African High Commissioner’s office. Outside Africa, China, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia issued travel warnings. Xenophobia thus tarnished South Africa’s economic and political relations in the continent and elsewhere (Louw-Vaudran 2016). Of interest to this study is the South African government’s response to xenophobia in 2015.

The Government Response: The Mixed Narratives

While the South African government is committed to ending xenophobic attacks and discouraging related attitudes, the authors found some of the statements from the government’s officials had mixed narratives. Even though the media played a huge role in manipulating the situation, some of the government officials’ statements were self-evidently problematic. For instance, following the 2015 attacks, Malusi Gigaba, the then Minister of Home Affairs, said that even though South Africa has problems, the government does not ‘send our [its] people to other countries’ (Hengari 2016). Moreover, in April 2015, former President Jacob Zuma stated that while the government ‘strongly condemn the attacks’, they [the government] are ‘aware of and are sympathetic to some of the issues that have been raised by the affected South African citizens’ (The Presidency 16 April 2015). Such statements are problematic in their reception as are embedded in different narratives. In such life-threatening situations, more responsible statements could be expected from the government and its officials to help combat such violent attacks. Also adding to problematic statements is the media. The media portrayed His Majesty, King Zulu, as the perpetrator of xenophobia. For instance, the media reported that the King stated that ‘foreigners need to understand that they are here [in South Africa] as a courtesy and our [the

leadership] priority is to the people of this country first and foremost' (*Mail and Guardian* 3 February 2015). African leadership responsibility is crucial to the people of South Africa, it is also equally significant to the people entering the country. Thus, making and publicising such statements in the country that already is troubled by violence is problematic. While media carries the right to publicity its messages should help reducing rather than promoting violence. While some media reports were problematic, some were more accountable. For instance, the then Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Economic Development in Gauteng, Lebogang Maile, who viewed motives for xenophobic violence as economic, since the struggling township entrepreneurs, whose majority are blacks, 'feel demoralised [and] frustrated [...] and cannot thrive as business owners in their own communities' (*Mail and Guardian* 30 January 2015). Also, the then Minister of Small Business Development, Lindiwe Zulu, reportedly said that foreign business owners must share their business skills and secrets with local entrepreneurs in order to co-exist peacefully with the local business fraternity (*Eye Witness News* 25 May 2015). Based on these media reports, evidently, xenophobia caused some strains with mixed narratives from the government officials, leadership and people affected in one way or another. Bekker (2015) whose descriptions indicate strong discontent with the South African government refers to these mixed narratives as the 'manipulation' of xenophobic tendencies.

Hence some responses viewed xenophobia as crime. In their responsive anti-xenophobia accounts, some government officials and politicians viewed xenophobia as a criminal act. Briefly, some of the government narratives pointed to crime, not anti-foreigner sentiments, as a driving force behind the attacks (Bekker 2015). For example, the then Minister of Police, Mr Nathi Nhleko, reinforced the criminal element of the attacks and said that it was difficult to define such actions as xenophobic (*Mail and Guardian* 14 April 2015). As a result, the parliamentary joint ad-hoc committee to investigate the attacks in Johannesburg and KZN was formed. The Alexandra police in Gauteng reported to the committee that there was no evidence that such violent outbreaks were xenophobic. The committee criticized the media for 'incorrectly labelling the attacks on foreign nationals as xenophobic' (Bekker 2015). *Izinduna* (indigenous ethnic groups headmen) from various hostels in Johannesburg claimed that factories discriminated against South Africans by hiring foreign nationals who were willing to work for 'peanuts' (*eNCA* 10 July 2015). Addressing them, Bhengu again said 'it

