

## **POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON NIGERIANS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract**

*In recent times, xenophobic attacks on Nigerians living in South Africa have been on the increase. Scholars' attempts to situate these attacks in a proper context have also seen them taking different positions. This study seeks a conceptual prognosis of the remote and immediate causes of the frequent attacks and argues that the factors responsible for them could be located within the domestic economic imperatives in South Africa. Anchoring analysis on Frustration-Aggression theory and relying essentially on documentary method of data collection, the study argues that contrary to expectations, post-apartheid black majority rule in south Africa, have not improved the economic fortunes of blacks in any significant way. Sequestered from the commanding heights of the economy, the locals are disillusioned that black majority rule has not translated to economic prosperity for them. This is worsened by the fact that small scale businesses are also controlled by foreigners, with Nigerians as major players. This dominance and visible presence of Nigerians, the locals find nauseating. Thus frustrated, they express their anger by attacking Nigerians. The study recommends that for these attacks to stop, the South African government have to set their economy on the path of progressive growth. Secondly, it should embark on a comprehensive youth empowerment programme. Engaging the youths in viable economic activities will tame their restiveness and ultimately contain the incidence of attacks.*

**Keywords:** Apartheid; Xenophobia; Economy; Imperatives; Disillusion.

### **Introduction**

Xenophobia, a word that evokes a feeling of hatred whenever it is mentioned, is a concept that has been subjected to different interpretations in the academia. It is the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange and foreign. It explains further that the term has been historically used to emphasize a sense of fright of outsiders.

In his own account, Yakushko (2009) defines Xenophobia as “a form of attitudinal, affective and behavioural prejudice towards immigrants and those perceived as foreign”. Crowther (1995) emphasized that xenophobia “focuses on individuals who come from other countries and toward whom native individuals have an intense dislike or fear”. According to Igwe (2007), xenophobia is “a primitive group syndrome symptomatic of a wider socio-political malaise, expressing itself in a dislike of and even hostility towards arbitrarily defined outsiders and encouraging an attitude of suspicion and exclusion in place of trust and inclusion”.

A more comprehensive and perhaps globally accepted definition of the concept was given in 2001 by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) 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”.

There is perhaps a single thread that seems to weave together all the definitions which is, that in societies where xenophobia exists, there is a feeling of “we versus them”. In the African continent, whenever, the word xenophobia is mentioned, the country that easily comes to mind is South Africa.

Xenophobia has been on the rise in South Africa since the end of apartheid. Hanekom & Webster (2009) observed that between 1997 and 2007, the South African media frequently reported violence targeting non-nationals. However, the one that reverberated throughout the world was the May 2008 violence visited on foreign nationals and which resulted in the death of 62 people and left about 670 injured. The violence started in Alexandria, a township near Johannesburg. It spread to other places and soon appeared in Cape Town and other places throughout the country (Hanekom & Webster, 2009). It was primarily targeted at foreigners from other African countries who live in informal settlements.

There is a significant population of Nigerians that live in South Africa. The Nigerian Union in South Africa estimates the population of Nigerians in South Africa to be about 800,000. With this figure, it naturally follows that anytime violence is unleashed on non-nationals, a sizeable number of the victims will be Nigerians. In recent times too, there has been attacks targeted specifically at Nigerians. In April 2015, shops belonging to Nigerians in Durban were looted and the goods they lost were estimated to be 400,000 rands. In Jeppe town near Johannesburg, five shops were looted and one burnt while the estimated loss was put at 1,000,000 rands. Following the attacks about 300 Nigerians living in that city had to flee.

Again in February 2017, in Pretoria, a protest march was organized by a group that called itself Mamelodi Concerned Residents. It escalated into a tense confrontation between protesters and foreigners. The protesters accused African immigrants including Nigerians and Somalis of being involved in crimes such as drug and sex trade. Nigerians living in Kuruman community in Cape Town province were also in 2017 given up to June 17, to leave the community. Similarly, in Klaarfontein community, Extension 5 in Johannesburg, landlords were directed not to renew the rent of Nigerians claiming rise in prostitution and illicit drugs.

