



# **Xenophobic Violence and Economic Development in South Africa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The increasing wave of xenophobic violence in South Africa has indeed, battered the country's image internally and globally. Apparently, the staggering dimension of this violence has sparked off unprecedented pogroms in the continental Africa and the world. Consequently, socio-economic activities needed for human progress, emancipation and development have been caught quandary, thereby, bringing life back to the Hobbesan state of nature where life is solitary, brutish, nasty, unaccommodating and short. Against this backdrop, this study therefore, aims at interrogating the causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa with a view to establishing its implication on socio-economic and policy development in Africa. The paper adopted structural conflict theory which explains that violence is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. Thus, it looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, exploitation, and inequality as sources of violence. Among other things, the paper argues that continual perpetration of xenophobic violence not only affect the social spheres of Africa but also constitute a major attribute of human rights violation. It further argued that available surplus finance by foreign borrowing and investors which indicates a cordial relationship among different citizens and governments of African countries and the world as a whole could be lost or denied in the face of xenophobic violence. The paper concludes that there should be greater support for anti-xenophobic efforts and the exposure of media outlets that support anti-immigrant sentiments. It recommends inter alia; that government must eliminate the climate of impunity that makes foreign nationals appear to be unequal before the law and should also promote sustainable opportunities for integration.

**Keywords:** Xenophobic, violence, economy, policy development, South Africa, the globe.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Across the globe, xenophobia has become a namby-pamby phenomenon that is orchestrated by enormity of factors basically associated with social and economic conditions and circumstances. The sporadic fire-spread of xenophobic violence on immigrants by South Africans has become a disturbing notoriety not only to Africans, scholars, media and governments but also to the world. Unarguably, South African xenophobia is not a new phenomenon since it is the extension of other forms of violence and intolerance (Akinola, 2014).

Essentially, the notion of xenophobia is seldom attached to the extreme dislike or hatred directed to those who are not citizens of a country; that is the dislike or hatred of one's nationality by the other (Ramphela, 2008; Sichone, 2008; Akinola 2014). South African Human Rights Commission (1998) argues that this deep dislike of non-nationals of a recipient state, including its manifestation is abusive violation that is unconstitutional. Furthermore, Sichone (2008:257) maintained that xenophobia is "one among several possible forms of reaction generated by anomic situation in the societies of modern states". In this regard, South Africa is seen as one of such good societies in a condition of anomie. Far from the above, the flame of xenophobia is the individual vulnerability to economic and political deprivation and underdevelopment

which is tantamount to unemployment, low income and declining standards of living. For Nyamnjoh (2006), xenophobia in South Africa is not generally directed at all people perceived to be foreign nationals but it is Africanized as Afrophobia with black African foreigners being the exclusive target for xenophobic attacks and violence.

Ultimately, the scramble for scarce resources and job opportunities between South Africans and non-South Africans did not only fuel tension but it obviously led to xenophobic attacks aimed at causing pogrom and bodily harm. It can safely be argued that this situation was further strengthened by political illiteracy on the part of South Africans with regard to African politics, including the decisive role played by other African nations in the liberation of South Africa. Thus, among the ruling elite, denialism coupled with political illiteracy manifest itself through the adoption of immigration policies which instead of easing the tension, succeeded in aggravating them through exclusion. In a bid to present a racism perspective to South African xenophobia against African immigrants, then, came, the neo-concept of “negrophobia or Afrophobia” (Bekker, 2010:136; Mngxitama 2008:195; Evert, 2011:7, and Matsinhe, 2011:298).