[xenophobia] means having extreme hatred which we don't have as South Africans. We must move away from this xenophobic word because it makes it seem like South Africans hate foreigners when we have lived with whites and Indians who we don't know where they came from. Therefore, it is not correct to judge and say South Africans are xenophobic'. She added that using this word could trigger more attacks (*eNCA* 10 July 2015). In addition, the parliamentary joint ad-hoc committee visited affected areas in the country and attributed xenophobic attacks to criminality by South Africans who were either criminals or drug addicts (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015; Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 12 June 2015; *Cape 567am* 16 April 2015). Based on the criminal narratives, attacks were not mainly based on xenophobia but on opportunistic criminality. Some of the officials strongly blamed it on the media for its failure to appropriately contextualize violence. For example, the KZN premier's office blamed the social media and some of the mainstream media platforms for manufacturing stories, some being shared with *Al Jazeera News* by foreign nationals. Because of such mixed narratives, the South African government statements amounted to being forms of denialism and the lack of readiness to deal with the realism of xenophobia, affecting the country and its reputation. The South African Human Research Council (SAHRC) maintained that this was not 'simply a law and order issue', and advised the government to acknowledge the root causes of such attacks in order to effectively deal with the challenge (*Talk Radio 702* 16 April 2015).

In 2017, Gareth Newham from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) stated that political leaders legitimised xenophobia when even the president said 'we cannot close our eyes to the concerns of communities that most of the crimes, such as drug-dealing, prostitution and human trafficking, are allegedly perpetrated by foreign nationals' (*The Citizen* 24 February 2017). In February 2017, the African Diaspora Forum (ADF) blamed Mr Herman Mashaba, the mayor of Johannesburg, for repeatedly saying that he would not accept foreigners without appropriate documentation. They (ADF) also blamed the government for spending 'so much time trying to find another name for it so they don't have to call it xenophobia' (*Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017). Such 'official' comments have received criticism from various quarters, some blaming the South African government for their sluggish response to violence against foreign nationals. One of the social media commentators said:

This is a national problem which was not dealt with when it first

erupted in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2008, and earlier this year in Soweto. It requires strong decisive leadership which will do the necessary ground work to ensure there is never a repeat of such violence in our country ever again (*Destiny Man* 15 April 2015).

Another commentator said:

This is our township economy rape, and now this has erupted to be a national economy rape. Our neighbouring countries' influence in our economic growth is compromised, not to mention the confidence Southern African Development Community (SADC) has in our country. I am not laying all this to the government leaders, but they should have seen this coming (*Destiny Man* 15 April 2015).

In April 2015, a Congolese businessman said 'if the government has failed [to stop xenophobia], it should admit that it has done so, call in the army and declare a state of emergency' (*Moneyweb* 21 April 2015). Indeed the 2008 unsolved murder case of Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a Mozambican who had been burned alive in Ramaphosa informal settlement, Gauteng, was among many cases for which no arrests had been made. In October 2010, this case was closed because there were no witnesses (*SAHO* 17 April 2015). There were also reports of harassment by the police. In Durban, a Congolese hairdresser commented that, while xenophobic attacks were worrying many foreigners, his main concern was 'fending off harassment from the people who are supposed to protect him: the police' (*Moneyweb* 21 April 2015). However, Jay Naicker, the police spokesperson, maintained that there was an 'excellent relationship' between the police and foreigners. When they (foreigners) were attacked, they ran to local police stations for protection. In Yeoville, Gauteng, Thabo Malatji, the district's police spokesperson, also said that, although the police had conducted operations in search of undocumented immigrants, no cases of police harassment had been reported. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), African Centre for Migration and Society, and the Displaced and Migrant Persons Support Programme built a network of SMS informants to communicate directly with the police, to which the latter (police) positively responded. Nevertheless, as China Ngubane, a member of the Civil Society Group in Durban, commented, 'it was like the police were friends of the looters. It was like they were helping because there were no warning shots

or teargas being fired. I spoke to a station commander about what was happening at Isipingo and I was told that they were short-staffed, which was why you had people being turned away from opening cases' (*Mail and Guardian* 24 April 2015).

Following the 2015 episodes, the government launched a program known as Operation Fiela Reclaim (OFR) to execute raids across the country and erode crime such as illegal possession of weapons, drug trafficking and prostitution (Bekker 2015). Having been initially carried out by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and launched by Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration, part of its mandate was to maintain public order and repatriate undocumented foreign nationals. OFR has, however, been criticised by some observers for allegedly targeting foreign nationals, and for their use of force (*Talk Radio 702* 16 April 2015). Some critiques have also argued that it was 'poorly calibrated', and endorsed perceptions of 'structural and administrative xenophobia' (Hengari 2016).

