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Xenophobia Attack and Development: A Discourse in South Africa

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Abstract

The social and political development among countries has affected relationships and that has ushered a new era wherein others nations feel that they are better off than others. The mentality of betterment has resulted in

hatred among nations in the same country and from different nations. This has culminated into civil war from within and clashes from without. These conflicts have divided countries especially in Africa which is propagating Ubuntu and communalism. From the premise, the paper will investigate the historical background of xenophobia, followed by its impact on Africanism and communalism to an extent of hampering development. The paper will then propose a social developmental model that could assist in addressing xenophobia that is a threat to peace, stability, and development in South Africa.

Keywords: *Ubuntu, Communalism, Civil War, Xenophobia, Development*

Introduction

The phenomenon of xenophobia is not a new concept in South Africa. There have been many reports highlighting the xenophobic attitude within South African communities as well as documented incidents of public and institutional violence and hostility towards foreigners. After the 1994 election euphoria, South Africa experienced growing inequality between the haves and the have-nots, high unemployment rates, high crime levels, and social economic ills produced a new wave of anti-black immigrant sentiment in South Africa. To vent their frustrations, Black South Africans needed a scape-goat, and black immigrants become the most convenient and reachable targets. This was due to that the illusion that the foreigners who have stayed in South Africa before 1994 had become financially and economically more successful compared to their local counterparts, served to exacerbate these tensions and increase antagonisms.

The Human Rights Watch report of 1998 reveals that immigrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi who were living in some parts of South Africa were brutally attacked over a period of several weeks in January 1995, in what was called Operation "Buyelekhaya", (go home); a clampdown that claimed to 'clean' some South African townships of foreigners. Since 1995 till day, a plethora of other anti-foreigner attacks have occurred, widely reported to have been targeted at Malawians, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Congolese, Nigerians, and Somalians. Apart from the general attacks that occurred in different South African cities between the year 2000 and 2016, taking

different dimensions of violence on different nationalities, prominent other ones in recent times are the 2013 attacks against Somali entrepreneurs, the April 2015 Durban originated attacks of foreigners, the October 2015 Grahamstown Attacks in the Eastern Cape and the Tshwane riots of 2016 (Agenda 2016, Nkosi 2016, Los Angeles Time). The motive behind the attacks varies economic, based on competition for material resources; sociological, with a link to crime, drug, and marriage; as well as others laden with a complexity of political and diplomatic issues.

Such attacks arise as lack of knowledge and ignorance of the host community (South Africans) of why fellow Africans come to our country. Hanekom and Webster (2010:91) depict a clear portrait of such push factors compressing the refugees and immigrants. Escaping ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, complete collapse of states like Somalia, while countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi are going through serious economic crisis.

By the time South Africa experienced its first financial crisis in 2008, local tensions against migrants had similarly reached boiling point, and by the first outbreak of xenophobic violence, killing many migrants of African origin, and the displacement of thousands of others, which subjected to having their properties and shops looted by locals, and shop owners are killed this was an outbreak in 2010 world cup. Between 2010 and 2015, sporadic xenophobic violence targeted towards black immigrants have persisted, which were made worse by the public comment which was made by the Zulu king Zwelithini condemning the influx of foreigners and calling for the deportation of foreign nationals, to prevent them from inconveniencing locals unleashed another wave of xenophobic violence. The recent attacks have highlighted the lack of understanding of what xenophobia means in the South African context, its root causes, and manifestations. However, with many of the attacks being described in the public domain as xenophobic, it was important to interrogate the meaning and understanding of xenophobia.

These attacks have been widely summarised as xenophobic and generated reactions from all around the world.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expressed concerns about the violence and urged the South

African government to cease deportation of Zimbabwean nationals and also to allow all refugees and asylum seekers of whatever countries of origin to regularise their stay in the country (UNHCR 2008). A wide variety of national governments, nongovernmental organizations, international organisations, opinion leaders and individual non-state actors throughout Africa and the entire world, have not also reacted to xenophobia in South Africa, but also warned seriously on social, psychological, political, diplomatic and economic consequences it has for the nation, the entire Africa as well as the world. It is based on this that a team of social scientists, psychologists, political scientists, diplomats, and social workers decided to launch a deep and comprehensive inquiry into the issue through this project, with the following objectives at sight.

What is xenophobia and its intentions?

Xenophobia is defined as fear or hatred of foreigners or people from different cultures (South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1994). Xenophobia is described 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. One important scholarly definition of xenophobia can be traced to Wimmer (1997) who sees it as "an element of a political struggle about who has the right to be cared for by the state and society: a fight for the collective goods of the modern state".