Why are Nigerians in South Africa under attack? This is what this study seeks to interrogate. The study is divided into four sections. Section one is this introductory part. In section two, we explicate our framework of analysis which is the Frustration-Aggression Theory. We will go a step further in this section to justify why we adopted this theory as our analytical framework. Section three focuses on the Post-Apartheid domestic economic conditions in South Africa that encourage xenophobic sentiments and South Africa’s government complicity in making

sustaining the sentiments. In section four, we look at incidences of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians. We conclude in section five with recommendations.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Our analysis is anchored on Frustration-Aggression Theory. The theory was propounded by Dollard et al (1939). Its major proposition is that aggression is a result of impeding or stultifying a person's effort to attain a goal. As the theory goes, aggression is a form of release of emotional tension. The theory seeks to explain why people scapegoat (Wikipedia). It attempts to give an explanation as to the cause of violence. It says that frustration causes aggression, but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target (Wikipedia).

Miller (1941), one of the proponents of the theory further modified the original thesis. In realization that fear of punishment can discourage acts of aggression, he stated that frustration produces investigations to a number of different types of response, one of which is instigation to some form of aggression. He argues that frustration produces instigation to aggression but this is not the only type of instigation that it may produce. To this end, responses incompatible with aggression may if sufficiently instigated, prevent the actual occurrence of acts of aggression.

The Frustration-Aggression theory assumes that individuals and groups have goals of sort, that much of their behaviour is purposive in the sense of goal seeking and that if this behaviour is not prevented in some way, the group or the individual is likely to behave quite peaceably. Since this condition is unlikely to be regular or at least, always fulfilled in the human condition of scarcity, the theory predicts that the result is likely to be aggressive behaviour (Onuoha, 2008, p.66).

Berkowitz (1969), one of the authors of the theory further advanced its frontiers by stating that a frustration doesn't always lead to aggression, rather aggression would only occur when certain cues are present. Giving an example, he observed that cues such as the presence of weapons will be more likely to trigger aggression. Aggressive action requires four main steps, namely activation of demand; frustration of demand; mental processes of deciding how to overcome the frustration and then action (Davies, 1973 cited in Onuoha, 2008).

At this juncture, the central question to ask is how this theory can help us to understand the xenophobic attacks on Nigerians living in South Africa. There is no doubt that the enthronement of black majority rule in South Africa in 1994 offered a promise of an elixir especially for black South Africans who for 45 years were subjugated under the apartheid racist regime. They expected that the new government will usher in all the trappings of good life, namely employment; good health care; access to decent housing etc. Unfortunately, successive governments over the past twenty-three years have not been able to deliver on these promises. In the midst of all these, the country has continued to witness an influx of immigrants from African countries including Nigerians. Majority of Nigerians in South Africa are economic migrants who are compelled to leave Nigeria because of the economic challenges at home. While there, they are willing to take up menial jobs at rates lower than the

national minimum wage, just to survive. Some others set up small scale businesses and through sheer determination and dexterity, outcompete the locals and in some instances displace them.

Realizing that their economic well-being has not improved under black majority rule, the locals feel frustrated. The frustration creates emotional tension in them which has to be let out through aggression. Since the aggression cannot be visited on the government, which is the primary source of the frustration, they make scape goats of Nigerians and other African migrants by visiting aggression on them.

There is prevalence of small arms and light weapons in South Africa due to several years of armed struggle by ANC's militant wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) against the apartheid regime. Since aggression in the words of Berkowitz (1969) can occur when certain cues like weapons are present, the availability of weapons in South Africa instigates xenophobic attacks and makes it run full cycle.

### **Domestic Economic Conditions in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

In South Africa, immigrants from African countries are collectively called "Makwerekwere", a derogatory term for foreigners and "Onomatopoeia", meaning someone who speaks unintelligibly... (Hickel, 2014). The enthronement of black majority rule in the country after the multiparty elections held in 1994 has not diminished this sentiment. On the contrary, it has reinforced it.

