



## Xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa: Causes and implications

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### Abstract

There is no denying the fact that Nigerians are facing primitive and undeserved xenophobic attacks in the hands of South Africans in South Africa. From Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Soweto, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, East London, Limpopo to Port Elizabeth it is the same barbaric tale of gruesome molestation and hounding down of foreign nationals, especially Nigerians. These heinous attacks when juxtaposed with Nigeria's financial and logistic support in South Africa's apartheid dark days, one will conclude without any iota of doubt that it is an act of ingratitude. Even though, there are allegations of Nigerians soiling their hands by engaging in illicit businesses, it begs the questions that, why not allow the long arms of the law to take its course; rather than take laws into their hands. The paper therefore, interrogates the remote and immediate causes of the attacks of Nigerians in South Africa, the socio-political and economic implications of the attacks on both countries. The theoretical framework for this work is Frustration \Aggression theory. It uses secondary data collection analysis. The paper makes appropriate recommendations.

**Keywords:** South Africa, xenophobia, Nigeria, attack

### Introduction

South Africa is one of the largest countries in the world in terms of landmass and population and is bordered by Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana in the north and Swaziland and Mozambique in the northeast (Rojorson, 2000). With a good GDP of about 326.541 billion, however inequality reigned supreme in the country, with corresponding poverty, unemployment and of course, crime is on the increase (Onyibo, 2018) <sup>[20]</sup>. The country gained independence in 1910 but found itself in the clutches of apartheid rule since then till it became emancipated in 1994. Kinge and Tiobo (2016) <sup>[13]</sup> submitted that the white minority sort to oppress and marginalize black populous settlement. Nigeria and Nigerians across strata of its society contributed in no small way to the emancipation of South Africa, especially when she was under apartheid regime. The federal government of Nigeria expended enormous amount of money particularly following the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, Nigerian university undergraduates' skipped lunch for a month in order to donate to the Cause of liberating South Africans from the shackles and manacles of apartheid by donating what was called "Mandela tax to fight apartheid". The Nigerian music industry was not left out of the struggle, as "fire in the Soweto" was composed by Sunny Okosun in order to reinforce help from the country (Onyibo, 2018) <sup>[20]</sup>.

Upon gaining independence in 1994, many Sub-Saharan African nationals saw a window of opportunities in new and free South Africa and they wanted to tap into it. Harris cited in Onyibo (2018) <sup>[20]</sup> postulated that, educational pursuit, job opportunities, and fear of political persecutions form the bulk of the reasons why many non-South African black Africans migrated to the country and the inability of the authorities of South Africa to provide jobs, housing and good healthcare system complicated issues and precipitated the attacks on foreigners, especially the Makwekwe (people who cannot speak South African languages and who are economically and culturally inferior to them). Moses

(2018) observed that xenophobia is a profound psychosomatic carryovers and the negative product of the apartheid regime. The dust raised by the xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008 is yet to finally subside, as there are still remnants of them. In that attack, scenes of knife, stick wielding, South Africans could be seen chasing Nigerians International Affairs and Global Strategy [2019] and other foreign Africans in South Africa, pictures of wounded Nigerian, several others who lost their lives in the attack could seen on several international television channels. Crush *et al* (2008) <sup>[4]</sup>, observed that the barbaric attack left more than sixty people dead and more than one hundred thousand people homeless.

Nigeria and South Africa are two important countries on the continent of Africa. This is due to their enormous influence on the diplomatic and economic planes on the African continent. Besides, the two countries having been colonized have come out better and bigger, with a population of people who are industrious and are ready to take up challenges. Their citizens are full of adventures, one of which is to seek greener pasture in any part of the world where such can be assured. This of course is in tandem with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) and the 1965 International Convention of the Eradication of all forms of Racial Discrimination. The fact must be emphasized however, that South Africa has made living and working on her land an arduous task for foreigners by viciously attacking them, treating them in the most despicable of manners at places of work, malls, market and some other public places. This seemingly barbaric attack on non-South Africans, especially Nigerians has engendered a lot of bad blood between the two countries. This is against the background that, Nigeria feel short changed despite spirited efforts being made to ensure and maintain peace on the continent of Africa. Little wonder, Nigeria made Africa the center piece of her foreign policy upon gaining independence in 1960. With this mindset, Nigeria acted with swiftness to unrest in Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia

among others and she dissipated a lot of human and material resources in the process, sometimes to the detriment of her citizens at home in terms of denying them certain necessities.

