

XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

Origins, Trajectory and Recommendations

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- Studies on xenophobia have attributed such hatred to foreigners to a number of causes: the fear of loss of social status and identity; a threat, perceived or real, to citizens economic success; a way of reassuring the national self and its boundaries in times of national crises; a feeling of superiority; and poor intercultural communication
- Xenophobia particularly strong in countries undergoing transition: where unfulfilled expectations of a new democracy result in the foreigner coming to embody unemployment, poverty and deprivation

The Extent of Xenophobia



- SAMP Survey of 2001: 21% wanted a complete ban on the entry of foreigners and 64% wanted strict limits on the numbers allowed entry
- Xenophobia not something new:
 - March 1990 - in Hlaphekani, near Giyani the capital of the former Gazankulu homeland when locals burned 300 huts belonging to Mozambicans
 - October 1994 – fighting erupted in the Imizano Yethus Squatter Camp in Hout Bay between Xhosa fishermen and Ovambos from Namibia
 - Between December 1994 and January 1995, a campaign dubbed Operation Buyelekhaya (go back home) began in Alexandra township. This campaign of intimidation was aimed at ridding the township of foreigners

The Extent of Xenophobia



- Driving such attacks have often been the perceived loss of income as a result of the activities of foreigners – e.g. in the Eastern Cape in early 2007 resentment towards Somalis from locals for supposedly stealing trade and jobs led to rioting that caused the death of over three dozen Somalis
- Such xenophobia also prevalent amongst the police – Zimbabweans complaining about being harassed by police
- CSVIR study in 2004 shows that only 35% of SAPS had received “some” training on race and discrimination, and that diversity training is largely seen as irrelevant to police work by stations commanders

What is peculiar about the South African experience of xenophobia?



- Possibly the most remarkable feature of xenophobia in SA is that it appears to have taken on a primarily racial form – it is directed against migrants from elsewhere on the African continent as opposed to, for e.g. Europeans or Americans
- SAMP survey demonstrates that not only are Africans discriminated against but that SADC citizens are not regarded any more favourably than Africans elsewhere on the continent – South Africans appear to believe that other SADC citizens take jobs from the locals, commit crime, send their earnings out of the country, use the country's welfare services and bring diseases
- Another peculiarity of South African xenophobia, and one that is of some concern, is that there does not appear to be a “xenophobe profile”: no specific group or groups within society are culpable of xenophobia. The fact that negative attitudes are so pervasive and widespread runs counter to the traditional argument that only certain types of people are xenophobic and creates a massive public education challenge, of not only knowing who to target but also of simply where to begin

What is peculiar about the South African experience of xenophobia?



- The purpose of such a public education campaign is necessary in order to bridge the divide between perception and reality – e.g. whilst over 40% of respondents believe that foreign citizens should be denied South African citizenship because they cause economic harm, 60% had never heard of anyone who was denied a job because it went to a foreigner, and over 70% had no personal knowledge or experience of such an occurrence
- Moreover research in Gauteng amongst small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) showed that foreigners involvement in these operations actually created an average of three jobs per business for South Africans
- Whilst foreigners are said to be involved in crime, crime statistics demonstrate that over 98% of arrests were South African citizens, with the percentage of foreigners rarely exceeded one in any crime category

Shaping a Response to Xenophobia



- SA Government is bound, legally and morally to a number of international conventions and treaties, including the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
- Primary challenge government faces is an educational one – has to provide knowledge to citizens about migrants and refugees as *PEOPLE*
- Need to encourage a greater sense of continentalism and internationalism through the media and through the public pronouncements of senior policy-makers
- This can be achieved by working with schools, colleges and universities to include issues such as citizenship and xenophobia in the curricula, and to stress the positive impact that immigration can have on SA's economy and society

Shaping a Response to Xenophobia



- The media must also play a vital role in this educational process, and the following suggestions are in reference to this: (1) The curriculum for journalism education should be re-examined to determine how best journalists can be trained to help create an environment that is more conducive to effective intercultural communication, understanding and harmony; (2) Tertiary institutions that offer courses on communication and journalism should incorporate information on refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in learning modules; (3) Editors should spell out clear and deliberate editorial policy for coverage on refugee and migrant issues; (4) Sensational and criminalising language should be dropped completely, different categories of migrants should be recognised as such; (5) Journalists and editors should pay particular attention to how they report immigration statistics they receive from official sources, there should be critical assessment of the source
- We need to revisit the SADC Protocols on Free Movement etc

Shaping a Response to Xenophobia



- It is also important to note that citizens seem prepared to accept and welcome non-citizens if their economic impact is demonstrably positive. Hence, skills and investor-friendly immigration policies would not be a difficult sell to citizens, and perhaps that favours period-specific immigrants over those with the intention of obtaining permanent residence. In this regard Michael Neocosmos (2006) makes the following suggestion: *“If temporary residential and social rights were to be granted to all who wish to settle and work in SA, then after a period of one or two years, extension or even permanent residence could be provided solely on the basis of gainful employment. In this way migration could be regularised, the police and other state agents would have less power over migrants, and the state would give a lead on democratic anti-xenophobic practices. At the same time any criminals could be more easily controlled as they would be traceable by the state. Moreover, such a demand is likely to gather widespread support as research shows that South Africans are likely to welcome foreigners whose economic impact is demonstrably positive”.*