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WHY UNENDING? MIGRATIONS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE XENOPHOBIC CONFLICT IN SOUTH AFRICA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

The object of the research is the interaction between unending migrations and the political economy as significant drivers of xenophobic conflicts. The phenomenon of xenophobic conflict in South Africa has garnered increasing attention due to its recurrent violent nature and socio-political implications. This study delves, systematically, into the intricate connection between migration and the politics of xenophobia in South Africa. It examines how migrations, both internal and external, have influenced the development of xenophobic conflict within South Africa, alongside the historical context of the entrenched apartheid system. It further explores the underlying motives of those engaging in xenophobic acts while examining the responses of civil society and the government. By analyzing existing literature and conducting qualitative reviews of the experiences of the victims of xenophobic violence, this study contends that xenophobia in South Africa, among other factors, is a lasting legacy of the apartheid era that has created unequal economic power relations between the South African blacks and the few dominant whites. Findings further underscore the significance of understanding contemporary migration patterns in the 21st century from the context of entrenched economic inequalities, economic disenfranchisements, rising poverty among the indigenous black South African community in South Africa. In addition, economic disparities, resource scarcity, and competition for employment opportunities have emerged for being pivotal catalysts of conflict, thereby exacerbating tensions between native black South Africans and the African immigrant populations in South Africa. Relying on findings, this study thus argues that xenophobia remains an ongoing and persistent challenge that demands urgent attention from policymakers in South Africa. In conclusion, this study underscores the necessity of addressing the xenophobic conflict in South Africa through a multidimensional approach. Policymakers, civil society, and academia must collaborate to formulate strategies that target both the economic and socio-political drivers of such conflicts. By acknowledging the historical context, rectifying inequalities, and promoting accurate narratives, it becomes possible to foster a more inclusive and harmonious society, thereby mitigating the unending cycle of xenophobic tensions, phobia and violence.

Keywords: *xenophobic conflict, migration politics, xenophobia, apartheid, unequal economic power relations, South Africa.*

1. Introduction

Xenophobic politics and conflict are not novel occurrences, and they extend beyond the borders of the African continent, including instances in countries like Germany and the United Kingdom. This demonstrates that no society is immune to xenophobia. In Germany, economic downturns have historically triggered a surge in negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, leading to a rise in violence against immigrants by native Germans, especially during the 1990 recession. Economic crises have also unveiled extreme right-wing, xenophobic sentiments in Germany. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, xenophobic politics have escalated, particularly after the «Brexit» decision, with incidents like the «Punish a Muslim Day» letters inciting attacks against Muslims in the country [1]. In South Africa, xenophobic politics add a new dimension to the understanding of xenophobia. Black immigrants, especially from countries like Nigeria, have been targeted for allegedly taking over jobs and resources in South Africa, even amidst economic challenges [2]. Some scholars debate whether collaborative projects between Nigeria and South Africa are suitable, given their strategic positions in international relations. Others attribute the issue to government failures in addressing poverty and the violent

history of South Africans. The exclusionary discourse against African migrants in South Africa is troubling, considering the historical support these countries provided during the fight against apartheid system. A survey conducted in South Africa revealed that not only Africans but also citizens of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are subjected to discrimination and negative perceptions. While initiatives for nation-building aimed at social cohesion, they unintentionally led to increased intolerance towards foreigners. Violence against foreign nationals and African refugees has risen, creating divisions and suspicion within communities. The prevailing perception among some South Africans is that black African migrants pose an economic threat to their livelihoods, leading to competition and conflict over limited economic opportunities. This perception has fueled widespread xenophobia in South Africa. The challenge of xenophobia in the country calls for comprehensive socio-economic interventions.

The purpose of this systematic study is to decipher the intricate interplay between ceaseless immigration and the political economy as important causes of xenophobic tensions in the country. It delves further into the motivations of people who commit xenophobic actions, as well as the responses of civil society and the government. This will it possible for government and policy stakeholders to better understand the intricate and underlying realities and motivations of the xenophobic conflict and how best to address it.