The aforesaid has made Nigeria and Nigerians to feel sad considering the unwarranted attacks on Nigerians in South Africa in recent times, more so Nigeria contributed stupendously to end the highly detestable apartheid policy in South Africa. This racial practice in South Africa has indeed received the ire of the international community as it stifles relations between South Africa and the countries whose nationals are being maltreated in South Africa. These xenophobic attacks against South African can be seen from the prism of struggle for scarce economic resources. South Africans feel that they are being denied of their right to jobs, this in line with the opinion of Dodson (2010)<sup>[7]</sup> who averred that South African feel that Nigerians are competing with them for jobs, housing and other resources to which they feel they are entitled to. This no doubt, has made living and working in South Africa.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is the frustration--Aggression displacement theory as propounded by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears (Dollard, J., Miller, N., Leonard, D., Mowrer, O. Sears, R.. (1939) in 1939. It was further developed by Neal Miller in 1941.. This theory formulated by Dollard, states that frustration always precedes aggression and aggression is the sure consequences of frustration, but Miller (Miller, N.(1941) and Sears (Sears R. 1941) two years later reformulated the hypothesis to suggest that while frustration creates a need to respond, some form of aggression is one possible outcome.

According to Miller and Sears, frustration prompt a behaviour that may or may not be aggressive, but any aggression is as a result of frustration. This theory attempts to give explanation to the cause violence and riots and revolution.

This theory drives home the real cause of xenophobia in South Africa. It was out of anger and frustration that south Africans were made to believe that Nigerians have taken over their jobs that resulted on the attack on them. Some have also argued that apart from their businesses which they complained Another source of frustration is that Nigerian men were taking their women and thus many of them were married out to Nigerians, this led to frustration which culminated into attacks.

### Conceptual Clarifications of Xenophobia

Xenophobia as a term originated from two Greek words, Xenos which translates to foreigner, stranger, alien among others, while the second one, Phobos which means fear or insecurity. From the two Greek words, one can conclude effortlessly that xenophobia, translates to extreme dislike or hatred for strangers and foreigners, or any other person that is perceived to be strangers). On a related analytical plane, Fanon (1967 described Phobia as a neurosis that is characterized by of an object that is outside of the individual. In other words, it is a neurotic disorder. It is stating the obvious that targets of xenophobic attacks are meant to be humiliated or hurt for belonging to a particular race or ethnic stock. A proper deconstruction of the word xenophobia can be broken down to racism, some scholars

have indeed christened it New Racism that is racism practiced by blacks on other blacks, who though stay in the same community with them, but who are deemed to be inferior (Tafira, 2011)<sup>[24]</sup>. It could also be seen an intense dislike, hatred, fear of those perceived to be strangers (Crush 1996, Frederickson, 2002, De Master, and Leroy 2000). The fact must be stressed that, these attacks in South Africa are institutionally entrenched and systemic in nature, by this study means that, there are governmental structures and institutions that are complicit in these attacks. They indeed help to aid and abet them. Some scholars like Fanon *et al* have described happenings in South Africa Negrophobia-fear and dislike of black people and their culture, Afrophobia-fear and dislike for people of Africa and their culture. Most scholars are at crossroad on how to draw a line between Xenophobia and Racism. This article therefore addresses the question of what demarcates one from the other. Simply put, xenophobia is fear and dislike of strangers, while racism in the opinion of Goldberg (1993) is the discrimination against others based on their putatively different social membership. Tafira (2011)<sup>[24]</sup> bolsters the analysis by explicating the fact that, commentators assume that when discrimination is being carried out among people of the same skin color, that it is xenophobia and not racism. Goldber adumbrated the contours of the debate by adding that, racism as a fluid and highly chameleonic concept in that, it meaning depends on the prevailing social and epistemological conditions and realities. A good number of Nigerians and Camerounians took refuge in Hillbrow, a community in the heart of International Affairs and Global Strategy [2019] Johannesburg. Hillbrow, provided a refuge for these migrants because of the large concentration of non-South African national in this vicinity. Hillbrow appealed to these set of people for a number of reasons, one of which is that, it used to be a formally white dominated community but later became a predominantly black neighborhood (Morris, 1999)<sup>[17]</sup>.

