

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Linguistic Representation and Intersection of Historical and Contemporary Contexts of Xenophobia Ecosystem in South Africa

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Abstract

The xenophobia crisis which erupted in 2008 in South Africa has fossilised into a perennial problem. The lingering crisis has become a dominant discourse because of its intractable nature. The development affects many African countries, given the massive human and material losses that their nationals have suffered. This study, therefore, examines the historical and contemporary contextual factors that underlie xenophobic prejudice in South Africa. Anchored on the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory, this review uses a qualitative approach that systematically examines and synthesises existing literature to explore the nexus of history and extant trajectory of xenophobia in South Africa. The research is based on secondary materials such as historical sources, policy documents, journal articles, books and media reports. It uses a thematic and discourse analytical approach to classify its findings. The study elucidates themes such as African immigrants' identity as foreigners and aliens in South Africa; the historical scope of xenophobia in South Africa; the contemporary contexts of xenophobia in South Africa; the xenophobic linguistic representation of immigrants in South Africa and xenophobia as cultural racism in South Africa. The study describes xenophobia in South Africa as an implicit attitude manifesting as an explicit violent action. It also revealed that the contemporary context of the xenophobia crisis is an offshoot of the historical past that has not been properly situated in the post-apartheid era. The study concludes that rather than unbridled hostilities against African nationals, South Africa needs innovative ideas and creative policy mechanisms to turn the so-called foreigners' skills and material resources into a huge socio-economic advantage. More importantly, South Africa should revive norms of Pan-Africanism and consider African nationals as brothers rather than aliens that must be hunted down.

Keywords: Xenophobia, South Africa, African nationals, historical context, contemporary context.

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Introduction

Intra-migration is historical in Africa and the forces of globalisation have reinforced this phenomenon in contemporary times. Whether in the past or present, migration in Africa is largely driven by economic, environmental and socio-political factors (Oni & Okunade, 2018). However, the cyclical nature of migration of people from time to time calls for the imperatives of tolerance, hospitality and good neighbourliness by the host communities as these virtues are cardinal in the African culture and worldview (Oloruntoba, 2018). It raises, therefore, a curious question of why some Africans are exhibiting hostilities, hatred, discrimination and violence, in some cases, against African immigrants (Umaru & Audu, 2022; Angu, 2023). Clearly, the blight of xenophobia has manifested in many countries in Africa at different times. These countries include Ivory Coast in 1958, 1979 and 1964, Chad in 1958, Senegal in 1967, Guinea in 1968, Ghana in 1969, 1979, Gabon in 1978, Nigeria in 1983, 1985 and Zimbabwe in 1982 – 1983 (Akinola, 2018; Benyara, 2018; Oni & Okunade, 2018; Garikai, 2021).

Notably, the harshest and most persistent form of anti-immigrant sentiments is expressed by the citizens of South Africa as this is demonstrated by the politicians, officers of the government, traditional leaders, government institutions such as the police, immigration, customs, judges and the media (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013; Nelson & Salawu, 2017; Claassen, 2017; Adesina, 2019; Lotter & Bradshaw, 2022). Besides, the most worrisome is the fact that black South Africans are unleashing violence on nationals of the African countries that faithfully identified with them in cash and kind during the dark days of the liberation struggle against Apartheid.

Given the peculiarity of the xenophobia manifestation in South Africa, this paper explores the nexus of the historical antecedents and contemporary factors that underlie the xenophobia debacle in South Africa. Specifically, the study addresses research questions such as (a) How do historical and recent circumstances converge to frame the xenophobia crisis in South Africa? (b) How does Social Identity Theory explicate the social construction of African immigrants in South Africa? (c) How do linguistic coinages depict and represent immigrants' identity in South Africa?

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Social Identity Theory (SIT), which was advanced by Henri Tajfel and later on by John Turner. The Social Identity Theory offers a succinct analytical model that can be used to understand the process of group identity formation, intergroup relationships, and inclusion and exclusion dynamics underlying xenophobia in South Africa (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The Social Identity Theory states that an individual gets a major portion of their self-concept through their belonging to social groups. These groups can either be categorised in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language or socio-political belonging. Social categorisation processes also cause individuals to

divide themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, which may lead to in-group favouritism and out-group derogation (Turner et al., 1987). The necessity to preserve a positive social identity makes individuals and groups attribute their own group as better and label other groups as inferior.

The theoretical perspective is especially applicable to the current study, which explores the overlap of historical and recent contexts of xenophobia in South Africa. The continual designation of African immigrants as foreigners and aliens is indicative of a social categorisation act that forms migrants as an out-group that cannot be included in the moral and social community of national belonging in South Africa. Recent studies utilising Social Identity Theory to xenophobia in Africa confirm that migrants are being constructed as the inferior Others, by being placed beyond the limits of belonging via discursive, institutional, and symbolic practices (Gamage & Nyiayaana, 2026).