Pressure also came from opposition parties within South Africa, claiming that the ANC government had failed to address xenophobia. As an Economic Freedom Fighter (EFF) said in a statement, 'the crisis that confronts society is primarily a political crisis born of politicians who have failed to provide jobs for the people of South Africa, and who have failed to educate the nation on coexistence of all Africans, including socio-economic migrants' (*UNDICTATED* 21 April 2015). In response to the killing of Emmanuel Sithole, a Mozambican man in Alexandra, the Congress of the People (COPE) president, Mosiuoa Lekota, said 'we feel so sick, revolted and horrified [...] that he was a Mozambican. That he was a fellow African matters not a jot. For once, the criminal justice system should show that the wheels of justice are capable of turning'. Lekota added that the ANC government should act swiftly because xenophobia was tarnishing South Africa's international image. The Democratic Alliance's (DA) safety and security spokesperson, Kate Lorimer, also demanded that the 'monsters that killed Sithole on Saturday must be hunted down and be persecuted to the full extent of the law' (*News 24* 19 April 2015).

Therefore, the ADF's observation that political parties in South Africa did not take a clear stand on issues of xenophobia was not completely accurate (See *Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017). The police reported that they were investigating if the death of Sithole was connected to xenophobia. Their spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Lungelo Dlamini, stated that 'the information

we have is that he was a street vendor who had an argument with a customer, who allegedly stabbed him, and he was taken to hospital where he died'. The police were thus investigating a case of murder (*News 24* 19 April 2015). All these observations and comments by observers suggest that the government failed to address xenophobia. However, there is evidence that, in 2015, there were attempts by various organs of the state to stop xenophobia, discussed below. Nevertheless, as will be shown in the next sections, these interventions were not punitive enough.

The State Intervention

The murder of Sithole in Alexandra, media reported, resulted in the first arrests for the murder of a foreigner in 2015. The defence minister, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, deployed the army in Jeppestown and Alexandra, Gauteng, and other parts of South Africa to assist the police handle confrontations with looters and attackers. Mapisa-Nqakula admitted that there was a crisis (SAHO 17 April 2015). This was 'the first deployment to quench civilian unrest since 2008. We are deploying because it is an emergency. The army will support police officers who will take the lead in containing the violence. There will be those who will be critical of this decision, but the vulnerable will appreciate it', she said during her visit to Alexandra (*UNDICTATED* 21 April 2015). The SANDF Military Command would provide support to the police because violence was posing threats to national security and stability, to stop violence since many lives were being lost (*UNDICTATED* 21 April 2015) In Alexandra, residents appreciated the presence of the army because, as one of them said, 'it's a good thing. Everyone is afraid of the army, it is going to control the situation'. The SAHRC also commended law enforcement for their quick response and intervention to minimize disorder (*Talk Radio 702* 16 April 2015).

The then minister of South African Police Services (SAPS), Nathi Nhleko, embarked on a campaign called 'We are the Humanity'. The movement focused on community outreach programs, mass education, behavioural change and community feedback programs. Nhleko said that these attacks were motivated by 'self-hatred', and were part of 'lingering destructive colonial legacy' (*News 24* 19 April 2015). Regarding xenophobic attacks in Durban, Malusi Gigaba stated that the government regretted the violence. Gigaba advised the foreign nationals to register their names with their community leaders, to have them on the database. The government promised

to help those who wanted to leave South Africa, and the safety of those foreigners who wanted to stay in the country. The SAPS commissioner, Mmamonye Ngobeni, promised that the xenophobia issues would be investigated and urged the community members to stop fighting foreigners. 'We will not tolerate such attacks, and this must stop. Our police officers in blue will continue to monitor the situation in the province and will investigate those cases already opened', he said (*Daily Maverick* 7 April 2015). In KZN, the government encouraged dialogue on xenophobia to provide solutions. As the premier's office statement suggests, 'in this regard, the executive council reaffirms its belief in shared humanity as central to contemporary global meaning of human rights and development'. Following violent explosions in Soweto, Lindiwe Zulu, in collaboration with the departments of Home Affairs and Trade and Industry, formed a task team to investigate underlying tensions between foreigners and locals (*Daily Maverick* 7 April 2015).