### Xenophobia in South Africa

Before 1994, immigrants from other places faced discrimination and even violence in South Africa after majority rule in 1994. Contrary to expectations, the incidence of xenophobia increased between 2000 and March 2008 at least sixty -seven people died in what were identified as Xenophobia attacks.

In May 2008 a series of attacks left sixty two people dead, although twenty one of those killed were South Africa citizens. The attack was motivated by Xenophobia

In 2015 another nationwide spite xenophobia attack against immigrations in general prompted a number of foreigners to begin repatriating their citizens A pew research pull conducted in 2008 showed that 62% of South Africans viewed immigrants as a burden on society by taking jobs and social benefits and that sixty one percent of South Africans thought that immigrants were more responsible for crime than other groups.

Between 2010 and 2017, the immigrant's community in South Africa increased from 2m to 4m. In September 1998 a Mozambican and two Senegalese citizens were thrown out by a group returning from a rally that blamed foreigners of unemployment and of spreading HIV] AIDS.

In 2000, seven foreigners were killed on the carpet flats one a time week period in what police described as xenophobia murders possibly mentioned by the fear that outsiders will take the properties belonging to locals.

In Oct 2001, residents of the Z and Spirit informal settlement gave Zimbabweans ten days to leave their country.

On 30<sup>th</sup> May 2015, a 25 year old Abdi Nasir Mahmood good was stoned to death. The incident was shared in a social media.

In June 2013, three Somalia shop keepers were killed and the Somalia government responded by telling South African government to do more to protect its citizens. Among those murders were three brothers who were allegedly hacked to death. The Attacks led to public outcry and worldwide protest by the Somalias in Cape Town, London and Minneapolis.

On 7 June 2014, a Somalia national in his 50s was reportedly stoned to death and two others were seriously injured when the angry mob attacked their shop in extension six late. Three more Somalia was wounded from gunshots and shops were looted.

In April 2015 there was an upsurge in xenophobic attacks throughout the country. The attacks started in Dubai and spread to Johannesburg and Zulu, king Godwill Zwelithim was accused of fueling the attack by asking foreigners to go back to their country.

On 21 October 2015 the attackers were instigated by taxi drivers who protested over the terrible state of the road, the rise in crime and rumors of murders committed by foreigners. Their demand was not grated this led to attack on Spaza shop owned by Pakistanis, Somalia, Bangladeshi and Ethiopian citizens at Grahams town. Mushin's community also had been a target of attacks.

In 2016 Tshwane riots was targeted at ANC but the shop of Somalias, Pakistanis and other foreign nationals were targeted.

In February 2017, South Africans Marched to foreign ministry accusing immigrants especially Nigerians of taking their jobs and not knowing how to talk to people.

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

There are as many causes of the series of attacks that were meted out to non-South Africans in the country, particularly Nigerians. From the amalgam of literatures on xenophobia, the following reasons have been gleaned as being the propelling reasons for the said attacks in South Africa in 2008 and 2015.

First cause of the attack can be looked at from the angle of governmental neglect of the essential necessities of the people. It can therefore be put hypothetically that, frustration with government precipitated aggression among the locals against the no-South Africans. Even though, some would put this down, as misplaced transfer of aggression but it holds some logic that, the people in their bid to vent their grievance, decided to deal with aliens. Morris (2008) submitted that perceived disinterest of government and the resulting lack of voice experienced by many communities triggered the violence.

Secondly, Competition over limited resources constituted another logical argument for the attacks on non South Africans in the country. Dodson commented 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 those things. Sharp (2008) added that wealthy South Africans loathed the idea of paying taxes to provide essential services for non-South Africans who escaped from their different countries

due to bad leadership, political incompetence, and economic mismanagement. On a lighter note, Dodson and Oelofse (2000:114) added interesting gender and sexual dimension interpersonal competition between South African s and foreigners. In other words, foreign African men were wont to flashing money around, thereby "stealing" their women. In the area of jobs, illegal immigrants to South Africa were ready to take up any jobs without the corresponding benefit and at any wage rate just to survive, especially in low-wage sectors of the economy. This friction was exacerbated by a high rate of unemployment in South Africa that rose to 24.5% in the third quarter of 2009.