Wimmer's position is that xenophobia arises when people feel that their entitlement to benefit from the government is being subverted by other people's right. To Benjamin (2006), xenophobia is all about labeling that one group in dominance gives to another group, in a bid to create separate, and most times, superiorist cum inferiorist dichotomy. This fear and dislike of foreigners are expressed in the form of hostile anti-immigration policies which favoured white labour immigrants while at the same time discouraging black immigrant workers (Morales, *et al.*, 2010:233). Guskin and Wilson (2007:15), as well as Landau and Monson (2008:9), explain that immigrants leave their countries of origin voluntarily in a search for better economic and quality-of-life circumstances. Refugees, however, leave their

countries of origin based on the violation of human rights (Morales *et al.*, 2010:223).

This systematic targeting and denoting of others as different and unequal resulted at the beginning of subsequent overt xenophobic tendencies, expressed namely through negative stereotypes of black Africans and the derogatory naming of them as '*Amakwerekwere*', allegedly based on the linguistic noises they made in their foreign languages. As a result, the foreigners are frequently treated as a homogeneous category of illegal aliens. Xenophobic discourse prevails around this category and forms the basis for hostility, conflict, and violence between South African citizens and predominantly black foreigners (Ramphela, 2008; Sichone, 2008; Akinola, 2014).

Xenophobia is embodied in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour and often culminates in violence, abuses of all types, and exhibitions of hatred, and xenophobes presumably do not have adequate information about the people they hate and, since they do not know how to deal with such people, they see them as a threat (Mogekwu, 2005). According to Harris (2001), such hatred of foreigners is caused by number of things such as, the fear of loss of social status and identity; a threat, perceived or real, to citizens' economic success; a way of reassuring the national self and its boundaries in times of national crisis, feeling of superiority; and poor intercultural information (Mogekwu 2005). In South Africa for instance, xenophobia variably manifests itself through tribalism and ethnic superiority, racism and sexism pathologies (Moosa, 2008). According to Landau (2005: 4), xenophobia takes forms such as discriminatory attitudes towards non-nationals whereas Musuva (2014: 382) notes that xenophobia takes place within the context of crime, poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

Botts (2016) contends that "understanding why xenophobia exists in South African society is key to confronting it". According to Botts, there are three primary theories on the reason for xenophobia in South Africa namely: denialism, minimalism, and realism. Denialism is from a government attitude towards xenophobia, the government. The government tends to ignore the root cause of xenophobia and instead, it suppresses the causes and that results in social instability. Minimalism is based on economic factors which embrace how the wealth of the particular country is distributed, the competing for

resources among the foreigners and the citizens. This theory examines the relationship between South Africa economy and the presence of xenophobia. Realism as a theory focuses on the fear of foreigners among South Africans. It serves as an effective way of solving the issues surrounding xenophobia and apply the in-depth analysis of the problem of xenophobia. From the theories, it is evident that real human interaction seems to overcome the social insecurity that underlies xenophobia.

The most important reasons behind the prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa are economic and the tendency to criminalize foreigners. Existing explanations in terms of economic crises, political transition, relative deprivation, or remnants of apartheid all contain an element of truth but are not in themselves sufficient. Proclamations from politicians coupled with media reporting on drug syndicates, prostitution and human trafficking, all feed and in turn feed off a popular perception that migrants are bad for South African society and its economy.

Impact of xenophobia in Africanism and communalism on development

Hickel (2014:105) describes xenophobia in terms of two causal factors, namely economic reasons and social instability, which result in a breakdown in values and norms. In terms of economic reasons, xenophobia is fuelled by the high levels of unemployment. Citizens view immigrants/refugees as a threat to their access to employment opportunities and basic service delivery (Amisi, *et al.*, 2010:11; Storø, 2011). It is for this reason that Hanekom and Webster (2010:91) refer to South Africa as “Home of millions of immigrants”. Thus, the imbalance between the needs of the immigrants and of the South African citizens. Africanism is an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide (Gelb, 2004). It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress and aims to unify and uplift people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fate of all African peoples and countries are intertwined.

At the core, Africanism is a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny (Minkah, 2015). Africanism is valued African

nationalism intrinsically linked to the creation of an African nation that will contribute to the strengthening of continental solidarity and the building of common destiny among peoples of Africa. Seeks to further promote collective self-reliance and economic recovery; ensure respect for the principles of human rights and democracy on the continent and fostering peace, unity, understanding, and cooperation among the people and as well contribute in creating a more dignified and prosperous future for Africans and Africa.