On 24 April 2015, President Zuma held meetings with organizations representing foreigners in South Africa. Meetings would also be held between the Ethekwini (Durban) Municipality, SAPSs and the national Home Affairs Department (*IOL* 25 April 2015). Zuma is said to have cancelled his state visit to Indonesia to deal with issues of xenophobia. He called for calm in the course of attacks in affected areas. As he said, 'we cannot accept that when there are challenges we use violence particularly to our brothers and sisters from the continent' (*Talk Radio 702* 16 April 2015). Tozi Mthethwa, the Durban city spokesperson, claimed that the reintegration of foreigners into Durban communities was already underway. Some of the foreigners had returned to communities in Umlazi and had been peacefully welcomed by the township residents (*IOL* 25 April 2015). These were all interventions by the state. Nevertheless, while the state condemned violence, it labelled the attacks as criminal and, sometimes, said that local business owners needed support in order to compete fairly with their foreign counterparts. There is no evidence that government interventions were effective. No one was held responsible for violence against foreigners. A statement was made that:

Until perpetrators can be charged, foreigners will remain an easy target for politicians and local leaders looking to deflect blame on service delivery failures, unemployment and poverty, criminals, and business owners forcing competition out of market. Initiatives to encourage dialogue on xenophobia began after 2008 attacks but, for

political leaders setting the agenda, the issue is only a priority after the attacks occur (*Daily Maverick* 7 April 2015)

Some critics argued that government interventions might be a belated effort to show other African governments that the South African government was willing to deal with the crisis effectively. However, as Roland Henwood, an academic, said, 'May be they [government] have information that this is out of the control of the police so they have to act with much more vigour' (*UNDICTATED* 21 April 2015). In February 2017, Gareth Newham from ISS also stated that the government had begun social cohesion and cultural awareness programs. But, such attempts needed more effort from the government because anti-foreigner attitudes are deeply rooted in South Africa (*Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017). The report by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (12 June 2015) acknowledged initiatives that were introduced around the country by various stakeholders to encourage peaceful co-existence between locals and foreigners. It, however, still noted that social cohesion programmes have not been effectively implemented since the 2008 attacks, to integrate foreign nationals. The People's Coalition against Xenophobia recommended community engagement, social cohesion discussions, and intervention by the Department of Home Affairs to ensure that human rights of foreigners are protected. In essence, while the ad hoc committee supported the protection of vulnerable communities, little attention was given to the promotion of social cohesion and to the government attitudes (denialism) towards xenophobia (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015; Report of the *ad hoc* joint committee 19 November 2015). Various policy options were endorsed. These include the 2016-2021 National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to deal with all forms of bigotry in the country (South Africa, Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2015). However, some critiques argue that xenophobia is not a dominant factor in such initiatives, compared to issues of racism against which the ANC government has mobilised (Hengari 2016). Xenophobia thus continuously poses a threat to South Africa's 2030 sustainable development goal of inclusiveness. It is, however, also important to highlight some of the challenges which the government faced. These hurdles did not necessarily stem from the state's unwillingness to address xenophobia. They were administrative mal-functions which weakened their (state) interventions, some of which are discussed below.

Government Challenges

Crime is one of the serious challenges in South Africa. Makhosini Kunene (in *Pambazuka News* 15 December 2010) remarked that genuine community anxieties have been seized and exploited by criminals as a disguise. Service delivery protests create a platform for criminals to rob, pillage or assault foreign nationals. Case studies from various provinces of South Africa showed that, when protesters cause disturbances during demonstrations, criminals subsequently exploit that social discontent to attack foreigners (SAHRC 2010). In some cases, crime was committed by local political leaders who planned xenophobic attacks for their own political and economic gains. Xenophobia became enmeshed in local political struggles for prestige and power, sometimes driven by political factionalism in protesting communities (Polzer 2010).