The third cause could be poverty. One can therefore say hypothetically that, poverty increases xenophobic attacks. This hostility towards the groups can be placed at the door of economic deprivation which is a precursor to poverty. This theory holds that poverty begets frustration and by extension aggression.

The fourth reason for the attacks could be that, most times immigrants may believe in different cultural and religious traditions as opposed to what the natives subscribes to. Classen (2017) corroborating this position, observed bed that, cultural and religious differences of Mozambicans or Zimbabweans (formerly Rhodesia) is not too different from that of the South Africans, that of Nigerians and Eritrea for examples were poles apart from the South African's cultural and religious beliefs, and this made them to feel insure and threatened.

Another strong argument is the theory of relative deprivation. This theory holds that, natives naturally deserve better living conditions than immigrants who do not have a stake in the commonwealth of South Africa. They contend that, in the event of any eventuality, the immigrants have their various countries to run to, but they have nowhere to go.

### **The September, 2019 xenophobic attacks on Nigerians**

The unrest broke out on the Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2019. Some account linked the violence to the killing of a taxi driver, in Pretoria, one of South Africa's capital cities on Tuesday August 27 2019. The said driver, was allegedly shot and killed when he confronted drug dealers and police officers allegedly involved in selling drugs. This led to protest by Taxi operators which eventually metamorphosed into revisiting aggression against foreigners who are believed to fuel the drug trade & other crimes in South Africa. The local population in South Africa believes that foreigners steal jobs that are rightfully theirs. But violence later broke out in many suburbs of Johannesburg and surrounding areas. On Sunday protesters burnt tires, manhandled bystanders and looted shops believed to be owned by foreign nationals [News 23], South Africa minister of police Cele Bbibe said criminal elements were simply looking for an outlet to commit crime South Africa's High commissioner to Nigeria Bobby Moroe said South African businesses were also looted and vandalized by the mobs. During a national address South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa announced that two of those killed are foreigners. Five deaths were recorded in coronation villa, two in Hillbrow, one Jeppe all in Johannesburg.

### **Outrage by Nigerians**

The news of the xenophobia attack on Nigerians angered many Nigerians who called for immediate retaliation and for

boycott of all South African businesses in Nigeria. Nigerians mobbed, attacked and looted ShopRite in Lagos & Abuja, MTN offices in many cities of Nigeria, PEP and other South African businesses on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2019. Many Nigerians took to social media to condemn the attacks on Nigeria and their businesses. Celebrities cancelled and boycotted already scheduled events and work visits. Some African countries in solidarity to Nigeria withdrew from a conference hosted by South Africa. Also President Buhari sent a special Envoy to South African president Cyril Ramaphosa to register his concerns over the attacks. Nigeria government Withdrew its participation from the World Economic Forum (WEF) in South Africa. Nigerians Ambassador was recalled (Kabiru Bala) but Nigerian government later denied the report. Nigeria's foreign minister Geoffrey Onyema (2019) said the Nigeria will ensure losses by Nigerians are compensated by the South African government. This lead to the evacuation of more than 300 willing Nigerians back to the country.

As a way of mending fences, president Buhari met with his South African counterpart in south Africa and the visit discussed the following;

1. The wellbeing of Nigerians in South Africa
2. Trade and investment among the two countries
3. The Inauguration of a Bi-National Commission. Channels (2019)

### **Implications of Xenophobia on South Africa**

It is indeed very apposite to peruse the impacts of these attacks on non-South Africans on the socio-political and cultural sectors of the South African state.

Political Implications That South Africa has been marked out as an unfriendly country to other Africans is stating the obvious. And this of course will affect such nationals in their different countries in the way they will relate to South Africans in their different countries. It must be emphasized that, on the political and diplomatic plane, a frosty relations has been engendered between Nigeria and South Africa as a result of the unprovoked attacks on non-South Africans, especially Nigerians in the country. South Africa has received public condemnation from several groups within the international community. South Africans proximate neighbours roundly condemned the heinous acts. The United Nations Security Council added its voice to the public condemnation that South Africa got. Nigeria in the hit of the attacks recalled her ambassador from South Africa to register her disaffection and indignation to the acts. This is more so that, the government of South Africa implicitly supported the violence being meted out to other Africans on South African soil.

