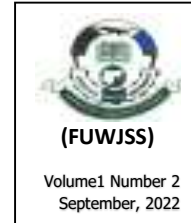


# **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF XENOPHOBIA ON NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS**

**Garba Mohammed (Ph.D)**  
Department of Political Science  
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria



## **Abstract**

The paper examines implications of xenophobic attacks on economic and social relations with reference to Nigeria-South Africa relations. The objective of this paper is to identify the implications of xenophobic attacks on Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic and economic relations. The paper reviewed secondary data which include books, journals, newspapers and internet sources. Major findings reveal that the Nigerian government has responded in several ways to express displeasure over xenophobic attacks on its citizens in South Africa, which include summoning of the South African Ambassador; ordinary Nigerian citizens have also resorted to use social media to call on Nigerian government to boycott South African companies. The paper concludes that xenophobic attacks have affected the economic and diplomatic relations of South Africa with Nigeria and other African countries. Consequently, South Africa fears retaliatory threats from citizens of other African countries, including Nigeria. The paper recommends that the Nigerian government should fight systemic corruption which is largely the cause of poverty and the high unemployment rate in the country and that have made Nigerians move to South Africa to be killed in a manner that is shameful.

**Keywords:** Xenophobic Attack, Diplomatic, Liberation Struggle, Xenophobia, Foreigners

## **Introduction**

Xenophobia is becoming a prominent aspect of life in Africa from Kenya to the Maghreb and across Southern Africa, discrimination against non-nationals, particularly fellow Africans has been on the rise according to International Media Reports (Ibrahim, 2019). Xenophobia is a social vice and is as old as mankind. It is base on the

politics of exclusion, which is a feeling that foreigners are different from the nationals and should have a lower status than that of the nationals. Xenophobic atrocities and ethnic cleansing led to the collapsed of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990's (Adebajo, 2010). Since the collapsed of Yugoslavia ethnic Albanian, Bosnia's and Croats have tended to develop a negative outlook on Serbs (Ajala, 2019).

The regime that committed genocide against Serbs, Japan's national closure (sakoku) policy promoted xenophobic feelings against foreigners (Northedge, 1991). The policy virtually excluded and marginalized all people of foreign nationals. In 2006, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Racial Discrimination Report castigated Japan's discriminatory practices which include difficulties in access to housing, hotel accommodation and other commercial establishments open to public based on physical appearance and myth (Ibrahim, 2019). Xenophobia has also been witnessed in America (Wilmot, 1980). Americans view foreigners with suspicion, fear and hatred, even when they needed these immigrants for cheap labour. Their illegal status makes it difficult for them to seek legal course in cases of labour and social disputes, lest they are arrested and deported. The alien status of immigrants makes them more vulnerable to frequent attacks by the nationals.

According to Amnesty International, the UN's and Human Rights Watch, physical attacks against Haitians by Americans have increased since 1992 and reports on lynching of Haitians surfaced as late as 2007 (Ibrahim, 2019). Xenophobic tendencies has also been observed outside America. During 2007 election the Populist Swiss People's Party gained 30% of the seats in parliament. The party was accused of increasing racism and xenophobic sentiment by publishing a controversial poster during its campaign. The poster showed white sheep kicking a black sheep off the Swiss flag (Lisca, 1992). The Swiss Political Party proposed a change to the penal court to allow judges to deport foreigners convicted of serious crimes once they have served their sentence. If the criminal is under the age of 18, the proposed law allowed the entire criminal's family to be deported as soon as sentence is passed (Crush, 2001).

For the first time democratization in South Africa has translated to the poor having the same formal political power as the rich. The country remains one of the most unequal societies on earth (Ibrahim,

2019). This cross inequality was engendered when the country left apartheid behind, it did not leave behind the structures and processes which generated inequity (Okolie, 2021).

In effect, the current waves of xenophobic attacks on Nigerian's living in South Africa bring into stake reality the preponderance of Nigerian business community in post apartheid South African economy. The attacks in which more than 60 persons were killed and thousands displayed attracted diplomatic intervention by the Nigerian state (Adebajo, 2010). In the xenophobic attack, many lost their properties and their shops were looted, an indication of orchestrated attack on the businesses of Nigerians in South Africa (Wilmot, 1980)

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September of 2019, Nigerian citizen's properties in Johannesburg were destroyed (Adebajo, 2010). The South African police arrested more than eighty and confirmed the deaths of five foreigners in Johannesburg. Those who participated in the riot destroyed a number of target businesses owned by foreigners, particularly, Nigerians (Ibrahim, 2019).