Increasing populations in townships and informal settlements as urban spots in South Africa have been characterised by poor living conditions, violence, lawlessness, poverty and poor law enforcement systems. There, poor foreigners and locals struggle to make a living. The violent nature of poor service demonstrations have increased the vulnerability of foreign nationals who are often attacked during service delivery protests. In Embalenhle, near Secunda, Mpumalanga Province, protesters torched the offices of the Govan Mbeki Local Municipality over electricity power cuts. As one of the residents said, 'I do not condone violence, but we cannot live without electricity while we pay for it'. In the process, they burned and looted shops owned by foreigners (*All For Women* 17 October 2017).

Lekaba (2014) conducted a study among residents in Alexandra and Bekkersdal townships, Gauteng. The residents confirmed that criminal elements took advantage of service delivery protests to cause disorder and pillage businesses owned by foreigners. They claimed that the attacks were not necessarily xenophobic. They felt insulted by foreign nationals who had killed a South African. They also expressed their concern against undocumented foreigners who settle in South Africa because, when they (foreigners) commit crimes, it is difficult to trace them. Residents further claimed that foreign nationals come to South Africa with skills such as welding and car mechanics that are not scarce in the country and compete with South Africans at a low cost, which undermines the local business talent. For them, xenophobia was 'a bold act against indignity' (Lekaba 2014). 'Undocumented migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation or end up supporting themselves through petty

crime. And that involvement in crime exposes them to attacks from locals in the name of fighting crime, as we saw these past weeks', said Richard Ots, head of the South African office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (*Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017). On 17 February 2017, there was a march against crime in Johannesburg. The government, the ADF complained, allowed the march on the premise that these were demonstrations against illegal activities such as drug dealing and prostitution, not against foreigners (*Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017).

In Bekkersdal locals indicated that they do not have a problem with foreign owned businesses. They emphasized that criminals taint the dignity of poor service delivery protests by grabbing an honest protest and turn it into chaos. They, however, also stated that the government should not focus on criminal elements and dodge real issues behind protests, which is service delivery. Violence against foreign nationals, manifested during genuine service delivery protests, is 'an act of criminality' by criminals who take advantage of the situation. There are peaceful relations between locals and foreigners before service delivery protests occur. South Africans support foreign owned businesses in their communities more, compared to those owned by fellow South Africans (Lekaba 2014). In Durban, one informant said:

Most of us are not xenophobic, we have thousands of Mozambicans here, some of them run small businesses. Who is their clientele in these communities? We are. It's convenient for us to have these [foreign owned] businesses here because we don't have to go to town to get things like bread, pain killers, cold drinks and other things. And their prices are reasonable. You see this guy up here, Moses, when you don't have money he gives you what you need on credit (Respondent 5 19 September 2017).

Therefore, to protect foreign nationals, the government must deal with social ills that lead to protests, during which foreigners are attacked (Lekaba 2014). Subsequent to the 2008 attacks, various stakeholders cautioned the government against the possible recurrence of such violence. However, such factors as recurring challenges within the public order policing and increasing political division incapacitated police responses. Judge Navi Pillay, former United Nations Higher Commissioner for Human Rights, headed a probe and identified areas of weakness in the work done by law enforcement agencies.

China Ngubane also stated that ‘effective preventive action by officials and the enforcement agencies is still missing’ (*News 24* 6 April 2016). The report of the ad hoc joint committee (19 November 2015) stated that underlying tensions between foreigners and locals should be traced back to the 2008 xenophobic violence, after which they were not addressed, hence their recurrence. The report, however, also highlighted the post-apartheid underlying socioeconomic challenges as a foundation for increased competition for employment, basic social services and business opportunities within and between communities (*The Daily Vox* n.d.).