Landau (2010) observes that two particular features continue to resonate in contemporary South Africa. First is the coding of unregulated (and even regulated) human mobility as a threat to insiders economic and physical well-being and national (or sub-national) achievement. Next is the use of individuals or cultural points of origin to determine utility and claims to citizenship. According to Ake (1996, cited in Kersting, 2009) there is a new wave of nationalism spreading across Africa. The first phase of nationalism happened in the process of decolonization and was directed against colonial powers. The second nationalism is as a rule, no longer directed towards other countries but against "denizens", non-citizens living within an African state. Thus he argues that the inclusiveness at the beginning of independence is gone, now the exclusion of social groups within the same society defines the new nationalism. In this connection, xenophobic attacks in South Africa is not a sudden eruption and not the action of criminals, but were a latent mindset in the midst of society (Kersting, 2009).

In the build-up to the 1994 multi-party elections, the ANC ran a campaign that made enticing promises to the people. This raised the hopes and expectations of citizens as they looked up to enjoying the dividends of black majority rule. Having won the election, the government promised to build a new society based on a culture of inclusiveness, tolerance and human rights and this was embodied in the 1996 constitution (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013).

As years rolled by, black South Africans were not experiencing any change in their economic wellbeing. The more things seemed to change, the more they remained the same. Tshitereke (1999) observed that with heightened expectations

came the realization that delivery was not immediate. Thus, discontentment and indignation set in providing the perfect breeding ground for xenophobia to take root and flourish. Not getting what was promised them after the 1994 elections came the feeling that the little they have is being shared by African immigrants. The locals were not willing to put up with this.

As at 1994, South Africa's unemployment levels placed it in 18<sup>th</sup> position in the global ranking. By 2017, it has climbed to 6<sup>th</sup> position with the unemployment levels averaging 24% over a 23 year period. South Africa's unemployment rate over the period is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: South Africa's Unemployment Levels 1994 – 2019.**

Year	Unemployment Rate	Global Rank
1994	20.0%	18 <sup>th</sup>
1995	16.9%	26 <sup>th</sup>
1996	21.0%	14 <sup>th</sup>
1997	22.9%	10 <sup>th</sup>
1998	25.0%	9 <sup>th</sup>
1999	25.4%	9 <sup>th</sup>
2000	26.7%	5 <sup>th</sup>
2001	25.4%	8 <sup>th</sup>
2002	27.2%	7 <sup>th</sup>
2003	27.1%	8 <sup>th</sup>
2004	24.7%	10 <sup>th</sup>
2005	23.8%	9 <sup>th</sup>
2006	22.6%	12 <sup>th</sup>
2007	22.3%	10 <sup>th</sup>
2008	22.7%	9 <sup>th</sup>
2009	23.7%	8 <sup>th</sup>
2010	24.7%	6 <sup>th</sup>
2011	24.7%	6 <sup>th</sup>
2012	25.0%	7 <sup>th</sup>
2013	24.6%	9 <sup>th</sup>
2014	25.1%	9 <sup>th</sup>
2015	25.0%	8 <sup>th</sup>
2016	24.9%	7 <sup>th</sup>
2017	24.8%	6 <sup>th</sup>

(Source: International Labour Organisation).

It is noteworthy that Xenophobic attacks against Nigerians and other African immigrants are often perpetrated by the youths. One factor that could be responsible for this, is the frustration faced by the youths, majority of whom are unemployed. Available statistics shows that youth unemployment rate averaged 51.93% between 2013 and 2017. It rose to 54.3% in Q1 2017 and reached an all-time high of 55.9% in

Q2 2017 (STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA, retrieved from <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/youth-unemployment-rate> on 17/8/17).