Agreeing with the above, Hussein and Hitomi (2013) opines that xenophobia basically derives from the sense that non-citizens pose some sort of threat to the recipients’ identity or their individual rights, and is also closely connected with the concept of nationalism; the sense in each individual of membership in the political nation as an essential ingredient in his or her sense of identity. While xenophobia has been seen as something of a global phenomenon, closely associated with the process of globalization, it has been noted that it is posing a lot of difficulties to South Africans and the continental Africa. Nyamnjoh (2006 p.14) expresses the problem succinctly:

*With inspiration from the apartheid years, South Africans sometimes subject makwerekwere (a derogatory term used for a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages and who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa) to the excesses of abuse, exploitation and dehumanizing treatment on the basis that they have the “wrong colour” to invest in citizenship. The rights of undocumented makwerekwere are particularly severely circumscribed as they are reduced to living clandestinely and being exploited with virtual impunity by locals enjoying the prerogations of citizenship.*

Against the backdrop that South Africa successfully emerged from decades of racial exclusion in the apartheid regime to that of democratic equality and recognition that this paper attempts to interrogate the concept of xenophobia in South Africa and its implication on socio-economic and policy development in Africa by establishing the following questions: how do we explain xenophobia? Why is xenophobia prevalent in South Africa? What are the causes and implications on the continental African people and their economy? How best can this dreaded phenomenon be arrested?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON XENOPHOBIA AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Several attempts have been made by scholars to pin down the etymological meaning and nature of xenophobic violence in South Africa. Contemporaneously, some scholars have argued that there is currently enormous growth of press literature on xenophobia and unending prejudice against foreign Nationals in South Africa especially after the events of May 2008 when some foreigners were killed and some displaced with reckless abandon (Mafukata, 2015; O’Donnell, 2014; Isike and Isike 20112; Koenane, 2013; Konanani and Odeku, 2013; Skinner and Crush, 2015; Valji, 2003). For them, the xenophobic violence against foreign nationals living and working in South Africa particularly those in the township emanate from the hatred which South Africans have towards foreign nationals.

Other scholars postulate that the causes of the hatred of foreign nationals is informed by dubious, unfounded allegations, rumours, ill-conceived perceptions propagated by the electronic media and the press, populist politicians wanting to score political points by exploiting the fears of the citizens while simultaneously raising their public profiles where it matters, ignorant South Africans who are lagging

behind in terms of inter-culturality and multi-culturality in post-colonial Africa and pure paddling of public lies about foreigners in South Africa (Duffield, 2009; Hanekom and Webster, 2009; Hungwe, 2012; Fayomi, Chidozie and Ayo, 2015; Isike and Isike, 2012). Specifically, Isike and Isike (2012) argue that South Africans were Afro-phobic because their xenophobia is mainly directed towards other Africans rather than other nationalities from elsewhere.

Similarly, Hicks (1999), Muzvidziwa, (1998) maintain that some South Africans claim that foreign nationals bring foreign religions and cultures into South Africa, were criminals, practice witchcraft and ritual murders to extract human body parts to bring luck to their businesses, sick-bringing diseases over the borders to the country, taking South African women from them, illegally benefiting from various grants and social service dispensation especially government grants and low-cost housing, taking over informal business space and market, and so forth. For these reasons, Hick (1999 p.392) expressly called South Africa a “harsh climate of xenophobia... a vestige from the apartheid era” while on the other hand, Valji (2003) called the country “the evil story of the beginnings of fascism”. From these expressions, it is clear from pandemonium that issues of xenophobia in South Africa are deeply rooted and quite challenging since it has become a prominent aspect of life in Africa.

From this standpoint, it can safely be argued that xenophobia variably manifests itself through tribalism and ethnic superiority, racism and sexism pathologies. Far from the above, Moosa (2008), Landua (2005) and Musuva (2014) argues that xenophobia takes forms such as discriminatory attitudes towards non-nationals within the context of crime, poverty, inequality and unemployment. Petkuo (2005) also observed that xenophobia has its roots from Greek-xeno meaning foreign and phobos which connotes fear.

All in all, the literature examined reveals that the foreigner has become site for the violent convergence of a host of unresolved social tensions. The challenges of transition, socio-economic frustrations, a legacy of racial division, and an inherited culture of violence are just some of the factors contributing to violent xenophobia in South Africa in the contemporary era.

In this discuss, the theorizing that South African mayhem and violence on foreign nationals as a purely South African social trait of the Blacks towards other Africans only for that matter, are missing implacable point around xenophobia essentially on the axiom of it being a universal human trait which persists to undermine issues of globalization and free human movement across the world as opinionated by international law of migration. Unarguably, xenophobia and other related human traits are curtailing to fast tracking development but quick to fan the embers of genocidal catastrophes negating development (Harcourt, 2009; Thomas, 2013). In essence, most of Africa’s underdevelopment characterization has been laid on the inability of Africa to overcome petty but deep rooted traits such as ethnicity, tribalism and xenophobia inter alia.