2. Materials and Methods

Before interrogating the existing theories on the discourse of South African xenophobia, it is expedient to revisit what constitutes the concept and practice of xenophobia within the context of the South African environment?

The concept of xenophobia, like many other terms in sociopolitical discourse, faces a challenge in defining it comprehensively [3]. To avoid the pitfalls of previous attempts to conceptualize this phenomenon, let's focus on its various manifestations within the African context. In this context, xenophobia is understood as a locally constructed concept, subject to interpretation based on our interactions and experiences with it here in Africa [4]. Thus, xenophobia is perceived as the expression of discrimination against foreigners, refugees, and fellow citizens, encompassing attitudes, actions, and behavioural inclinations that often lead to violent attacks. It is essentially the fear or hatred of outsiders reflected in discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, resulting in various forms of violence, abuse, and displays of hate [5]. It also refers to it as a form of dislike, hate, or fear exhibited by a group of people towards immigrants [1]. Importantly, xenophobia is both an attitude and a behaviour, often involving physical, psychological, and social abuse, as evident in the incidents in South Africa. It is primarily directed at people of different races and ethnicities, especially foreigners.

According to [6], xenophobia constitutes a distinct set of beliefs that can manifest in government policies, public discourse, and media activities. It is a form of hatred or fear towards outsiders based on specific beliefs that can be expressed verbally or observed in the conduct of the government, media, and general public. Xenophobic beliefs and actions can also arise from erroneous inductive inferences and stereotypical classifications [7]. [8] offers a more detailed definition of xenophobia, describing it as the fear or hatred of strangers. It suggests that xenophobia

serves as a mechanism for the symbolic economy of historical societies, allowing the reconstitution of social unity by attributing internal tensions and disputes to external figures. In this sense, xenophobic attacks are directed at individuals who are not considered original inhabitants or natives of a particular group or state. Such violence represents systemic bias and discrimination, and in severe cases, it may even be categorized as genocide [9].

Theoretically, xenophobia can be understood and interpreted through different theoretical lenses. For the Isolation thesis, xenophobia in South Africa has consistently been influenced by the country's historical isolation from the international community, particularly the rest of Africa, during the apartheid era. However, this theory fails to explain why foreigners of colour, especially Africans, face more hostility than other European foreigners who also migrated to South Africa. The Relative Deprivation Theory provides insight into South Africans' feelings of hostility towards foreigners, attributing it to a perception of being deprived of basic privileges due to the actions of others. The poor in South Africa feel increasingly marginalized while the political and corporate elite enrich themselves, leading to frustration and resentment directed at outsiders. However, this theory does not fully account for why foreigners of colour are disproportionately targeted in xenophobic attacks.

The scapegoating theory, as theorized by Brown Harris, suggests that xenophobia arises when indigenous communities direct their anger at foreigners as a result of their own struggles, viewing them as the source of their problems [1]. Like other theories, it falls short in explaining why foreigners of colour are specifically targeted in contemporary South Africa. The Endemic Poverty Explanation by Nieftagodien, on the other hand, highlights the association between poverty and xenophobia, observed particularly in impoverished areas like Alexandra in May 2008. However, persistent poverty alone cannot fully explain the occurrence of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

The Frustration-Aggression theory proposes that frustration can lead to aggression, and if the true cause of frustration is not addressed, aggression is directed towards innocent targets, like foreigners. While this theory provides some understanding, it overlooks the complex political dynamics behind xenophobia in South Africa, including the struggle between dominant-market minorities and the indigenous market majority for economic control and resources.

Thus, the study finds that the Political Economy theory offers the most credible and empirical basis for explaining the politics underlying xenophobia in South Africa. It delves into not only the immediate causes of xenophobia but also the inherent political aspects of the issue. Furthermore, the Political Economy theory complements the liberal theory of Inter-state relations, providing insights into the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa. Overall, it establishes political economy theory as the most effective framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of xenophobia in South Africa.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Dialectics of xenophobic relations in South Africa.
The general perception that foreign workers are occupying jobs and economic opportunities meant for indigenous black South Africans has been ingrained erroneously within the South African community. In sectors like mining, retail, and

the informal economy, foreign migrants from countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria are believed to dominate. This has created a dynamic where the market-dominant minority, possessing resources, skills, and know-how, is seen as a threat by the socially disadvantaged majority of South Africans, who feel their opportunities are being claimed by others [6, 10].