African countries offered political support for the liberation struggle and were sources of migrant labour to South Africa, memories of these longer histories, and of the contributions and sacrifices of other Africans to South Africa appear to be waning as South Africans become increasingly focused on unfulfilled promises of the post-apartheid era. Very often it appears that frustrations about the slow pace of socio-economic change are being taken out on foreigners. The manifestation of xenophobia undermines social cohesion, peaceful co-existence, and good governance, and constitutes a violation of human rights.

A developmental model of peace and stability

The xenophobic crisis provides a perfect opportunity to begin thinking in a different way, looking at current social and economic challenges with a more holistic perspective and seeing the systemic interconnectedness of all these factors. Looking at current challenges in an environmental context will enable us to overcome short-term symptoms of the problems more quickly, and enable us to deal with the major environmental challenges we face more effectively in the long run. African solution for African problem strategies must be strengthened with intention of creating programmes that evoke a sense of self-reliance, responsibility, pride, ownership, and indigeneity, at once a rallying cry and a neat amalgam of politics, and agency.

Muigai (2011:4) reflects on these discussions and suggests that, although progress was made in terms of legislation and policies, new innovative efforts are still needed to address this on-going issue, including a renewed focus on services to victims of xenophobia. The South African government also reacted on the above-mentioned xenophobic attacks by means of a policy that assists immigrants and refugees to re-integrate into the communities from which they had to

flee because of these attacks. There are several policies in South Africa that look at development such as the National Development Plan (NDP), such need to incorporate peace between the South Africans and immigrants and refugees. This is vital as these attacks affect the markets and the economy of the country like investments. The same goes to population policies.

But Patel (2014:2), noted recently, however, that the on-going xenophobic violence is almost inevitable without the implementation of policies that adequately address the xenophobia in all its ugly complexity. Strengthen the ability to detect and respond to threats or outbreaks of xenophobic violence; strengthen conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms at the community level; strengthen disaster management systems and assistance to displaced persons; and conduct a public information campaign tackling myths and misperceptions about foreign nationals.

Prevention by means of community education programmes. Programmes should focus on providing community members with information on the circumstances and rights of immigrants/refugees, on misperceptions that immigrants/refugees take away opportunities from citizens, and on dealing with conflict without violence. Intercultural tolerance should be an aim of services. Solomon and Kosaka (2013:5) argue that xenophobic people possess an enemy image which leads then to being violent. Therefore, one of the solutions is to get rid of enemy images.

Imbizos (forums for enhancing dialogue and interaction between government and the people) works well for discussing issues that face most South African citizens. It is through Imbizo where we can assure the utilization and remembrance of our African centered dictum which states the view of the person within African community. Through Ubuntu African communities' belief that man is defined as "*I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.*"

One obvious conclusion to be drawn from this dictum is that, as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be is in rootedness in an ongoing human community. Through Imbizo and Ubuntu, African descendants can incorporate the use of *Jaku*, which is a strategy brought by the Ga people of Ghana. *Jaku* implies that every person with a drop of African blood in his or her veins is a member of this *Jaku*. *Jaku* is African culture which does not

consider any child as illegitimate or inferior and accept any person, whether of male descent or female descent as a member of the clan community. No person has the right to deny any person of African descent the right to claim that he or she is an African except that person himself or herself. The implementation of this strategy makes communities be able to abundant what was brought by the Berlin conference which has caused all of the African chaos and challenges.

As stated by Osabu-Kyle, The quality of management and leadership matters. Africa requires well-trained managers in the various institutions to be established but if the political leadership is not dynamic and committed enough, the transformation process may stagnate. There are two types of leaders required: transaction leaders and transformation leaders. Transaction leaders are those who can fine tune the transformation processes of development by bringing about relatively small changes. However, whenever there is a tendency for stagnation, transformation leaders capable of radical changes to the status quo are required. Africa's present predicament demands the existence of transformation leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Dubois, George Padmore, Marcus Garvey, Edward Blyden and Patrice Lumumba with the appropriate vision and capability for uniting the continent into one great nation.

Unfortunately, most of the leaders of Africa today have been captured through IMF and World Bank colonialism and go about with caps in hand begging for the crumbs that might be allowed to fall from the tables of capitalists and imperialists. Instead of freeing Africa from the shackles of imperialism they have allowed themselves to be transformed into agents of neo-colonialism. The greatest problem of Africa is, therefore, the betrayal of the leadership. Africa needs light but the leaders do not know how to operate the appropriate switches. But because of our mental slavery xenophobia attacks is that black South Africans never considered white South Africans as the source of their disenfranchisement.

