



**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**Nigeria, Nigerians and Xenophobic Attacks; Political and Economic Implications: A Phenomenological Approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study on '*Nigeria, Nigerians and Xenophobic Attacks; Political and Economic Implications: A Phenomenological Approach*' was designed to look into the historical background of constant xenophobic attacks against foreigner in South Africa of which Nigerians are at the epicenter and has the highest casualty of the attacks. Xenophobia is the fear and hatred shown towards foreigners in the land. It usually involves vibe of an ingroup towards an out-group which often manifests itself in attacks. The work adopted the method of phenomenology, the primary objective of which is the direct investigation and description of events as were consciously experienced, by bracketing their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. This approach has to be as free as possible from conceptual presuppositions with an attempt to describe them as faithfully as possible. The study concluded thus, building strong economy and political institutions will bring about economic transformation for Nigeria's socio-political development and thereby prevent Nigerians from running away from their country in search of better life and human flourishing. Again, that developing a comparative engagement and change of foreign policy will enhance both countries relationship positively. Finally, the study recommended that the Nigerian government and her political leaders should strive at all times to build a robust economy for the teeming population and use her population as an asset and not as a liability.

**Keywords** Nigeria, nigerians, xenophobia, violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The desire to engage in this topic was triggered by a remembrance of how a friend of mine in 2006 before our graduation made a frank and sincerely effort to take me to South Africa in search of greener pasture. It even became something of reflection and thoughtful engagement when we look at the economic situation of Nigeria today and how our teeming youths roam around without a job after spending years in school. The question that came to me was if I would have been dead by now? If I would have been among the six hundred and forty (640) Nigerians that have voluntarily indicated interest to return to Nigeria? The feelings of South Africans amidst all these xenophobic attacks were succinctly describe by Landau, Ramjathan and Singh (2005, pp.54):

As a result of long-standing patterns of labour migration, conflict and economic hardship in neighbouring countries, and South Africa's peace and prosperity, the country has become a primary destination and transit point for migrants from throughout the region. These numbers are only likely to increase in coming years. For South Africa to achieve its promises of human rights, tolerance, and prosperity, it must develop norms, laws, and practices that can capitalise on the contributions of foreigners to the country; promote the country's reputation abroad; and protect the rights, security, and livelihoods of all of South Africa's residents. Achieving democratic rights-based migration policy in South Africa is extraordinarily difficult however, because South Africa is a highly xenophobic society, which out of fear of foreigners, does not naturally value the human rights of non-nationals

Although attitudes towards non-nationals especially black foreigners vary across South Africa's socio-economic and ethnic spectrum, there is strong evidence that non-nationals living and/or working in South Africa face discrimination at the hands of South African citizens, government officials, the police, and private organizations contracted to manage their detention and deportation. Reasons for this vary and include fear of economic competition, a belief that foreigners are inherently criminal, a drain on public resources and more successful. Foreigners have also been made the scapegoat used to justify the shortcomings of elected and corrupt leaders (Landau, et al. 2005). This results in nonnationals facing disproportionate difficulties in accessing employment, accommodation, banking services, and health care. It has also legitimised extortion, corruption, and the arbitrary arrest and detention of suspected non-nationals (including

children). The trust of the work is to analytically look at the issue of xenophobic attack against non-South African indigenes which Nigeria is at the center. X-ray the role of our leaders in terms of bringing economic development to Nigerian to prevent mass exodus to other countries for.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONSHIP**

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 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about 326.541 billion, however inequality reigned supreme in the country, with corresponding poverty, unemployment and of course crime which is on the increase (Onyibo, 2018; Edet 2014; Duke 2016; Duke 2018). The country gained independence in 1910 but found herself grasped in apartheid rule since then till it became emancipated in 1994. Kinge and Tiobo (2016) cited in Ibrahim; Dele and Ukeaja, (2019) submit that the white minority oppressed and marginalized the black populous settlers.

Nigeria-South Africa relations could be historically traced to events arising from the Sharpeville massacre of 21st March, 1960, when the South African police shot and killed 72 blacks and wounded 184 (Wilmot, 1980:9; Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012:439; Akinboye, 2013:18 cited in Ibrahim; Dele and Ukeaja, 2019). This event which occurred even before Nigeria's independence marked the beginning of Nigeria's confrontation against white South Africa. The Tafawa Balewa government (1960-1966) upon assumption of office in October 1, 1960 was faced with overwhelming pressure from both domestic and external sources to institute measures to check South Africa's apartheid policies.

Consequently, Nigeria banned the importation of South African goods into the country and was instrumental to the political and economic sanctions passed against the white racist regime. Furthermore, Balewa went to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in March 1961 in London, where he spearheaded the move that led to the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth (Aluko, 1982; Ajala, 1986 & 1993 cited in Ibrahim; Dele and Ukeaja, 2019). By 1962, Nigeria terminated all the privileges of Commonwealth membership which South Africans enjoyed in Nigeria. Nigeria government's anti-apartheid policy continued until the first military coup led by Major Nzeogwu in January 15, 1966 which disrupted the first republic.