Moreover, Social Identity Theory justifies the impact of social-economic and political circumstances which escalate the tension between groups. The immigrants are often viewed as a threat in the South African context because of the limited resources they are competing for, in terms of employment, housing, and social services. These views strengthen both in-group solidarity among natives and, at the same time, justify hostility towards foreigners. Thus, xenophobia serves as an identity politics wherein an in-group can enhance its unity by excluding and marginalising an out-group, especially in economically uncertain times and with weak institutional governance (Gamage & Nyiayaana, 2026).

Furthermore, the theory provides an understanding of the historical aspect of xenophobia which is discussed in this paper. Institutionalised rigid forms of social categorisation, exclusion, and inequality as a result of the apartheid system have impacted long-term effects on identity formation in South Africa. According to Social Identity Theory, these historically established systems of classification influence the way modern perceptions and interactions are perceived. The redefinition of identity in the post-apartheid period has created an inversion of roles, with black South Africans, the previously marginalised and out-group, now forming the African immigrants as the new other. This is indicative of the dynamic and contextual quality of social identity, which changes in relation to the changing socio-political realities.

Besides, the Social Identity Theory can also be used to explain the intra-racial xenophobic or Afrophobic phenomenon, as it is pointed out in this research. Although the racial identity is common, the nationality, language, and socio-economic status are distinctions that are brought into the limelight. This highlights the multidimensionality of identity, whereby people give importance to some dimensions of identity more than others in different situations. Research on Pan-African solidarity also indicates that low supranational affiliation to Africa also leads to xenophobic attitudes, as people place more emphasis on national identity rather than a continental one (Adida et al., 2023). This is

consistent with the argument of this study that the inability to instill Pan-African values contributes to xenophobia. Social comparison is another significant aspect of the Social Identity Theory that can be applied to the current study. The groups make comparisons with other groups to boost their self-esteem and retain a superiority complex. This is reflected in the fact that some locals in South Africa feel greater in terms of their economic and cultural superiority over the immigrant population of other African nations. Political rhetoric or media accounts that describe immigrants as criminals, economic burdens, or cultural outsiders tend to reinforce such perceptions. Such representations not only legitimize exclusion but also normalize xenophobic violence.

Likewise, Social Identity Theory highlights the importance of institutions in strengthening group boundaries. Policies, enforcement activities and media discourses by the government can either undermine or reproduce social divisions. The situation in the South African case is that the image of migration as a crisis and the absence of institutional safeguarding of immigrants are part of the entrenchment of xenophobic attitudes. Hence, xenophobia in Africa is entrenched in the political economy of state-society relations in which institutional failures and gaps in governance aggravate identity-based conflicts (Akinola, 2018).

Altogether, the Social Identity Theory can be a strong tool to explain xenophobia in South Africa as a socially constructed and historically determined phenomenon. It explains the ways in which categorisation, identification and comparison processes create and reproduce the dichotomy of us versus them, thus justifying exclusion, discrimination and violence. Through incorporating the experiences of the current African scholarship, this paper shows that xenophobia is not only a spontaneous response to socio-economic pressures, but a highly organized identity politics based on past experiences, institutionalized structures, and daily discourses of belonging.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design to examine the overlap between the historical and extant contexts of xenophobia in South Africa. The study is exploratory, in that it offers perspectives on xenophobia through placing it in a wider socio-political, historical and cultural context. The research is based on secondary materials that comprise journal articles, books and media reports. These sources give us a clue on how xenophobia in South Africa has evolved, manifested and its complexity. The research uses thematic and discourse analysis as an analytical tool to determine the identity description of immigrants and linguistic representation, and relate xenophobia prejudice to Social Identity Theory.

Perspectives on Xenophobia in South Africa

The perennial anti-immigrant protests taking place in South Africa have been widely described by the media and academia as xenophobia in South Africa (Wilson & Magam, 2018; Nenjerama, 2020; Addae & Quan-Baffour, 2022). This incessant protest is considered a communication tool through which the locals convey their displeasure, frustration, anger and indifference to the immigrants (Oni & Okunade, 2018). It is an expression of contempt for foreigners, particularly among nationalities that belong to the same race. Thus, Benyera (2018) avers that the aim of the masterminds is to eradicate the immigrants from their terrain. Xenophobia makes foreigners become perceived in a negative, derogatory and dehumanising way that categorises them as inferior individuals, thereby subjecting them to harsh treatment. It is motivated by extreme nationalism and assumed economic protectionism (Montle, 2021). Hence, any form of act that maligns immigrants in the guise of insulting language, intimidation and restriction of freedom to engage in lawful activities is regarded as xenophobia (Dauda et al., 2018).

The phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa can be broadly classified into twin notions of xenophobia as attitude and xenophobia as action (Claassen, 2017; Dube & Settlatentoa, 2024). The notion of xenophobia as an attitude is derived from the Greek etymological meaning of the word xenophobia, where xonos (xeno) denotes foreign and phobos (phobia) means fear (Aragbuwa, 2018; Umaru & Audu, 2022). On this premise, xenophobia is primarily described as fear, dislike, prejudice and discrimination against foreigners. This view best explains the kind of xenophobia that has taken place in some African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana and Zambia (Akinola, 2018b). The brand of xenophobia where violence, aggression, brutality, arson and killing are unleashed on foreigners is designated as xenophobia as action. This has been the case in Libya, India, South Africa, Dominican Republic, Malaysia, and Australia (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Oloruntoba, 2018; Oni & Okunade, 2018).

Regarding xenophobia as an attitude, Muchemwa et al. (2011) describe xenophobia as intolerance of foreigners or people different from oneself. It is an attitude that aims to socially and politically exclude those classified as others. It is borne out of the view that, for a nation to make progress and be preserved, the outsiders must be ostracised (Neocosmos, 2010). In other words, xenophobia as an attitude is sheer hatred for those perceived to be strangers or aliens, and it is based on the perception that foreigners are mere outsiders who are not entitled to political, social and economic benefits in the host country (Tarifa, 2018). Crush and Ramachandran (2009) add that xenophobia provokes hurtful, hostile and unhealthy social relations between foreigners and locals. It legitimises the abuse, suppression and exploitation of immigrants, which invariably erode and cripple the positive side of migration. Similarly, a xenophobic attitude is a social and psychological oddity that opposes the global tenet of tolerance, brotherhood and accommodation, and it polarises society as 'we' and 'them' with possible unpleasant

consequences (Chibuzor et al., 2017).

On the other hand, xenophobia as action entails deliberate acts of violence against immigrants (Harris, 2002; Tella, 2018; Oloruntoba, 2018; Jarvis & Mthiyane, 2022). Thus, the dimension of the existential reality of xenophobia in South Africa has necessitated its description beyond the confines and limits of attitudinal tendencies. In other words, it is inadequate to conceive xenophobia in South Africa as fear or dislike of foreigners because its manifestations have proved it to be hostility demonstrated in violent practice and action, which result in bodily harm, death, social exclusion and economic displacement (Kanayo & Anjofui, 2020)

However, xenophobia in South Africa is both attitude and action (Claassen, 2017). It is these forms that mobilise and exploit differences based on spatial, linguistic or ethnic origin (Kruger & Osman, 2010). It is a broad spectrum of behaviour that includes stereotyping and dehumanising remarks; discriminatory policies by government and private officials, such as exclusion from public services to which target groups are entitled; selective enforcement of laws by local authorities, assault and harassment by state agents, particularly the police and immigration officers; as well as public threats and violence that often result in rape, beatings, torture, ejection, trauma, displacement, loss of lives, properties and means of livelihood (Misago et al., 2015). Hence, the South African brand of xenophobia demonstrates violent action against foreigners as well as a negative social representation of migrants, asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees (Wilson & Magam, 2018).

African Immigrants as Foreigners and Aliens in South Africa

Curiously, black African immigrants in South Africa are addressed as foreigners or aliens. It is quite surprising that South Africa depicts their African neighbours and people with whom it shares the same racial stock with such ascription, especially the people who stood in unison and fully identified with them during the liberation struggle as such (Onyido, 2018). This labelling points to the fact that the terms foreigner and alien have peculiar connotations and contextual meanings in the South African context. In this regard, Azindow (2007) explains that the term foreigner in South Africa represents any black immigrant presumed to be socially and economically inferior to South Africans. What is so worrisome about this description is the fact that other immigrants from Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia, even immigrants from North Africa, are not so labelled. Rather, it is only black nationals from sub-Saharan Africa that are so described (Misago & Landau, 2023).

Therefore, the word foreigner in South Africa is a social expression of the superior versus inferior dichotomy in which black immigrants are perceived as undesirable people. Nyamnjoh (2006) describes a foreigner in the South African context as any black immigrant who cannot speak any of the South African local languages and is thus considered to be

culturally backwards. This view accounts for the invention of the term *Makwerekwere*, which is said to be a linguistic manifestation of discrimination against the so-called foreigners (Hlatshwayo, 2023). Besides, a foreigner is deemed to be an escapee from war, poverty, famine, political persecution or natural disaster, and it is in this respect that South Africans usually refer to black immigrants as our suffering brothers and sisters from Africa (Tarifa, 2018).