Walter Da Costa, a former member of the SANDF, indicated that low level every day attacks are difficult to trace as early warnings more than 24 hours before their occurrence, especially because sometimes lootings take place during other demonstrations such as service delivery protests. There are also loopholes within the policing system. Apathy of the individual police officers makes it difficult for the system to trickle down. Other complications are caused by how the police handle the pillaging scene when they get to it. Da Costa also observed that ‘police might cordon off a scene, but will allow looters to loot until they are finished, they wait to use maximum force, which is difficult since Marikana’ (*Mail and Guardian* 24 April 2015). The public order policing has also faced many challenges since 2008. Its membership has been dropping in the last ten years. For example, in 2009 there were 3306 trained public order policing members, compared to the end of 2006 number, which was 7 227.

The crime intelligence capacity has been deteriorating, exacerbated by the increasing number of robberies between 2012 and 2014, with an average increase of 50 robberies per day. Political interference to protect Lieutenant General Richard Mdluli, the SAPS head of crime intelligence, was another factor within the policing system. ‘Senior and experienced officers who were against Mdluli were forced out, and a number of Mdluli’s cronies are still active in this division. This has contributed to a climate of mistrust and low morale at a leadership level’, said Newham of the ISS (*Mail and Guardian* 24 April 2015). Da Costa also noted that there were gangs moving from township to township, stealing goods and cash. In Durban, these thugs targeted mostly shops owned by foreign nationals. This happened before the attacks deteriorated into widespread targeting of foreigners in the scale of 2008 and 2015 (*Mail and Guardian* 24 April 2015). There were thus political and socio-economic interests fuelling attacks, which the system struggled to monitor.

Loren Landau, from the Centre for Migration and Society, observed that ward councillors are poorly trained to deal with their voters' discontent. 'Faced with perennial shortfalls', 'Landau stated, 'is it any wonder local leadership allows and abets the scapegoating and appropriation of foreign owned shops, houses or goods? With new resources to distribute and a demon to blame, they come out winners' (*The Wordpost* 26 April 2015). *Daily Maverick* (24 November 2015) reported that the Department of Home Affairs was working on the green and white paper, the Refugee Amendment Bill and changes to the Border Management Agency. Part of this was an attempt to tighten up controls on migrants, beef up border security and invest in township economies. However, as Landau argued, 'tightening immigration rules will not solve the problem, instead it will drive people further underground. Again, if trade and traffic are shut off between South Africa and its neighbours, that will weaken the regional economy which depends on remittances' (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015).

Increasing migration into urban areas of South Africa has also brought its own development and service delivery challenges. Many urban areas have been characterised by competition for limited resources, and inequalities that are no longer based strictly on race, but also on class (Seekings & Nattrass 2007). In the report by the parliamentary ad-hoc joint committee, the IMC and other ministries challenged international agreements such as the United Nations conventions. While such agreements allow asylum seekers to work in foreign countries, other African countries do not have provisions to share the burden of migration (Report of the parliamentary ad-hoc joint committee 19 November 2015). The report challenged the criticism that South Africans are xenophobic, and stated that many problems emanated from huge migration levels for which the government had not planned. Illegal migration has compounded the problem (Hengari 2016). Where there is strong migrants' presence, competition has brought up issues of citizenship (Zondi 2008). Added to this is the perceived lack of communication between residents and local leadership, in which residents feel that they are 'on their own in dealing with social problems' (Allan & Heese n.d.). Some locals highlighted development challenges as an issue that the government has experienced since the 1990s due to migration. One of the respondents said, 'it is a problem of the past. The government must control the borders, and be strict about the legality of migrants in South Africa. It is very difficult for the government to control and manage undocumented migrants, really something should be done'

(Respondent 3, 12 September 2017). David Abraham's study (2010) thus highlights 'structural xenophobia' in the urban setting in which poverty, unemployment and resultant competition for resources are major influences.

However, as the ad hoc committee reported, some South Africans use derogatory language such as the word 'kwere-kwere' to refer to foreigners (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 12 June 2015). The ADF spokesperson stated that 'many South Africans welcomed other Africans into their countries, but the reality is that many others don't want to be associated with foreigners. That is xenophobia' (*Daily Maverick* 24 February 2017). Nevertheless, some South Africans still maintain that 'not all of us hate foreigners. If we did, we would not have so many foreigners in South Africa' (Respondent 2, 17 August 2017). Another respondent said:

What happens when these foreigners hurt us? What do you call that? Xenophobia? Sister, just go to South Beach, we call it Nigeria, the crime there! The government protects them against us because they are supposed to be victims, not the other way round. The government has failed to control South Africa against such criminal incursion. You say something about it, and then they say it's xenophobia (Respondent 4, 19 September 2017).