According to Eze and Agena (2017; 5-6) "not too long after the restoration of black majority rule in South African which Nigeria was instrumental to, the relationship between the two countries experienced various hiccups thereby graduating from cooperation to competition within the African continent". This evident battle for hegemony between both countries had seen them take contrasting position in key regional issues in Africa. Hannatu (2013, pp. 15-17) in Eze and Agena (2017, pp. 5-6) observes that the following areas have taken centre stage in the supremacy battle between Nigeria and South Africa.

1. South Africa's criticisms and backing Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1995 after the execution of the famous Ogoni 8 and Nigeria's response in withdrawing from participating in the 1996 African cup of Nation hosted by South Africa.
2. Disagreement between both countries via disparate approaches in tackling the post-election conflicts in Ivory Coast, while Nigeria adopted a belligerent posture towards Laurent Gbagbo, who refused to concede defeat after losing the country's election. South Africa provocatively sent a warship to the Gulf of Guinea in Nigeria's traditional domain/stronghold; however South Africa belatedly recognized Allassane Quattara's victory.
3. The opposing stance of both nations over the embattled late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi and the recognition of the government of the Transitional National Council (TNC) during the Libyan revolution. While Nigeria recognized the TNC based on the African Union Constitutive Act Principle section 14, South Africa back the embattled Gaddafi regime saying TNC was illegal.
4. The 2012 salient diplomatic clash between both courtiers at the AU summit in January, over recognition of the government in Guinea-Bissau which Nigeria was supporting and South Africa was opposing.
5. The 2012 deportation of 125 Nigerians including legislators on the unsubstantiated claim of fake yellow fever vaccination cards and Nigeria's response in deporting 84 South Africans in 2 days, forcing South Africa to apologise.
6. The struggle by both countries to be the African country to occupy a permanent seat in the UN Security Council when eventually there would be the admission of more members to accommodate all the continents.

## **XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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 painlessly that xenophobia, translates to extreme dislike or hatred for strangers and foreigners, or any other person that is perceived to be strangers, outsiders, or a group of people, based on their colour, gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or on any other grounds (UNHR, 2013; Ijisakin & Fakanbi 2019). On a related analytical plane, Fanon (1967) described Phobia as a neurosis that is characterised by 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. Ijisakin and Fakanbi (2019) observe that the emphasis must be laid that xenophobia did not start or originate in South Africa. Europe and North America have been steeped in xenophobic sentiments ever before its occurrence in South Africa, it was subtly and systematically done with the toga of nationalism. It has only become a big issue in Nigeria in recent times, because the bulk of the victims of these attacks are Nigerians. In 1914, many Mexicans were attacked in the

United States of America on xenophobic grounds (Fetzer, 2000, Mikulich, 2009, Stacey, *et al.*, Kinge and Tiobo, 2016 in Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019).

France attacked Muslims and non-French citizens because it's predominantly white. Australia regarded nationals of other countries as criminals and asylum seekers in their country in the heat of their xenophobic attacks against foreigners (Buchanam, 2003). Back in Africa, xenophobia has been in place before its reappearance in South Africa. Ghana and Nigeria have had her own share of reciprocity of xenophobic dispositions and sentiments. In 1969, Ghana deported about 1.5 million foreign nationals from their country (Campbell, 2003), bulk of which were Nigerians and in a retaliatory attack, Nigeria extradited many Ghanaians in 1983. Just a year after their gaining freedom from the hands of the apartheid Lords, migrants from neighbouring Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique were seriously attacked in the town of Alexandra (Buthelezi, 2009 cited in Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019). In 2008, there was an increase in the attacks. Monson and Anan cited in Onyibo (2018) also contend that, in one attack 62 people were killed, while well over 670 people were seriously injured. In 2017 attacks, several lives were lost, property worth millions of Rands belonging to Nigerians were destroyed, while many people were hospitalized. Furthermore and most recent in July and August 2019 Nigeria were killed and their property looted. This caused a diplomatic crisis between Nigeria and South Africa and Nigeria to repatriate her citizens who are willing to come back. This diplomatic cold war is subtly and systematically on-going.

## **CAUSES OF XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Many causes of the series of attacks that were meted out to non-South Africans in the country, particularly Nigerians, were developed from the amalgam of literatures on xenophobia; the following reasons have been adduced as being the propelling reasons for the said attacks in South Africa in 2008, 2015 and 2019 by (Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019) Firstly, the 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 non-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) cited in Ijisakin, & Fakanbi (2019) submits that, perceived disinterest of government and the resulting lack of voice experienced by many communities triggered the violence.