For Neocosmos (2010), the term alien in relation to black immigrants is a creation of the press in South Africa. Accordingly, in the worldview of South Africans, aliens are unwanted persons, invading hordes, vectors for disease, illegal immigrants, and criminals that must be subdued and eradicated. In other words, the term foreigner is a pejorative nomenclature to delineate black African immigrants, whereas Caucasians are not so captioned (Ogo & Nwokie, 2021). Rather, Caucasians are given appellations such as tourists, investors, researchers, entrepreneurs, expatriates and employers of labour. This negative conception and description of black immigrants underscore the shabby way they are treated in South Africa. The fact that only black immigrants are isolated and specifically portrayed thus and treated accordingly has made many scholars substitute the term xenophobia for Afrophobia (Tarifa, 2018; Dube, 2018; Dube, 2019; Nenjerema, 2020; Kanayo & Anjofu, 2020); Jearey-Graham & Hiropoulos, 2020; Montle, 2021). For instance, Tshaka (2024) points out that xenophobia is the fear of others, but in the South African context, xenophobia has become Afrophobia, since Afrophobia is the antagonism and violence specifically against black African immigrants in South Africa, and this manifestation can be attributed to distrust and envy of the locals against the immigrants. Furthermore, Addae and Quan-Baffour (2022) state that the terms foreigner and alien are used synonymously in some contexts as the expression of the perception of African migrants as intruders and parasites, which makes many South Africans turn a blind eye to the socio-economic contribution many African migrants make to South African development. This uncharitable perception and description of black immigrants, according to Addae and Quan-Baffour (2022), is attributed to the “mis-education” of black students by the apartheid authorities, where the ethnic-infused education constituted by the apartheid-era government has left a consequence of suspicion and hostility for people from other parts of Africa. The explicit curricula of that epoch were deliberately assembled to enact, reproduce and instigate racial separation and dominion. The warped education provided for blacks under apartheid undermined the traditional African values of brotherhood, compassion, unity, commonality, cooperation, and love. Thus, the apartheid system replaced them with alien values of hyper-individualism and disdain for black life and culture (Addae & Quan-Baffour, 2022).

Historical Scope of Xenophobia in South Africa

The extant literature on the South African xenophobic discourse has enunciated diverse causes of xenophobia in South Africa. This can be examined from both historical and contemporary standpoints. The historical paradigm relates to the pre-independence

remote causes while the contemporary viewpoint relates to the immediate causes after 1994 when South Africa was freed from apartheid rule. The historical cause is situated within the ambit of isolation theory. It is rooted in the historical development of South Africa where the black South Africans were treated as aliens and outsiders in their land. This racial discrimination, segregation and isolation affected the black South Africans' psyche in many respects. It engenders a racialised worldview of identity where the blacks see themselves as inferior and subservient to the whites (Muchiri, 2016; Tarifa, 2018).

Besides, the pattern of settlement and intra-immigration policies obstruct integration and interaction among tribal groups. An inter-tribal connection was not only inhibited; the blacks were isolated from the rest of the continent. The suppression, brutality and vicious violence through which the whites kept them in check became a daily experience. This permeated their being as a normative mode of treating aliens and outsiders. This historical exposure to a culture of hostility and violence perpetrated by the apartheid regime considerably affected the black South Africans' way of life, bringing about a development whereby they, too, transferred their aggression to the black African immigrants in the post-apartheid era (Misago et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2019). In this milieu, Muchiri (2016) points out that colonial and apartheid experiences subjected black South Africans to the daily rule of violence, murder, assassination, genocide, imprisonment, persecution, oppressive policies and legislation. For over five decades, therefore, this unfair, inhumane and chaotic experience was meted out to the black South Africans (Tarifa, 2018).

Based on the whites' conceptual designation of the blacks as 'alien' and 'foreigners', the blacks were deprived of politics, residence, movement and human rights. These discriminatory treatments became the worldview of black South Africans that coalesced as the basis for xenophobia after independence (Muchiri, 2016). In view of this, after apartheid rule ended in 1994, the former 'aliens and foreigners' under apartheid became citizens with full rights and privileges. The immigrants are now the 'aliens and foreigners' who must be excluded and made to suffer discrimination on account of their 'otherness.' Therefore, while the development used to be a case of the whites swapping roles with black South Africans, it is now the black South Africans swapping roles with black African immigrants or foreigners (Muchiri, 2016; AbdulMagied, 2020).

As Tarifa (2018) points out, existence in such areas was unpalatable, and this encouraged social strife and disorder to thrive. Besides, those from other ethnic groups were seen as the enemy, and frustration and anger were directed at anyone perceived to be different (Tarifa, 2018). Therefore, Nenjerama (2020) submits that apartheid subjected the blacks to conditioning whereby they (the blacks) internalised the atrocities and brutalities of the whites based on racial difference. This internalisation underlined the post-apartheid xenophobia whereby black South Africans see black immigrants as people to be harassed, attacked and oppressed.