Some locals feel that indeed some foreign nationals are not innocent. In Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape Province, some Somali business owners have established relationships with local thugs and pay them to terrorise other foreign potential business owners. In De Doorns, Western Cape, many of them were kicked out because the South African labour brokers were not happy with the operations of the Zimbabwean labour brokers operating in the same neighbourhoods (*Pambazuka News* 15 December 2010). The government thus faces pressure from locals who claim that the police have failed to protect them against crime committed by foreign nationals. In December 2016, Mashaba claimed that he was clearing downtown of 'drug dealers and lords, and taking back hijacked buildings'. Mashaba was in communication with foreign embassies, 'for them to know [that] their residents in our city are here criminally'. He blamed the national government for failure to address crime, unemployment, inequality and border control (*Daily Maverick* 24 and 28 February 2017).

The South African labour policy is also not punitive enough to protect

both foreigners and locals. The report of the parliamentary ad-hoc joint committee stated that businesses exploit foreigners who work for less and South Africans are seen as 'lazy' (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015). The Presidency also highlighted the problem of unskilled labour migration since 2008, which exceeds growth, and in which low skilled jobs are dominated by foreigners. Also, due to lack of a business partnership between foreign nationals and locals, such areas as Mahatma Gandhi and Russell streets in Durban have become 'no go areas', where foreigners live isolated. Added to this, the report said, large store owners support foreign owned businesses by securing goods cheaply and sourcing counterfeit goods. Such trade practices force local traders out of business. Some of the problems were systematic. For example, many foreigners struggle to obtain work permits, and end in informal markets, running small businesses. Once in businesses, the report said, foreigners use models such as monopolies, tax evasion, avoidance of customs and sale of illegal and expired good, which do not make competition fair (Report of the *ad hoc* Joint Committee 19 November 2015). There were also concerns that foreigners include ex-military combatants who run small businesses as 'fronts for brothels and drug trading' (*Daily Maverick* 24 November 2015). Such sentiments also emerged during interviews. One respondent said:

I know that some of them make an honest living really. But I have also heard that these guys, especially Nigerians, are involved in human trafficking and drug dealing. I know one guy, his church knows him as a pastor. You know some of them hide behind this church thing. I read somewhere that he was caught at the airport with drugs on his way to South Africa. But I also know that they do not work alone, some locals are involved. It is difficult for the government to control these things (Respondent 3, 12 September 2017).

Therefore, there are complex dynamics on the ground where these attacks happen. Among them are socio-economic difficulties which the government has been struggling with since 1994, corruption among local government officials, political interference and inadequate law enforcement. These flaws in the system have been exacerbated by criminal opportunism, illegal immigration, understaffed public policing system, attitudes among locals and many other social ills. The government struggles to contain these defects at national, provincial and local levels.

Conclusion

The mixed government narratives towards xenophobia in 2015 were and/or are regrettable. This paper, however, argued that, as the state began to redefine xenophobia as a crisis and emergency, various organs of the state intervened against the scourge. Nevertheless, these interventions were not effective enough therefore more work needs to be done to address attacks against foreigners in South Africa. South Africa is the country among the world states with the youngest democracy yet still has much to learn and adjust to, and xenophobia is one of the atrocious incidents that the government needs to eliminate. South Africa needs a coordinated and systematic effort to understand and address the problem of xenophobia. To root out xenophobia, as per the Immigration Act of 2002 commitment, community leaders, law enforcement, media, and the government should promote societal changes in the form of, for example, public awareness and education together with plans to tackle issues of corruption, poverty, unemployment and poor living conditions in urban spaces. Socially inclusive dialogue should be encouraged, and all stakeholders involved such as central government, local authorities, community leaders and representatives of migrant communities should all form part of that dialogue to promote harmonious co-existence.

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