### **Causes of Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa**

Many series of the causes of attacks that were meted out to non South Africans in the country, particularly, Nigerians were developed from the amalgamation of literature on xenophobia, the following reasons have been adduced as being the propelling reasons for the attacks in South Africa in 2008, 2015 and 2019 (Crush, 2001).

Firstly, the cause of the attack can be looked at from the angle of governmental neglect of the essential necessities of the people (Ajala, 2019). It can therefore be put appropriately that frustration with government precipitated aggression among the locals against the non-South Africans. Similarly, competition over limited resources constituted another logical argument for the attacks on non-South Africans in the country. Rosenau (1990) comments that South Africans saw foreign Africans as competing with them for jobs, housing and other essential services which they believed they are the ones that are entitled to do things (Lisca, 2009). Wealthy South Africans abhor the idea of paying taxes to provide essential services for non-South Africans who escape from their different countries due to bad leadership, political incompetence and economic mismanagement

Dodson and Delofse (2009) added interestingly, that gender and sexual dimension to interpersonal competition between South Africans and foreigners. In other word foreign African men are inclined to flashing money around, thereby stealing their women. In the area of jobs, illegal immigrants to South Africa aer ready to take up any job without the corresponding benefit and at any wage just to survive, especially in low wage sectors of the economy. It increased the rate of unemployment among South Africans. The third cause could be poverty. One can therefore say tentatively that, poverty increases xenophobic attacks. This hostility towards the out groups can be placed at the door of economic deprivation which is the precursor to poverty. The theory holds that poverty begets frustration and by extension aggression (Lisca, 2009).

Xenophobic attacks on Nigerians by South African indigenes have been a source of worry and conflict in the two countries relations. Their codial relation is vital to the development of African continent. However, political, economic and diplomatic reasons were advaced as causes of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and other nationals. In 2019 report of spontaneous assault by some South African members of Port Nolloth community were said to have targeted Nigerian community living in the area. They were reportedly chased out of their homes, their properties looted and their shops burnt. The attackers always accused Nigerians of dealing in drugs but the Nigerian community in South Africa has denied the allegations.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In the South-African context, xenophobia is not restricted to the fear of dislike of foreigners but to exploitation, discrimination and intense violence and attacks toward foreign immigrants (Harris, 2002).

Wimmer theory on xenophobia and the economic theory are the underlying theories that are utilized in this paper to comprehensively understand the concept of xenophobia (Wimmer, 1997) used power theory to explain the causes of xenophobic. Wimmer argued that when people feel insecure in the face of threat, they will potray resentment and hatred. Hatred does not necessarily depend on real competition on the job market, but as long as the perceive threat is strong enough to induce resentment. According to him xenophobic stems from an intense rivalry between migrants and indigenes. The other one is the

cultural symbolic theory in which Wimmer holds that animosity towards the other is not as a result of economic competition between rival groups but a product of political and economic socialization (Shindolala, 2008).

Economic theory or power theory attributes xenophobia to economic factors like poverty and unemployment where poor and unemployed people are more likely to engage in xenophobic practice compared to rich and employed persons (Wilmot, 1980). The economic theory on the other side traces xenophobic attacks on economic factors. The essence of this theory is that the poor, unemployed and economically crippled are more likely to be xenophobia than the employed and the elites and this resonates well with trends of xenophobic attacks in South Africa which has almost always been perpetrated by unemployed youths and the poverty stricken disgruntled citizens (Spence, 2004).

### **Methodology**

This section presents the methodology adopted for this work and the analysis of the data gathered in the course of writing this paper, it dwells on research design, sources of data, method of data collection and analysis. The study engaged secondary source of data were gathered from government gazettes, bulletin, magazine, journals, newspapers, textbooks from internet and archival, document on the subject matter. This also includes historical analysis of Nigeria-South Africa relations.

### **Political Intrigues of Xenophobia in South Africa**

While the theoretical hypothesis provides some forms of contextualization to the whole dilemma of xenophobia, it still falls short of offering an explanation as to why the xenophobic attacks have taken place in some areas of the country and not others. When looking at specific township and settlement that have faced violent attacks on non-nationals, it is almost always rooted in the micro-politics of these areas, local leaders often lead or organize violent attacks on foreign migrants in order to gain authority or realize their political interest (Okolie, 2021).