Similarly, competition over limited resources constituted another logical argument for the attacks on non-South Africans in the country. Dodson in Ijisakin, & Fakanbi (2019) comments that South Africans saw foreign Africans as competing with them for jobs, housing, and other essential services which they believed they are the ones that are entitled to those things. Sharp (2008) adds that wealthy South Africans abhor 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, pp. 114) added interestingly gender and

sexual dimension to interpersonal competition between South Africans and foreigners. In other words, foreign African men were inclined 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. It increased the rate of unemployment among South Africans.

The third cause could be poverty. One can therefore say tentatively that, poverty increases xenophobic attacks. This hostility towards the out-groups can be placed at the door of economic deprivation which is a precursor to poverty. This theory holds that poverty begets frustration and by extension aggression (Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019, Edor 2005).

Another 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 in (Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019) corroborating this position, observes 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. Similar view to this 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 (Ijisakin, & Fakanbi, 2019; Akpanika 2016; Akpan 2007, Akpan 2011; Akpan 2017).

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The political consequences of Xenophobic or Afrophobic attacks are imminent; South Africa has been marked out as an unfriendly country to other Africans. Eze & Agena (2017) identified the following as the political implications of Xenophobic or Afrophobia attacks:

- i. It can mar the ties between both countries. In diplomatic circles, once there is a severe row between countries the next option is recalling Ambassadors and citizens. Whenever there exist any breakdown of relationship between countries, it usually take time for such to be restored and taking into cognizance the position of Nigeria and South Africa in the African continent, it will also affect the progress of other African countries.
- ii. It affects the fiber of African solidarity: African usually regard each other’s as brothers and in so many circumstances speak with one voice in the international arena, it is reasoned that a break in relationship between Nigeria and South Africa will lead to a divided Africa thereby limiting their chances in making wave in international politics (Eze & Agena, 2017).
- iii. Tough visa policies/restrictions: People migrating in search of safer and more prosperous living conditions is as old as man and the right of any person to leave anywhere is enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1965 International

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (Orovwuje, 2017: 2). This clearly depicts people's freedom to seek good life and human flourishing in any part of the world. However, this freedom can be hampered through xenophobic attacks.

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

According to Ogunoiki and Adeyemi (2019, pp. 13), the spate of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians living in South Africa and the looting of their shops and stores led to somewhat a reprisal attack on a South African-owned company doing business in Nigeria. On February 23, 2017, the telecommunication giant, MTN, head office in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, was not only looted by some protesters but, office equipment was vandalized. Again, there were similar reprisal attacks against Shoprite a conglomerate of South African investment in Nigeria in 2019 of which Lagos branch of Shoprite was heavily attacked and looted. And recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria is trying to di-monopolize the viewing of English Premier League matches in Nigeria only by DSTV (a South African owned company).

Security wise, it will be equally instructive to note that attacks on businesses in Nigeria and South Africa will obviously bring about job losses, a development which might make the victims to be vulnerable and easy prey to terrorist organizations thereby aggravating the already worst security situations in both countries. In Nigeria and South Africa today, most of the crimes committed are usually carried out by the youths as unemployment is on the increase.

Socio-culturally, an Afrophobic attack by South Africans towards their fellow African brothers has a lot of implications (Eze & Agena, 2017).

- i. **Identify crisis:** identity conflict is one of the worst form of conflict as it affects the psychology of the victims thereby making them not to realize and achieve their self-esteem and full potentials.
- ii. **Disunity:** when Africans begin to see their fellow brothers and sisters as strangers and thereafter treat them as such, the by-product of this state of thing is obviously disunity in a continent that regards each other as being from the same parents. The implication of this is the obvious fear that Africans will have when in other African countries other than their own country of birth.
- iii. **Insecurity:** when one is socially and culturally humiliated, the bad thought arising from such alienation may lead them into joining bad gangs which might obviously lead to increase in crime and security challenges within the African continent.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 the authorities of South Africa are to desist from institutional connivance in these attacks.
- 2 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 illegal businesses.

- 3 the Nigerian High Commission in South Africa should be on standby to always wade in, in the event of future attacks on Nigeria to prevent unnecessary molestation, victimization and killings and be proactive and not be reactive.
- 4 that the Nigerian government and her political leaders should strive at all times to build a robust economy for the teeming population and use her population as an assets and not a liability. This can be done by creating conducive business environment which will now ensure that Nigerians flourish at home.

## CONCLUSION

The paper did a phenomenological interrogation and investigation on xenophobic attacks against foreigners in South Africa, especially Nigerians. These attacks that some scholars have tagged **West-a-phobia**- attacks against Africans living in the Rainbow City can be seen as a reversion to colonial days. These attacks have no doubt put South Africa and her citizens in bad light within the continent of Africa and beyond. The study concluded thus, building strong economy and political institutions will bring about economic transformation for Nigerians and for Nigeria's socio-political development and thereby prevent Nigerians from running away from their country in search of better life and human flourishing. Our leaders should work assiduously to build strong economic institutions that will help drive the economy.

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