Contemporary Context of Xenophobia Crisis in South Africa

The contemporary context of xenophobia in South Africa has been hinged on post-apartheid socio-economic factors, namely, bad governance, political corruption, media hype, inflammatory comments, government denialism, poor immigration management, negative indoctrination, institutional compromise, and ignorance of the potential of migration (Akinola, 2018; Oloruntoba, 2018; Oni & Okunade, 2018; Wilson & Magam, 2018; Kerr et al., 2019; Hiropoulos, 2020). Significantly, the dearth of economic fortunes is at the centre of xenophobic attacks on the so-called outsiders, as the government is not doing enough to devise workable solutions to the menace of xenophobic attacks, so that the populace will not be disillusioned. Therefore, poor governance by not improving the economy to ensure the provision of jobs and adequate social welfare caused the frustration and anger that the less privileged black South Africans are venting on the foreigners (Dauda et al., 2018).

In addition, the representation of migration as a crisis in South Africa by government officials, policymakers, traditional institutions and political elites is generally exacerbating xenophobic attitudes, making foreigners highly vulnerable to victimisation and attack (Jadoo, 2017). Thus, the construction of migration as a crisis is a misplaced diversionary tactic and a machination to shift attention away from incompetence by the government, which fails to make life better for the people and presents immigrants as culpable for the misfortune of the poor South Africans. It appears that making uncomplimentary remarks about foreigners have become a device used to gain popular support. Through this, the black downtrodden have been made to believe that the foreigners, but not the inept government, are the harbinger of their precarious condition (Hiropoulos, 2020).

Similarly, Naidu et al. (2015) explain that socio-economic crises, gross inequalities and rising poverty are the causes of poverty at the macro level, while self-hate syndrome, employers' exploitation and tribal identity are responsible for xenophobic acts at the micro level. The post-apartheid South Africa inherited poor, low-class masses as a result of the unfair apartheid system. However, succeeding post-independence governments have not done enough to improve the economy; rather, they watch the economy nose-dive. To worsen the precarious situation, mindboggling corruption is rampant among politicians, government officials and the ruling party (Ogo & Nwokike, 2021). These have exacerbated inequalities in society. The convergence of the deteriorating economy and excruciating poverty has piqued the poor masses to see foreigners as the interlopers that compete with them in the economic space, hence the need to deal with them ruthlessly. The immigrants have, over the years, demonstrated what it takes to flourish in the informal sector and, instead of the locals to synergise with them so as to learn the skills and the tricks, they make recourse to destructive envy. Another dimension of envy, as Naidu et al. (2015) identified, is instigated by the employers of labour who readily employ immigrants who are available for low wages. This, again, incites the locals to view the foreigners as those

stealing their jobs.

Neocosmos (2010) hints that the failure of the Africa National Congress, as a party that has been ruling since independence, to promote and inculcate the philosophy of Pan-Africanism partly encourages xenophobia in South Africa. In other words, for a people that have been restrained from freely relating with their African fellows for decades, the political elites ought to have espoused the values and virtues of Pan-Africanism. This would have helped the black South Africans to define their relationship within the parameters of the ethos of Pan-Africanism. Instead, ANC evinces the neo-liberal credo of the African Renaissance (Neocosmos, 2010), which erroneously inflates the ego of the black South Africans, as this makes them regard themselves as superior to and more sophisticated than their fellow African nationals.

Furthermore, the non-existence of immigrants' human rights in the South African Constitution is another reason for unbridled xenophobic rascality. This development is a gross shortcoming in the rainbow nation. Clearly, there are no existing laws that make xenophobic acts an offence (Hlatshwayo, 2023). Xenophobic offences like molestation, extortion, rape, murder, arson and looting are considered to be mere criminal offences in law. As such, the state does not see xenophobic brutality as anything new, special or extraordinary. Taking any legal action against any form of xenophobic offence is frustrating and risky as state officers like the police are rarely interested in such cases, and foreigners who report any case of a xenophobic attack in their community put their lives at risk of endangerment by irate South African local mobs (Neocosmos, 2010).

The settlement pattern of immigrants has been another catalyst for xenophobic attacks in a profound way. It is common for foreigners to seek shelter in informal urban, suburbs, and townships that are characterised by unemployment, poverty, vigilantism, poor social services and amenities, and overcrowding. Rivalry in terms of informal businesses with the locals in these tense settlements easily provokes xenophobic violence (Brobbeey 2018). The violence, which is an importation from the apartheid era, is endemic among the locals. Society thrives on violence as protests, agitations and demands for rights and privileges are expressed through violence. It is rife and prevalent in South African life, and it is normalised as a solution to problems (Chikanda, 2016).