Furthermore, non-nationals have become increasingly unpopular throughout South Africa, local leaders often feel pressure to exclude foreigners from political participation or ostracise them in general

because of their fear of losing their political positions, some leaders have promoted violent practices against non-nationals in order to ensure their authority within the community.

In 2010, South African Newspaper Mail and Guardian highlighted a study by the International Office for Migration reveals that community leaders and the local government did nothing to prevent or stop violent attacks on foreigners. Furthermore, some are directly involved in attacks while others are reluctant to assist foreigners for fear of losing legitimacy or positions in the 2009 election. Similarly, the Consortium of Refugees and Migrants in South Africa released an issue brief in 2010 stating:

The key trigger of violence against foreign nationals and outsiders in specific locations is localized competition for political (formal and informal) and economic power, leaders and aspirant leaders often mobilize residents to attack and evict foreign nationals and a means of strengthening their personal and political or economic power within the local community (Dodson & Delofse, 2009).

Beyond local officials, national leaders have also used anti-immigration language during their campaigns in order to gain votes. In addition to the political callousness that has fed xenophobic trends in South Africa there have been documented instances in which migrants have become targets of abuse in the hands of the police, the military and department of Home Affairs. For example, the former Minister of Home Affairs Mangosuthu Buthelezi stated publicly, "If South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with immigrants, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme" (Human Rights Watch, 2008). This kind of misuse of power and prejudiced speech has only contributed to the xenophobic sentiments expressed by South African citizens and the widespread violent attacks.

### **Implications of Xenophobia on Nigeria -South Africa Relations**

According to Human Rights Watch Report, 1998, immigrants from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique living in Alexandra Township near Johannesburg were physically assaulted over a period of several weeks in 1999 as armed gangs identified suspected migrants and marched them into police station in an attempt to "clean the township

of foreigners”. The campaigners known as “Buyelekhaya” (go back home) blamed foreigners for crime, unemployment and sexual attacks.

In May, 2019, report of spontaneous assault by some South African members of Port Nolloth community were said to have targeted Nigerian community living in the area. They were reportedly chased out of their homes, their properties looted and their shops burnt. The attackers always accused Nigerians of dealing in drugs but the Nigerian community in South Africa has denied the allegation. President Jacob Zuma of South Africa and Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria initiated high level diplomacy to repair the damage brought about by the accident. In fact, the rate of the xenophobic violence in South Africa coupled with other recorded tape violence the country qualifies as one of the most violent societies in the world.

### **Political and Diplomatic Implications**

Politically, the current and incessant wave of violent attacks on Nigerians in South Africa has a lot of implications if the two governments fail to muster enough political will to deal with this unbecoming situation. It can mar the ties between both countries. In diplomatic circles, once there is a severe row between countries the next option is recalling Ambassadors and whenever there exist any breakdown of relationship between countries, it usually takes time for such to be restored and taking into cognizance the position of Nigeria and South Africa in the African continent, it will be also to the detriment of the progress of the other African countries. Lost of African Solidarity: Africans usually regard each other as brothers and in so many circumstances speak with one voice in the international arena. It is reasoned that a break in relationship between Nigeria and South Africa will lead to a divided Africa thereby limiting their chances in making wave in international politics. Though visa policies/restriction: People migrating in search of safer and more prosperous living conditions is as old as man and the right of any person to leave any as enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Right and the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (Ajala, 2019).

### **Economic Implications**

The economic implications of the recurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa will be very enormous. Fundamentally, one of the principal reason for xenophobic attacks in South Africa is tied to the economy as according to South Africans, other African countries citizens are taking over their jobs and the businesses leading to high rate of unemployment especially among locals. While this argument appears to be correct but it is relatively weak as these people are doing genuine and legal businesses in South Africa. Equally, taking cognizance of the fact that South Africans are also doing businesses in other African countries, it will be better imagined of their reprisal attacks on South Africans in residing and doing businesses in other African countries. The implications for the overall economy of Africa should these scenarios play out were clearly depicted by Nigeria-South African Chambers of Commerce. The chamber holds the view that the outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa and reprisal events in Nigeria, including direct attacks on foreign owned businesses in both South Africa and Nigeria poses a threat to Africa's fragile economic recovery.