Realists like Hickel (2014) and Mafukata (2015), seek to explain issues of xenophobic tendencies in society as being an issue of social deep-rootedness of pervasive hostility and animosity of society against fellow humans, which however, might be influenced amongst others by national identity, myths such as beliefs on witchcraft, other societal stereotypical behaviour and the violent nature of society.

In contrast, the Marxian scholars like Ramohai (2014 p.2976); Thomas, (2013 p.50) and Whitetaker, (2005 p.109) reveals that human beings especially where they shared common socio-economic motives, have always sought to protect the socio-economic space against perceived intrusion or violations of that space through collective actions. For them, this defence and protection of the socio-economic space could take the form of Afro-phobia, Apartheid, ethnicity, racism, tribalism, xenophobia and so forth. Substantiating further, they opined that all these are forms of emotional, physical and psychological assault and violence on others especially against those perceived as “alien” “different” “others”, “the stranger”, “outsider”, “non-member”. In African context, there have been ultra tendencies and behaviours across the world to exclude those perceived as “others” as affirmed by Harcourt (2009 p.441) that “there is globally a prevailing mistrust along with naked exclusions and outright neglect and open attacks on people who are perceived as outsiders or a threat to the mainstream”.

## **Factors Responsible For Xenophobia In South Africa**

### **Racism**

Racism has been identified as one of the factors responsible for xenophobia in South Africa. This insidious hatred against foreigners by locals emanates from factors such as the fear of losing their social status and identity; the conviction of intimidation that foreigners pose to citizens economic success and feelings of superiority (Solomon, 2008). Obviously, this widespread of fear of foreigners is very sacrosanct and rigid in South Africa, as exemplified in the 2008 attack in Gauteng and Western Cape, the 2009 attacks in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and in the western Cape and Durban 2015/2016 attacks which resulted in many deaths and displaced a large number of them homeless.

### **Neo-Liberal Economic and Social Policies**

Among the many factors for the crisis bedeviling South Africa today, foremost are its neo-liberal economic and social policies. Obviously, because of the free economic system, South Africa has emerged a land of opportunity for many foreign nationals, as well as a sanctuary of peace for those fleeing from war-torn countries, political conflict or ethnic-based violence (I-Net, 2009). Of course, these factors have adversely increased unemployment, poverty and homelessness, particularly in poor black communities because of aggressive competition for jobs and housing (Harvey, 2008). In this regard, the essence of anti-immigrant reaction in South Africa is attributed to an expression of dissatisfaction and frustration over the lack of service delivery, which is not unconnected to the socio-economic and political aspects of the society.

### **South African Foreign Policy**

Unarguably, South Africa's transition to democracy was founded on negotiated settlements in which certain promises were made but not honoured, thereby leaving some national questions unresolved. The abysmal failure to resolve national problems can, to a large extent, be attributed to South Africa's national interest being on a certain level based on Africa's prosperity and stability, an indication of South Africa's liberal foreign policy (Hendricks and Whiteman, 2004). Nyamnjoh (2005) noted that South Africa endorsed the method of economic and political liberalism, in which the preference of equality without justice was implemented. Consequently, the liberal nature of South African foreign policy can be attributed as being one of the causes of xenophobia because an effort to gain re-admittance to the continent's organizations and the international community, domestic interests were dashed away. Arguing further, Nyamnjoh (2005) opined that the justification for the above point is made on the bases that the adoption of the principle of equality without justice creates environmental tension especially as the average underprivileged South Africans realize that their constitutional rights were being undermined as a result of the failure to deliver the material benefits of citizenship, as well as the fact that they had to continuously compete with foreigners to make ends meet.