Socially and culturally, South Africa citizens have got more enemies that the apartheid era. The pity and sympathy that South Africa got as a result of their apartheid experience has been obliterated by these attacks on innocent Africans. Instead of paying countries that came to their rescue in their dark days in good coins, they decided to hit them below the belt, especially Nigerians.

Economic Implications On the economic plane, there are implications to South Africa for maltreating and molesting non-South African Africans on their soil. Conventional wisdom holds that, foreign investments contribute to the growth and development of any nation. It is common knowledge that, Nigerian investors in South Africa will not entertain any idea of engaging Their citizens consequent

upon such attacks, accepts in situations where they are mandated to have South Africans in their organization statutorily.

### **The Battle for Supremacy Between Nigeria and South Africa**

Some have argued that most maltreatment meted to Nigerians may be as a result of the cold war between South Africa and Nigeria over who wears the crown of supremacy in the African Continent. Indeed, the battle of which one of the countries has the largest economy in Africa has been ranging for a number of years now. South Africa had in a long time set the helm until 2014 during Jonathan's Administration from nowhere Nigeria took over as the number one country in Africa. Ever since, it has been a cold was between the two nations.

### **Comparison Points**

#### **Economic Diversity**

One major difference between Nigeria and South Africa is the nature of their economies. South Africa is a highly diversified economy. Initially they developed around rich minerals reserves and favorable conditions for agriculture. As the country advanced its economy grew to include tertiary sectors like tourism, communication and trade. The infrastructure of the country as well as regulatory environment highly favors trade and contributes to sustainable growth.

This is in contrast to Nigeria where it depends solely on oil which is threatened by hostilities in the Niger Delta rich Oil zone. Regulation in Nigeria are not favorable for trade to thrive in Nigeria

#### **Strength of the Dollar**

South Africa economy fell in 2016 to third place in the ranking of developed economies in Africa. This is because of the weakness of its currency [rend] to dollars. This shows that South African economy is still fragile. In the case of Nigeria, the control of the money which (Exchange rate) is by the Federal Govt, and the CBN affected the currency as against the USD. The refusal of the CBN to allow for free flow of money and to devalue the naira affected the strength of the Nigeria Naira.

#### **GDP VS GPP PER Capital**

The Gross Domestic Product is one of the methods used to measure the economy of any country. This figure is the sum total of everything that is produced in a country by all companies and individuals regardless of their background. Even foreigners owned companies have their product included in the GDP. The GDP per capital divides a country's total revenue by the number of people living there. This helps to articulate individual's standard of living. Looking at the list of African Countries South Africa fall at 13th position with \$13,500, while Nigeria is 17th with \$5,900.

### **Conclusion**

The paper hinges on xenophobic attacks against non-South African in South Africa, These attacks that some scholars have tagged West-a-phobia- attacks against West Africans can be seen as a throwback to colonial days. These attacks have no doubt put South Africa and her citizens in bad light in African continent and beyond. The attacks on their fellow

Africans have exposed South African government that a lot still needs to be done for its development to get to the door steps of the common South Africans.

### Recommendations

First, the authorities of South Africa are to desist from institutional connivance in these attacks.

Secondly, Nigerians must be re-oriented on the need to be law abiding, be good representatives of their country and engage in legitimate dealings as against allegations of dealing in drugs and some other outlawed items.

Thirdly, a committee should be on standby to always wade in, in the event of future attacks on Nigeria to forestall unnecessary molestation and victimization and not after a lot of havocs must have been wrought then Nigerians will be embarking on fire brigade approach, in other words, we must be proactive and not be reactive.

Nigerian government should look inwards and ensure that there is enabling environment for businesses to thrive

Fourthly, since the bulk of those going to South Africa are either for studies or business opportunities, Nigerians government should make education especially tertiary education a priority and an enabling business environment should be endangered.

Fifthly, the security agencies in South African must be proactive to avert future occurrences.

The African Union should put in place sanction against any country where xenophobia is carried out

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