After all white South Africans gave up political power, but never gave up their control of the economy and resources. So in many ways, Apartheid may be gone, but white supremacy still prevails. White supremacy is the obstacle but continually ushered in through neo-colonialism. The problem is so difficult to counter because 1) white supremacy is so ingrained as a doctrine that it has become normality in the psychology of the African, 2) the African psychology because

of white supremacy operates from a place of inferiority to the detriment of his own people. This means that in an attempt to impress or satisfy the oppressor, he inflicts ill-treatment to his fellow African: Black skin, white mask.

As the meaning of Ubuntu was highlighted, showing concern, remorse and taking action when something that threatens another human life occurs forms part of it. Despite the questions facing the South African government in terms of what they are doing to resolve the xenophobic attacks, actions were taken after the 2008 attacks. The South African government stakeholder, civil society and affected communities hosted a roundtable to look into causes and solutions of such outbreaks (Hadland, 2008:2). As a future solution, the round table came up with opportunities and needs that need to be put into place. Such opportunities and needs include; tension monitoring and management skills in host communities, educating South Africans about migration issues, application of policy in hiring foreign nationals, development, and training of locals in relation to sustainable productive activities, political education to relevant stakeholders about development and xenophobic challenges and lastly, migrants educations around re-integration which includes understanding the indigenous cultures in South Africa. Having such solutions in black and white does not help if an implementation is not taking place. One can look back and assess the post-2008 xenophobic attacks to the recent one to evaluate the implementation of the solutions that were suggested.

Going forward, it is clear that the issue of xenophobia in South Africa is far from being resolved. Much still needs to be done. Although consensus on how and by whom remains elusive. Working with the displaced communities, we need to continue to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the displaced population are adequately met. We need to continue to monitor the sites and respond effectively to the needs in a way that is empowering. If South Africans can't identify and relate on a similar basis, national cohesion towards eradicating poverty and inequality becomes more difficult to achieve. If young Africans can embrace the mental concepts of Franz Fanon, Leon Demas, and Thabo Mbeki to deal with post-colonial Africa, the African Renaissance could have been imagined. This Pan-Africanist idea is felt among the global African community. In this sense, to unite African we must reject the ways of the past, and commit itself to

build a future of democratic governance subject to the rule of law. Such a future is only achievable on the condition that we end Africa's conflicts, without which no amount of aid or trade, assistance or advice, will make the difference.

Summary

The mentality of looking down on other people, making excuses of laziness, and immorality lead to many things. And one of them is xenophobic attacks. Xenophobia is a global issue whereby South Africa is no exclusion. Rather, it has experienced outbreaks of xenophobia like the well-known of 2008. South Africa is an African hub of refugees and immigrants more especially from countries like Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia. These immigrants and refugees are people seeking a better living, who are running away from the country of origin due to conflicts and many more pull and push factors.

Arguments differ when it comes to what causes xenophobia and what are its intentions. Other people see it as a social, political, economic and psychological issue. It even goes to the extent of having theories or rather ideologies such denialism, minimalism, and realism. Other may assert that in most cases South Africans justify their brutality towards foreign national as an economic reason. They normally claim that foreign nationals are taking their jobs. This results in maiming, killing and looting the businesses of immigrants and refugees. With all this happening, South African society is affected in various ways.

Authors including Amisi, *et al* (2010:11); Storø, (2011); Hickel (2014:105) contends that in terms of South African development, xenophobia plays a role in social and economic instability. This refers to high levels of unemployment and lack of basic service delivery. Having said this, issue draws back to the individuals and South African government to say what you are doing with xenophobia as an issue. It goes to the ideologies we have such as Africanism, Ubuntu. As for the government it speaks to the existing policies, initiation of new policies and programmes directed at xenophobia and implementation of such.

It is the heart of every country to have peace and stability. This opens up an opportunity and a need of a country's self-introspection.

In South Africa with issues such as racism, will it be possible to combat xenophobia and open a window for development. People need to learn and understand that the future is more vital than the past. Holding on to the past hinders growth and development in all aspects. This goes to the quality of management and leadership of the country. Africa has resources to fight such things as xenophobia. SADC, UN and other sovereign states are there to be utilized to form unity and peace amongst the Africans. This calls for incorporation of human issues such as xenophobia in policies like NDP.

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