### **Political Factors**

Another serious factor responsible for xenophobia in South Africa is the inefficient service delivery system which has triggered off the socio-economic conflicts in South Africa and to a large extent, has exposed Government's inability to dutifully serve the people. To this end, it can safely be argued that political factors include structural or institutional discrimination, the laxity of the Department of Home Affairs to grant asylum seekers refugee status, the illegal presentation of immigrants and South Africa's border problems.

Matzopoulos, Corrigan and Bowman (2009), Mcknight (2008), Webb, (2008); Zondi (2008), Biekpe (2008), Nell (2009), Mthombeni (2011) and Neocosmos (2006) are all in agreement that the attitude of the South African Government towards foreign nationals, the manner in which these foreigners are dealt with by the Department of Home Affairs concerning the matter of their legal status, the very slow pace in processing of foreigners applications to be granted a legal status, the non policing or control of the borders are all elements of political factors to xenophobia in South Africa. This political factor for xenophobia thus intertwine with other factors; that the failure of the state to achieve human development

together with poor services and deteriorating infrastructure and ongoing poverty in all give meaning to xenophobic attacks and the accompanying violence.

### **Theoretical Paradigm**

The study adopted structural conflict theory represented by the Marxist dialectical school with exponents like Marx and Engels, V.I. Lenin. The major assumption of Structural conflict theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. The theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality etc as sources of conflict. Structuralists maintain that conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies, domination of one class by another, and so on. The Radicalists like Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Joseph Lenin and Mao Tse Tung blamed capitalism for being exploitative system based on its relations of production and the division of society into the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. For them, the exploitation of the proletariat and lower classes under capitalism creates conflict. Consequently, capitalist societies are accused of being exploitative and to that extent; exploitation is a cause of conflict. To Marxists, capitalism will be resolved through revolution where the bourgeoisie will be overthrown in a socialist revolution led by workers, bringing about the establishment of a socialist order led by the working people. In this regard, there will be “capitalist internationalism”, a situation where workers all over the world unite, and will not be limited by state boundaries, since the state itself is an artificial creation of the bourgeoisie to dominate others.

The relevance of this theory to the current study cannot be overstated. This is because of its interconnectivity to the explanation of Xenophobia in South Africa.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Trend and content analytical approaches were adopted for this study. Data were collected using documentary instrument and scholarly inputs from several libraries, internet sources, periodicals and journals. This method was suitable to the study because of its qualitative nature. Data generated were analysed to determine whether xenophobic violence in South Africa has significantly affected economic development in the continental Africa.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF XENOPHOBIA ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

In consideration of the fact that xenophobic violence is pigeonholed on economic grounds, foreign nationals were accused by locals for competing with them for jobs, housing and other resources which the locals feel they are entitled to. These assumptions triggered off unhealthy competition between the locals and non-South Africans. This study finds the following as the socio-economic implication of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

- Scrambling for scarce economic resources has partly contributed to the wide-spread of xenophobic violence. These economic citations has not only sustained xenophobic violence but also have oiled the suspicion that most of the businesses run by non- Africans particularly black Africans thrives well in South Africa, based on human relationship values and principles. The xenophobic activities in South Africa is synonymous to the assertion of Hobbes about the state of nature where life is solitary, brutish, nasty, unaccommodating and short (Hobbes, 1651).

Consequently, the failure of the locals to compete favourably with the non-locals culminates into local businesses winding down with the option of renting them out to foreigners.

- Xenophobic violence in South Africa has led to the political instability and economic uncertainty engulfing the African continent. This is because the hostile environment has been instrumental in displacing people to the neighbouring nations as refugees.
- Xenophobia again dislocated foreign nationals not only from their source of livelihood (businesses) but also has isolated them from their business partners.

- As a result of xenophobia, South Africa has lost its glory as the strongest economy in the continent. South Africa has its drawbacks especially in becoming the economic and political haven for non-South Africans faced by socio-economic and political hardships and oppression.
- The harsh policies regulating the movement of foreign nationals have led to social and political exclusion. Neocosmos (2010); Masuva (2014) were all in agreement that the marginalization of migrants through passing restrictive policies and practices are the architect of social and political exclusion.