The legacy of the apartheid system further exacerbates xenophobia, as discriminatory economic, social, and educational policies left many black South Africans marginalized and impoverished. Illiteracy and a culture of violence were fostered during that period. Presently, rising poverty and unemployment among indigenous black South Africans contribute to the resurgence of xenophobic politics [11, 12]. Regions with higher poverty and unemployment rates, such as Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and the North West, have become hotbeds for xenophobic violence. The majority of perpetrators in these incidents are unemployed and impoverished black South Africans [13].

The post-apartheid era, which was expected to bring positive social and economic changes for black South Africans, has not fulfilled its promises [14]. The prevalence of slum residences, ongoing land dispossession, high unemployment rates, and the economic dominance of black foreign migrants competing for jobs have fuelled xenophobic sentiments and attacks.

3.2. Why Unending? Since the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugees and migrants seeking better opportunities in the country. This influx is driven by various factors, including the need for professionals such as teachers, doctors, engineers, and translators to fill gaps left by the previous apartheid government [15, 16]. Additionally, South Africa's opening of its borders to skilled migrants from other African countries has contributed to the growing migrant population [17].

The economic conditions and educational deficits in post-apartheid South Africa have also played a role in attracting migrants. The country's need for cheap labour, coupled with domestic unemployment and low wages, has led to immigrants, particularly black African immigrants, filling various skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled job positions where local labour is lacking [18].

The Political-economic theory is relevant in understanding the political dynamics and ongoing manifestations in South Africa. This theory, popularized by Karl Marx, emphasizes the role of economic conditions in driving political struggles [19]. It posits that the possession and accumulation of wealth create dominance by a privileged minority over a disadvantaged majority, leading to constant struggles between these groups. According to the theory, xenophobia stems from economic competition over limited resources, especially when outsiders, often from economically disadvantaged regions, perceive threats to their access to resources in the host country.

The theory applies at both individual and group levels, suggesting that economically vulnerable individuals are more likely to exhibit xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants perceived as competitors for limited resources [3, 20]. This feeling of threat arises from uneven power relations between dominant and subordinate groups.

Evidence from Western Europe and other studies supports the idea that a country's economic status influences the level of discrimination displayed by economically disadvantaged individuals [21]. Furthermore, xenophobia can be particularly pronounced in economically deprived communities with a high proportion of immigrants, as seen in places like South Africa, Sweden, Germany, Russia, among others [22].

In summary, the Political-economic theory sheds light on the politics and persistent manifestations of xenophobia in South Africa. Economic competition over limited resources, coupled with power dynamics and group identification, plays a significant role in fuelling xenophobic attitudes and tensions between different communities. Understanding these factors is crucial in developing measures to address and mitigate xenophobia in the country.

Undoubtedly, South Africa actively encourages foreign direct investments and welcomes business ideas from foreign investors due to its free-market democratic system. Under this democratic framework, foreign nationals with the financial means can invest and establish businesses in South Africa without hindering the ability of indigenous South African citizens to do the same. The government's commitment to a free-market economy and democracy ensures equal opportunities for all participants in the market and economic realms [23].

However, the interplay between market-dominant minorities, comprising affluent black foreigners with substantial capital, and the indigenous South African majorities, historically oppressed socially, educationally, and economically during the apartheid era, has led to market-induced conflicts, often taking on a xenophobic character, as observed elsewhere. These foreign ethnic minorities, possessing better education and greater economic capabilities, tend to dominate politically over the indigenous majority, which faces challenges in terms of education, social standing, and economic resources.

The phenomenon of market-dominant minorities is not unique to South Africa and can be observed globally. For example, Chinese communities dominate various markets not only in the Philippines but also across Southeast Asia [24]. Whites hold market-dominant positions in South Africa [25], while similar dynamics exist in countries like Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Latin America as a whole.