### **Soci-Cultural Implications**

Africa's colonial heritage and the inhuman albeit regrettable apartheid system in South Africa did enough damage to the psyche of Africans. Suffering these ordeals from the Europeans, Africans believe after granting independence and dismantling of apartheid in South Africa that they are brothers with common history and descent, and to that extent would respect the dignity of each other. Be this as it may, the xenophobic or call it afroophobic attacks by South Africans toward their African brothers have a lot of socio-cultural implications as follows;

**Identity Crisis:** Identity conflict is one of the worst form of conflict as it affects the psychology of the victims thereby making them not to realize and achieve their self esteem and full potentials.

**Disunity:** When Africans begin to see this fellow brothers and sisters as strangers and thereafter treat them as one, the by-product of this state of thing is obviously disunity in a continent that regard each other as from the same parents. The implication of this is the obvious fear that Africans will have when in other African countries other than their own country of birth.



Insecurity: When one is socially and culturally humiliated, the bad thought arising from such alienation may lead them into joining bad gangs which might obviously lead to increase insecurity challenges within the African continent.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

There are several factors which have led to the thriving of xenophobic attacks and violence against foreigners residing and doing businesses in South Africa. These attacks have affected the economic and diplomatic relations of South Africa with other African states especially Nigeria which South Africa sees as its rival on the continent of Africa. South Africa received retaliatory threats from citizens of other countries like Nigeria, where South African Companies such as multi-choice, MTN and Shoprite are operating. The reactions of other African countries particularly those whose nationals were killed and means of livelihood destroyed in the attacks was negative. These factors are highlighted as competition over limited resources and opportunities, poverty, jealousy, stealing of South African ladies by foreigners, accepting below minimum wage by African migrants and stealing jobs. Nigeria and South Africa are regional as well as continental leaders in the areas of economy and politics. The paper recommends that in order to deter xenophobes from carrying out xenophobic attacks as well as the extra-judicial killings of non South Africans by the police, the South African government should arrest, prosecute and convict offenders and their collaborators. The Nigerian government should fight systemic corruption which is largely the cause of poverty and the high unemployment rate in the country and that have made Nigerians move to South Africa to be killed in a manner that is shameful. Nigerian government should always compel the South African government to educate and tell her citizens the role and sacrifices Nigerians and Nigerian government played for their liberation from apartheid regime.

### **References**

Adebajo, A. (2010). South Africa and Nigeria; An Axis of Varture. A paper presented for the Harold W. Wolpe Memorial Trust Open Dialogue,

- Lecture Theatre 3A Leslie, Social Science Building, South Africa, *Unpublished*.
- Ajala, A. (2019). "Nigeria and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa" *Paper Presented at Sapes Trust Fifth Anniversary Annual Colloquium South Africa in the Year 2020*.
- Crush, B. (2001). *The Perfect Storm: Xenophobia in Contemporary South-Africa*. Cape Town
- Dodson, R. & Delofse, O. (2009). Shades of Xenophobia In-migrants and Immigrants in Cape Town: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34 124-148
- Harris, B. (2002). *Foreigners Experience: Violent Crime and Xenophobia during South Africa Transition*. Violence and transitions. Violence and transitions Serious
- Ibrahim, B.F. (2019). The Effect of Xenophobia on Nigeria-South Africa Relations: Attempting a Retrospective Study. *International Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences Invention*. 8 38-49
- Liska, J. (1992). *Theories in International Relations*. New York: *African Publishers Company*.
- Northedge, F. S. (1991). *Foreign Policy of African States*. London: *Faber & Finers Publishers Ltd*.
- Okolie, I. S. (2021). *The Effect of Xenophobic Attacks on Economic and Diplomatic Relations Among States: A Study of Nigeria-South Africa Relations (2010-2020)* Master of International Relations (Dissertation) *Unpublished*.
- Rosenau, M. (1990). *Introduction to International Relations*. London: *Macmillan Publishers Ltd*.
- Shindondola, H.K. (2008). *xenophobia in South Africa: Views, Opinion and expression*, Africans University, *unpublished dissertation*
- Wilmot, P.F. (1980). *Apartheid and African Liberation*. Ile Ife, *University of Ife Press Limited*.