Another factor that can be used as an index to show how the domestic conditions in South Africa influence xenophobic attacks on Nigerians is the living conditions of households in South Africa. According to LCS report for 2014/2015, the average income in South Africa is approximately R 138, 168 per annum, with the biggest portion derived primarily from work. Other income sources include capital gains, pensions, allowances and rent. The data shows that white South Africans still command the highest average incomes in the country approximately R 444, 446 a year. This is over 1.5 times greater than Indians/Asians at R 271,621 per year, and almost five times more than black South Africans at R 92, 893 per year. The detailed figures are shown in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Living Conditions of Households in South Africa**

	White	Indian/Asian	Coloured	Black	S. Africa
Salary (rands)	300 498	215 784	131 633	69 094	100 246
Capital Gains (rands)	16 184	2173	1364	842	2451
Pensions, Social Insurance, Family allowances (rands)	30 379	10 028	12 260	8 921	11 378
Income from individuals (rands)	5 232	3 309	2 430	2 194	2 542
Others	6 520	2 223	2 265	1 261	1 886
Imputed rents on own dwellings	82 271	38 005	22 747	10 671	19 665
Total	444 416	271 621	172 765	92 983	138 168

(Source: Statistics South Africa. [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za))

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, black South Africans expected that their journey to freedom would mean claiming part of the enormous wealth accrued by the country's white minority. But rather than the expected redistribution, poverty and inequality have remained a fact of life. This is exemplified by the fact that the whites control the commanding heights of the economy and a disproportionate number of top and senior management positions in employment. The blacks who were looking up to enjoying the privileges hitherto enjoyed exclusively by the white population, find themselves sentenced to low positions with the consequence that they continue to play a second fiddle in the economy. This creates a feeling of disillusionment and to express their frustrations, they vent their spleen on Nigerians and other African migrants. Table 3 below shows the racial distribution of management positions as at 2013, a situation that is yet to change.

**Table 3**  
**Racial Distribution of Management Positions.**

	Whites	Blacks	Indians	Coloureds	Foreign nationals
Top Management	62.7%	19.8%	8.3%	5.1%	4.1%
Senior Management	57%	23%	10%	7%	3%
Professionally Qualified	40.2%	38.4%	9.4%	9.4%	2.5%

(Source: 2013 report of 14<sup>th</sup> Commission for Employment Equity (CEE). Retrieved on 28/8/17 from <http://www.fin24.com/economy/whites-still-top-management-posts-report>.)

There is a sense in which the South African governments in conjunction with the police seem to be complicit in reinforcing xenophobic sentiments. Hanekom & Webster (2009) observes that economic migrants, those in South Africa seeking employment in large part because of the poor state of their country's economies as well as legitimate asylum seekers are often undocumented. This lack of documentation according to them, makes it impossible to determine not only how many nationals are in the country, but also their reasons for being there. Furthermore, it is difficult to differentiate between economic migrants and asylum seekers because many economic migrants apply for asylum seeker status as a means to remain in the country temporarily.

The non-documentation of immigrants renders them vulnerable to police raids. Hanekom & Webster (2009) put it succinctly thus:

The police in South Africa arrest more people for violating immigration laws each year than any other reason. The arrests and deportations are publicly characterized as the result of the concentrated efforts by the police to crack down on crime. Immigration control is publicly labelled as crime control. Publicized crackdown on crime often takes the form of massive sweeps through immigrant neighbourhoods in which police arrest anyone without proper documentation. Such operations further the association between being undocumented and committing crimes such as stealing, selling drugs and killing.

Non documentation of immigrants entering the country is a deliberate act that is codified in the laws of South Africa. The Immigration Act of 2002 accords primacy to the protection of the borders and limiting the number of people who could enter the country. This reinforces the belief in certain quarters that xenophobic sentiments have had deep roots in South Africa since the end of apartheid. This has prompted a scholar to insinuate that: "South Africans remain deeply divided on many issues, but there is one thing on which they have consistently agreed: immigration is a universal bad and should be actively discouraged" (Hanekom & Webster, 2009, p.104).

In a bid to maintain its bond with the poor, the government deploys a security strategy that involves using the police as a bogey to hoodwink the locals that their freedom is being circumscribed by foreigners and for that they deserve to be punished. This explains the frequent raids on immigrants' neighbourhoods by the police. These raids are done ostensibly to secure the locals from foreigners who are often branded criminals and economic saboteurs. Steinberg (2012, p. 345) puts it this way "it is this that led mobs into the streets, for it gave purchase to the idea that the business of making the city secure was forever unfinished".