The combination of free-market democracy and market-dominant minorities can trigger xenophobic sentiments in societies. The pursuit of free-market democracy often creates volatile economic conditions, leading to tensions between the affluent minority and the impoverished majority. The wealth concentration in the hands of the dominant minority and their control over significant economic assets, sometimes symbolizing the nation's identity, can further exacerbate ethnic envy and hatred among the less privileged indigenous majorities.

This kind of economic situation, coupled with opportunistic political actors seeking votes, can give rise to xenophobic movements [26]. Xenophobia can manifest in various forms, such as backlash against foreign-controlled markets, calls for more nationalistic policies favouring the indigenous majority, or, most severely, violent xenophobic attacks directed at the market-dominant minority. These patterns have been observed in South Africa and other countries like Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Venezuela, Russia, Zimbabwe, and beyond.

It is essential to recognize that xenophobia in South Africa, driven by economic perceptions, is a complex issue. The country's economic progress and globalization have

benefited the affluent few while leaving many ordinary South Africans in poverty and uncertainty, creating a divide between them and black African immigrants. Xenophobia often arises from the perception that immigrants are taking away economic opportunities from indigenous South Africans, despite evidence showing the positive contributions of immigrants to the economy [27, 28].

To address xenophobia, education and awareness about the positive impact of immigration are crucial. Emphasizing the benefits immigrants bring to the economy can help combat the false beliefs leading to xenophobic attitudes. Policymakers worldwide need to explore measures that address the underlying economic inequalities and social tensions to effectively mitigate xenophobia and its detrimental consequences.

Indeed, studies can be impacted by researcher's bias during study selection, data extraction, and analysis. In this study, efforts were made to reduce subjectivity and guarantee a balanced representation of research with various views by ensuring that the data collection process through desktop review of extant literature followed the ethical guidelines of data protection. Confidential and classified information were anonymised and used for intended research purpose.

Further studies may look into the long-term socioeconomic repercussions of xenophobic disputes on both immigrant communities and the general community. This might entail looking at how job patterns, company dynamics, and social integration have changed over time. Similarly, more research studies may be conducted to assess the efficacy of government initiatives targeted at reducing xenophobic conflicts, and also, to determine if policy measures have resulted in measurable improvements in decreasing tensions and boosting social cohesiveness. Comparative studies with other nations or areas that have suffered comparable xenophobic conflicts may be conducted in order to identify common trends, unique reasons, and potential lessons that can be drawn from these situations.

4. Conclusions

The politics of xenophobia in South Africa has been complex, multifaceted, and indicative of the internal socioeconomic contradictions present not only in South Africa but also in many other African countries. The harsh socioeconomic conditions, such as poverty, unemployment, and widening economic inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa, have consistently fueled tensions between indigenous black South Africans and black African migrants, resulting in a fierce power struggle over the limited and scarce social and economic resources in the country. Evidence from various sources points to several factors contributing to this phenomenon, including high-profile corruption within the ruling ANC-controlled government, persistent unemployment, poverty, economic disparities between white and black South Africans, leadership deficiencies, and a high crime rate. These elements have perpetuated xenophobic attacks in South Africa over time. The recurrence of xenophobia in South Africa since 1994 has exposed the shortcomings of many African governments in addressing the internal contradictions and discontent within their respective countries. Despite the establishment of a democratically elected government in South Africa in 1994 and subsequent indigenous administrations, the deep-seated issues that characterized the apartheid era have persisted and even worsened in the post-apartheid era. This ongoing conflict reflects the challenges faced by South African society in reconciling and addressing the complex issues that continue to divide them along social and economic lines. Hence, South Africa's government should prioritize inclusive economic policies that encourage job creation, skill development, and entrepreneurship for both citizens and immigrants. The government can mitigate competition-related tensions and enhance social cohesion by fostering an environment of equal economic opportunities, providing access to education and vocational training, and encouraging intercultural business collaborations, thereby addressing the root causes of xenophobia.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest in relation to this study, including financial, personal, authorship, or any other, that could affect the study and its results presented in this article.

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Data availability

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