Xenophobia-Related Linguistic Neologism in South Africa

Tarifa (2018) states that certain names are deftly coined by the local residents to stigmatise, denigrate and mock the foreigners in South Africa. In other words, such names are deliberately coined with xenophobic connotations. Some of these xenophobic names, identified by Tarifa (2018: 23-29), are *Makwerekwere*, *Magrigambia*, *Maforeigner*,

Amakalanga, MaNyasa, MaNigeria, Broder, Ngwangwa, Padro, Omotswagai, Mukwevho, Mashangani, BakaMugabe, Amaxenophobia, MaZimbabwe, and MaZulu.

For Jarvis and Mthiyane (2022), *Makwerekwere* is the oldest and the most common label for immigrants in South Africa. It has different layers of meaning. Primarily, it means someone who has no mastery of any South African local language. It is also a signification for a culturally inferior person and those from wretched countries of Africa. Thus, Uzoatu (2017) contends that *Makwerekwere* is a sarcastic and malicious coinage devised by black South Africans to malign black immigrants in South Africa. *Magrigamba*, according to Tarifa (2018), is a derogatory name given to immigrants in South Africa, particularly the West African immigrants. It refers to an immigrant who arrived in South Africa as a pauper but returned to his country with riches and wealth amassed from the resources of South Africa. *Maforeigner* is a coinage derived from blending the local language and the English word. It is an insulting description of foreigners as victims of anti-immigrants violence.

Tarifa (2018) explains that *Amakalanga* is a pointer to the depth of intolerance and ethnic nationalism in South Africa. *Kalanga* is a sub-ethnic group under the Ndebele nation in Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, there is also the Ndebele ethnic group in South Africa. Both groups have mutually intelligible languages. However, the name *Amakalanga* is invented to describe the Ndebele from Zimbabwe as inferior to those in South Africa. Therefore, *Amakalanga* is a specific degrading label for ethnic identity (Tarifa 2018). Similarly, Tarifa (2018) describes *MaNyasa* as an ethnic label to demean the Malawian immigrants in South Africa. *Nyasaland* is the former name of Malawi before independence. The Nyasa people have been immigrants in South Africa far before independence that changed the national name to Malawi. *MaNyasa* is, therefore, an offensive name to portray Malawians as culturally inferior to South Africans (Tarifa 2018).

Tarifa (2018) also recognises *MaNigeria, Broder* and *Ngwangwa* as demeaning references to immigrants from Nigeria. The term *Broder* which is a corrupt form of the English word 'brother' is derived from the frequent informal conversation in which Nigerians often address one another as 'my brother'. The term, however, has a negative connotation for the poor people from Nigeria, who are desperately in South Africa for greener pasture. *Ngwangwa* is a jocular reference to a common Nigerian food often cooked by Nigerian immigrants, but its connotation is scornful as well (Tarifa, 2018). *Padrao* is a Mozambican word appropriated by South Africans. It is a greeting expression through which Mozambican traders and businessmen do exchange pleasantries. However, the appropriation and usage of this word by South Africans are embedded in mimicry, sarcasm, and disparaging connotations (Tarifa, 2018).

Omotawagai, according to Tarifa (2018), is a word from the Sesotho/Setswana ethnic group in South Africa. It is a term used by the urbanised South Africans in addressing any South African who comes from a rural area to live in the city. The word denotes a

rustic, traditional, conservative and unrefined individual, considered to be backward and uninitiated to the city way of life. *Mukwevho* is another scornful and malevolent term identified. It is used against the minority groups of *Tsongas* and *Vendas* from Limpopo in South Africa and the foreigners from Mozambique. *Mashangani* is similar in its derivation to *Mukwevho*. It is specifically devised against the *Tsonga*, *Vendas* and *Shangani* people from Mozambique. Since these three ethnic groups are also in South Africa, the term is used to differentiate and point to those from Mozambique as inferior and backward (Tarifa, 2018).

Both *BakaMugabe* and *Mazimbabwe*, according to Tarifa (2018), are used to refer to Robert Mugabe's people. Therefore, the term is a description of immigrants from Zimbabwe. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003) and Els (2013), in the South African media, Mugabe is constructed as a dictator and corrupt leader who has thrown his country into socio-economic and political crises. The term is, thus, a spiteful and demeaning label to refer to Zimbabweans as victims of bad leadership. Furthermore, Tarifa (2018) states that *Am xenophobia* is a label that emerged after May 2008's widespread anti-immigrant riots in South Africa. It is used to signify the foreigners who were displaced by xenophobic attacks. However, connotatively, it is an aspersive expression to stigmatise foreigners as helpless victims of violence.