### **Why Nigerian Immigrants in South Africa are subjected to Attacks.**

There are some stereotypes which South Africans hold about Nigerians. Nigerian immigrants are thought to be heavily involved in illicit trade in drugs, arms and human organs. They are also accused of trafficking in goods that are considered to be fake, like designer clothes and pirated DVD's. Moreover, they are regarded as shadowy masters of the black market capable of marshaling esoteric techniques to secure wealth from hidden sources (Hickel, 2014). As is typical with stereotypes, there is hardly evidence to suggest that immigrants indulge in illicit economic activities more than South Africans do.

Between 2015 and 2017, about 116 Nigerians were murdered either by South African citizens or agents of the state (Guardian Editorial, Feb.20, 2017). In February 2017, a Nigerian, Tochukwu Nnadi was extra judicially killed by South African police forces for allegedly dealing on hard drugs (Guardian Editorial, Feb. 20, 2017). The mere suspicion that one is a Nigerian could lead to his being attacked. In 2007, Lucky Dube, a popular South African musician that played the reggae genre of music was shot and killed in the Johannesburg suburb of Rolsentensville in an attempted car hijacking. He was driving a Chrysler 300. His assailants Sifiso Mhlanga, Julius Ngxowa and Mbuti Mabo were later apprehended, charged to court and sentenced to life imprisonment. The interesting, yet surprising thing that happened during their trial was that they told the court that they shot Dube, because they thought he was a Nigerian.

The killings and attacks have been most prevalent in the mining and manufacturing sectors of South Africa's industrial heartland of Johannesburg which ironically were built on migrant labour. Much as unemployment and economic distress may be the motivation, but as Guardian expressed in its editorial cited earlier, unnecessary envy also plays a part. Some South Africans are known to be disturbed by the competition offered by Nigerians and other foreigners and the spectacle of Nigerians who are more successful than they are. The entrepreneurial spirit and hard work Nigerians exhibit is a major source of worry for the locals.

Nigerians in South Africa are perceived to be very smart with a pen chance for circumventing the law in the course of doing business. Related to that, they are seen as shrewd businessmen who deploy skilful marketing strategies to undercut competition. In some instances, they are known to create uncontested market space that renders competition irrelevant; what in marketing is known as Blue Ocean Strategy.



Nigerians are also perceived as being very loud, utilizing every opportunity to flaunt their wealth. They are known to organize noisy parties, ride expensive cars and also woo South African ladies with money. In all of this, they see locals as lacking in business acumen and look at them with contempt. These behavioural tendencies infuriate South Africans and deepen their frustration. When these frustrations build up, they let it out by attacking Nigerians.

### **Conclusion**

We have been able to show in this study that the domestic economic conditions in post-apartheid South Africa create the enabling environment for xenophobia to thrive. Unable to live up to the expectations of the locals, whose hopes were heightened in the build up to the 1994 multi-party elections, the government pits the locals against the migrants. They sell a dummy to the locals that the ubiquity of African migrants are the reasons why they don't have jobs. As a result, they manipulate their immigration system to make it difficult for legal migrants to be duly registered. The rationale being that the more migrants they allow in, the more saturated the labour market would become. Thus migration is criminalized and every migrant is first perceived as a criminal, while the onus is on him to prove otherwise.

The police play quite an ignoble role in this regard. Migrants are haunted and labelled criminals and economic saboteurs. Those that work in the informal sector are seen as threats and the little successes they record even in the midst of hostility are easily noticed and attract envy. Having fallen for the governments intrigue that foreigners are their enemies, they are unable to vent their frustration on the government authorities. They therefore let it out on Nigerians and other African migrants. Violent attacks thus, becomes the easiest way to ease tension and serves as an emotional release.

### **Recommendations**

To stem the tide of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians, the government of South Africa has to make deliberate efforts to regenerate the economy and set it on the path of progressive growth. Secondly, it should embark on a comprehensive youth empowerment programme. As was shown in the study, unemployment in South Africa has averaged 24% in more than two decades of black majority rule, with youth unemployment averaging 55.9% as at Quarter 2, 2017. This is a potential time bomb. Reducing youth unemployment significantly by engaging them in viable economic activities will tame their restiveness and ultimately contain the incidence of xenophobic attacks.

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