Implicitly, this has vindicated Fanon's (1963) expression of internalization of oppression. Thus it appears as if South Africans are the victims of the oppressive and racist apartheid regime and amidst the prevalent socio-economic crisis, non-South Africans tend to become secondary victims of xenophobia.

- Xenophobic violence in South Africa is a negation of the clarion call of "rainbow nation" canvassed by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela (Mashele & Qobo, 2014). It has undermined social cohesion, peaceful co-existence, good governance and observance of rights.
- Denial of access to economic opportunities, education and land in South Africa over the years has been responsible for the high poverty levels among the black population. This scenario has negative implications on the South African economy and has seriously affected the African continent to some extent. This is because development is a function of investment which required domestic savings for growth and development (Obademi and Uadiale, 2004).
- Another economic implication of xenophobic violence in South Africa is that available surplus finance by foreign borrowing which shows a cordial relationship among different citizens and governments of African countries and the world as a whole are lost and denied in the face of xenophobia. Foreign resources would have been able to supplement South Africa's domestic savings overtly or covertly by providing foreign exchange to buy imports or as substitute for domestically produced goods (Mthombeni, 2011).
- Xenophobic violence has also worked against the dictates of Articles five and nine of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Laws. Evidently, Article 5 states that; No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 9 also states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile. But xenophobic violence has destroyed the human dignity of others as well as contradict the stipulations of Articles 6 and 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Laws which states that "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" (Ilesanmi, 2004: 280).
- Furthermore, xenophobic violence has contradicted the values of the South African Constitution which emphasizes the recognition of the fundamental human rights of all who live in South Africa. This is a clear manifestation of violation of fundamental human rights of the African citizens.

## CONCLUSION

This study sets out to interrogate xenophobic violence in South Africa and its implication on socio-economic and policy Development in Africa. The position of the study is that xenophobia in South Africa is deeply rooted in the nature and character of apartheid and its discriminatory trajectory against the black majority which obviously denied them of economic opportunities and simultaneously fueling the attitude of suspicion, antagonism and hatred for foreigners. The socio-economic and policy development implications as analyzed in this study are tremendous and to that extent, both locals and non-South Africans were affected. From the study it was discovered that xenophobic violence that has ravaged the new and democratic South Africa is a clear demonstration of shameful pogrom in post-apartheid history affected the social spheres of Africa and to a large extent constitute a major attribute of human rights violation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings made in this study, the following recommendations are put forward as policy alternatives to ameliorate xenophobia in South Africa.

- Borrowing the notion of “rainbow nation” as advocated by Desmond Tutu and the late President Nelson Mandela, South Africa should embrace peace and accommodate all migrants without discrimination as a uniting force which should transcend racial and ethnic divisions to engender unity in diversity.
- The acts of xenophobic violence makes mockery of the notion of Africa for Africans and to that extent, Africa must unite and champion continental peace and unity of all Africans. This is possible if efforts are made by the African governments in building a strong continent that would vehemently fight against xenophobia.
- Strengthening regional and sub-regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will go a long way in ensuring the dismantling of all the xenophobic structure that manifest in form of regional ambitions and economic imperialism.
- South African Government must among other things intensify efforts to empower the black population in the post-apartheid South Africa. This will pave way in the resolution of the contradictions of apartheid and ensure a free society for all.
- The South African minority that is on top of the South African Economy must show the willingness to open the space for competition, accommodation and inclusion.
- African countries and South Africa relations should be strengthened through the instrumentality of bilateral relations as a platform to resolve diplomatic imbroglio.
- African Governments should be more proactive in championing Africa’s development and renaissance. This should be their continental responsibility.
- African Governments must eliminate the climate of impunity that makes foreign nationals appear to be unequal before the law and should also promote sustainable opportunities for integration.
- There should be greater support for anti-xenophobic efforts and the exposure of media outlets that support anti-immigrant sentiments. This can be achieved through government led-approach to educate the police about xenophobia and acting promptly in curbing xenophobic violence.
- Civil society need to adhere to the government policy of integration, together with the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders to collectively build an open-minded society.
- There is urgent need for the South African Government to take responsibility to implement good policing, to control borders and draw a comprehensive road map on migration policy that would enable management of current population flows in and out of the country.

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