While the aforementioned names are labels fabricated by the South Africans against the immigrants, *Mazulu* is, however, a name devised by the immigrants against the South Africans (Tarifa, 2018). The name emanates from the foreigners' wide belief that attacks against them are initiated and propagated by the Zulu, the largest ethnic group in South Africa. So, the label captures the Zulus as the attackers and molesters of the immigrants. Over time, as the anti-immigrant violence spread beyond Zululand, the term has been semantically extended to denote any South African, be it a *Xhosa*, *Zulu*, *Sotho*, *Pedi*, *Venda*, *Tsonga*, *Shangani* or *Ndebele* who attacks a foreigner (Tarifa, 2018).

Xenophobia as Cultural Racism in South Africa

Xenophobia and racism are overlapping concepts and, at the same time, distinct. Since attention has been given to the varied definitions of xenophobia in the earlier section of this study, this section will dwell more on the conceptual construct of racism. The convergence and divergence between the two terms will be drawn to foreground the view that xenophobia in South Africa is a form of cultural racism in South Africa. Racism is informed by the European misconception that they are the finest, most advanced and civilised race in the world, having the obligation to spread and impose their sophistication on other races, especially those that are perceived to be savage, barbaric and culturally inferior (Mlambo, 2019). Racism is inspired by Western epistemological, scientific and

religious dogma. It kindles colonialism, which is justified on the grounds that the Whites are superior and extraordinary beings that need to embark on the mission of civilizing the sub-human others. Therefore, racism is the overriding factor that informs the colonial project (Tarifa, 2018). It is predicated on discrimination based on biological differences such as skin colour, hair type and facial features (Akinola, 2018a).

In explicit terms, racism is any form of behaviour, attitude, action or practice (formal or informal; conscious or unconscious) that attempts to subjugate or exclude others, which may be an individual or a group of individuals based on their skin or racial identity (Mlambo, 2019). It allows for a culture of racial hierarchy and taxonomy which propagates the social dichotomy of civilised/uncivilised, superior/inferior, urbane/barbaric, citizen/alien, human/subhuman, master/servant, inclusion/exclusion and integration/alienation. It is a contrived abstraction that is weaponised by the Whites to justify their invasion and subjugation of the Blacks (Tarifa, 2018).

In racism, stereotypes and attitudes are manifested through beliefs, verbal outbursts, slurs and tangible acts, and these are capable of fomenting violence. Language is an accomplice of racism, as it is used against others in a denigrating, derogatory and debasing manner (Nanjerema, 2020). Fundamentally, convergence can be drawn on the overlapping conceptual description of both racism and xenophobia. While they have separate meanings, they are, however, interlinked as both are rooted in prejudice, hostility, intolerance, exclusion, discrimination and contempt for outsiders (Sulika & Sabi, 2018).

However, there are identifiable divergences between the two terms. Akinola (2018c) argues that racism is a branch of xenophobia since it is predicated on the form of discrimination that is based on biological attributes and physical characteristic differences such as skin colour, hair type and facial features. On the other hand, xenophobia entails discriminatory behaviour based on the prejudice that others are foreigners to a community or a nation. Also, racism is based on biological differences and the feeling of superiority while xenophobia is based on nationality and cultural differences (Adjai 2010). The World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), cited in Muchiri (2016), points out that racism is an ideological construct that assigns a certain race or ethnic group to a position of power over others based on physical and cultural attributes, as well as economic wealth, involving hierarchical relations where the superior race exercises domination and control over others. Whereas xenophobia describes attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude, and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to a community.

A striking difference between the two terms is that racism is distinctively an ideological construct with deliberate social structures like institutions, laws, policies, and regulations formulated to produce, nurture and uphold the ideology. In the case of xenophobia, laws and policies operate covertly, and social institutions of the state can discriminate against

foreigners, but they are not primarily set up for a xenophobic agenda as in the case of South Africa (Adjai, 2010; Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013). Furthermore, whereas racism is a description of a racial group that prides itself as superior to another or other races, xenophobia is a label for a nationality within a race that regards other nationalities within the same race as different (Mohr, 2008). Therefore, racism is inter-racial, while xenophobia is intra-racial.

Contrary to Muchiri (2016), Akinola (2018a), and Mlambo (2019), who subordinate racism to xenophobia, Mohr (2008), Adeogun and Faluyi (2018), and Ogo and Nwokike (2021) argue that racism rather takes precedence over xenophobia. In other words, racism is more far-reaching in its nature and implications than xenophobia. Xenophobia as an intra-racial malady is generally provoked by the twin problems of competition for dwindling socio-economic resources and the perceived criminality of immigrants. This means the causes are synchronic, ad-hoc, terminal and correctable. It implies that xenophobic attacks or sentiments will not occur in a host country that is economically buoyant and devoid of immigrant criminality. It also implies that xenophobic acts may discontinue when the economy bounces back and foreigners are law-abiding.

On the other hand, racism is ideological. It endures, and it is undying. It is a belief that runs in the blood of its adherents. It seems permanent, irretrievable, and trans-generational. It is both intra- and trans-national. It is responsible for colonialism, apartheid and the infamous trans-Atlantic and Saharan slave trade experiences in Africa and elsewhere. As manifested in America in July 2020, the murder of George Floyd was not motivated by competition for economic opportunity or the criminality of the victim but by racial prejudice (Aljazeera News, 2020). Therefore, xenophobia is micro in scope, non-segregational and consequential on the perceived misdeeds of foreigners, whereas racism is macro in proportion because it is a pre-conceived worldview that endures.

Mlambo (2019) differentiates between individual and institutional racism. While individual racism is what a person does is ideology-based, institutional racism is policy-based. In this respect, racism is a deliberate demonstration of prejudicial laws and regulations by the government in social institutions like schools, courts, media, religion, sports, business, immigration, and the police force to foist a group's or government's view, power and idiosyncrasies over the perceived inferior race (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013).

Tarifa (2018) identifies biological and cultural racism. According to Tarifa, biological racism originates in the Western world, where whites consider themselves superior to other races as a result of their distinctive physical differences from the latter. Cultural racism thrives on the supposition of cultural differences (such as the difference in accent and manners) and lack of repertoire in the indigenous language. For Tarifa, biological racism is the precursor to cultural racism, in which cultural racism is an attitude where

the “others” are perceived as a risk, a threat, trespassers, and interlopers seeking to compete with or displace the locals.

In this milieu, the aim of the locals is to suppress or eliminate the “outsiders”. Notably, cultural racism is void of hierarchical segregation of society; rather, it is grounded in social and economic alienation of foreigners (Tarifa, 2018). It is on account of this substantial overlap between the concept of cultural racism and xenophobia that Tarifa (2018) contends that xenophobia in South Africa should be regarded and analysed through the lens of cultural racism, which he redefines as ‘black-on-black’ racism, ‘new racism’ or ‘intra-black’ racism”.

Similarly, Addae and Quan-Baffour (2022) interrogate the appropriacy of the use of the term xenophobia as the right description for the incessant anti-immigrant attacks in South Africa. They chronicle numerous specific attacks on African immigrants perpetrated by black South Africans to prove that the situation in South Africa is a case of black-on-black attacks. Therefore, Addae and Quan-Baffour (2022) deconstruct the concept of xenophobia as weak in view of anti-immigrant sentiments and recurrent attacks in South Africa and propound the term new racism due to the empirical facts that African foreigners in South Africa face varied forms of discrimination, prejudice, and violence at the hands of the indigenes, who are mostly black South Africans.

Corroborating this view, Mututa (2023) avers that the persistent xenophobic attacks on black Africans have led to a new cultural watershed in which the new emergent cultural identity movement has reified the practices of black-to-black violence. It is, therefore, a case of the freed oppressed becoming the new oppressor of their fellow black nationals from the continent. Hence, the xenophobia conflict in South Africa is not only an intra-racial crisis but also a brand of new racism.

Conclusion

The paper has explored the connection between the historical and the contemporary contexts of xenophobia in South Africa in relation to the Social Identity Theory. The results indicate that xenophobia in South Africa is not only spontaneously generated by economic distress but a social phenomenon that has its roots in historical experiences, identity formation, and institutional cultures. The paper reveals that the remnants of apartheid imprinted the inflexible structures of classification and marginality, still manifested in social relations of the post-apartheid period. The historical trends have been re-arranged in South Africa today, where the African immigrants are rendered as the new out-group in the system of national identity. Socio-economic competition, political rhetoric, and negative media portrayals are reinforcing this process, all of which justify hostility and violence towards immigrants. Moreover, the paper confirms that xenophobia in South Africa is not a mere attitudinal bias but involves violence. Thus, it is one of the most extreme expressions of anti-immigrant sentiments in Africa.

The derogatory names and language used also deepen the social creation of immigrants as inferior and undesirable, therefore, perpetuate the exclusionary practices. Notably, the use of Social Identity Theory emphasizes the pivotal role of identity politics in the explanation of xenophobia. It exposes the social construction of the dichotomy between us and them and how they are reproduced in discourse, institutional practices and day-to-day interactions. This highlights the necessity to shift away from explaining xenophobia solely by economic factors to a more comprehensive view that involves identity, history, and power relationships.

The research concludes that the xenophobia in South Africa cannot be resolved without a conscious attempt to redefine the social identities and inclusiveness. The policies that promote Pan-African solidarity, enhance institutional security of immigrants and confront the exclusionary discourses are necessary in reducing the tensions of xenophobia. Finally, re-identification with African identity and common growth is an urgent necessity to attain sustainability in social cohesion in South Africa and the continent in general.

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