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Illegal aliens and demons that must be exorcised from South Africa: Framing African migrants and xenophobia in post-apartheid narratives

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Abstract: This article interprets narratives that have dominated the public sphere in post-apartheid South Africa, following the influx of African migrants. It uses qualitative data from personal interviews with local South Africans, excerpts from familiar political speeches and print media articles to tease out how the construction and intersection of public messages about foreigners and xenophobia have contributed to the recurrent attacks of African migrants. The article argues that although post-apartheid South Africa has become a prime migration destination, the country's economic and psychosocial challenges have influenced the way citizens frame narratives about African migrants from other parts of the continent. These narratives are often fraught with images and metaphors that demonise and attempt to justify violence against African migrants. The article attempts to examine how the framing of such narratives provides a discursive space for understanding South Africans' perceptions about African migrants and the multiple perspectives of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa.

Subjects: African Studies; Politics & the Media; Political Communication

Keywords: xenophobia; Afrophobia; African migrant; framing; post-apartheid; South Africa

1. Introduction

The gruesome xenophobic attacks of foreigners in South Africa first in 2008 and again in 2015 and 2016 have dented the image of South Africa globally. This unique example of an African progressive democracy, and the supposedly rainbow nation is no longer the imagined safe haven for African migrants. Today, post-apartheid pathologies such as violent crime, joblessness and poverty are

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In this article, I write about the relationship between South African citizens and other Africans living in South Africa. I explain how messages and/or stories told by South Africans, including politicians and in newspapers, represent Africans as the architect of all the problems of post-apartheid South Africa, such as unemployment, poverty and crime. Also, I explain how by blaming Africans for their social problems, South Africans incite violence against Africans, whom South Africans now see as the enemy that must be eliminated.

constantly blamed on the increasing number of foreigners residing in South Africa. Ironically the instigators of xenophobic attacks have targeted mostly vulnerable Africans and what has been written as xenophobia is also arguably “Afrophobia” or what Achille Mbembe calls “black on black racism” (see Matsinhe, 2011; Mbembe, 2015). In this erstwhile apartheid state, the history of oppression seems to have reconfigured the psychic of local South Africans to think and see other Africans as undesirable persons and demons destabilising the country’s political and social order (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Landau, 2011). This disparaging image of Africans has dominated narratives that seek to justify the recurrence of xenophobic violence.

In this article, I analyse such narratives that have occupied the public spaces, following the influx of African migrants. I use qualitative data from personal interviews with local South Africans as well as excerpts from familiar political speeches and print media articles to tease out how the construction and intersection of public messages about foreigners and xenophobia have contributed to the recurrent attacks of African migrants. The article attempts to show how the framing of such narratives provides a discursive space for understanding South Africans’ perceptions about African migrants and the multiple perspectives of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. It therefore argues that although post-apartheid South Africa has become a prime migration destination, the country’s economic and psychosocial challenges have influenced the way citizens construct messages about African migrants residing in major South African cities such as Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. This is because many stories about African migrants especially from destitute South Africans, populist politicians and in local newspapers, are often fraught with idioms, images or metaphors that associate all post apartheid evils to the presence of Africans. To understand how Africans and xenophobia are framed in post-apartheid narratives, I discuss the key principles of framing theory and how they provide a theoretical lens for the article. Thereafter, I analyse street level narratives and political rhetoric and finally I attempt to make meaning from newspaper captions and articles, and how they contribute to instigate xenophobic attacks.

2. Understanding African migrants and xenophobia through framing theory

The representation of African migrants in public discourse is not a new phenomenon in post-apartheid South Africa. African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and the Southern African Migration Project have continually produced books, articles and seminar papers on the entry of migrants into South Africa, policy challenges, spatial and resource contestations (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2002; Crush, 2008; Crush & Pendleton, 2004; Hickel, 2014). A number of these publications have also focused on the representation of Africans and the implications for the dominant logic of social inclusion and exclusion in the new South Africa. This body of knowledge focuses on the idioms, images and metaphors that are incessantly used to describe African migrants and to entrench anti-foreigner sentiments or influence locals’ psychic and behaviours towards Africans. For example, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001, 2002) use metaphors and images of wild fire, zombie and invasive plant (flora and fauna) to explain the familiar discourse of illegal aliens and South Africans’ fixations with the imagined dangers of sharing spaces with immigrants. These articles address the myriad ways South African citizens and political institutions construct messages about immigrants and the discursive notions of autochthony and belongingness especially in the age of flexible human mobility (Geschiere, 2009; Harris, 2002; Landau & Freemantle, 2010; Sandwith, 2010).

Similarly, Landau (2011) collection of articles on xenophobia focuses on the demonic image of Africans and the accusatory discourse use to defend xenophobia in South Africa. Here, the African symbolises thuggery, evil, and the attack and murder of Africans is a justifiable cleansing ritual. From these examples, it is clear that dissenting voices of locals, tactical populist political discourse and the

framing of newspaper captions have continued to shape many South Africans' perceptions of Africans and their responses to the deepening culture of xenophobia. Whilst this article draws on these existing studies on racialised violence in South Africa, it also attempts to tease out how narratives from the three domains (street level, political spaces and print media) intersect and perpetuate particular anti-African migrant sentiments. This intersection is seen when "street level narratives" are sometimes constructed by politicians and they permeate through the media to the streets. Or when "street level narratives" find their way through to political spaces and are quoted by politicians as the voices of the masses especially when they attempt to defend unlawful responses to xenophobia.

To understand how these messages are framed and how they intersect to construct anti-African migrant sentiments and xenophobia, I draw on the principles of framing theory. This theory has its roots in agenda setting theory of Media Studies but today it is adaptable across many disciplines. Its emergence is often attributed to the epistemological assumption that an issue or event lends itself to many interpretations and the construction of these interpretations has implications for broader societal issues. Framing is therefore the process by which people develop a particular meaning or reconfigure their minds about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 103). For proponents of this theory, the concept of framing embodies people's beliefs and attitudes and it uses these human attributes to formulate opinions about societal issues and events. It also relates to the way the construction of message in newspaper coverage of events for example, influences public opinions about those events (Iyengar, 1991; Scheufele, 1999). In the context of Media Studies, framing theory is not about political predilections of persuasive messaging, or of learning, information processing and other cognitive processes (Brewer & Gross, 2005; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). It is about message construction and the effects on human behaviours and actions.

The framing of messages leads to framing effects, which refer to behavioral or attitudinal outcomes resulting from the way messages are constructed and communicated to different audiences (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2001). They are the human responses to the way a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse. The theory is therefore premised on the notion that the meaning of a message resides not only in the message itself but also in the way the message is constructed and placed in the public domain. Essentially it is not what a person says; it is how the person says it. This theory is vitally useful here because anti-foreigner sentiments and the ensuing xenophobic attacks are, to a large extent, the ripple effects of the negative images and metaphors that different institutions and South Africans have used to formulate perceptions particularly about Africans (see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Danso & McDonald, 2001; Hadland, 2010; Harris, 2002; Sandwith, 2010). They associate African immigrants to criminality, alien illegality, demons and parasites, suggesting that "by the time of the May 2008 attacks a powerful xenophobic culture had been created and state organs were geared to hounding African immigrants" (Desai, 2010, p. 6).

3. Research methodology and sources of data

This article is based on narratives about African migrants that have permeated South African communities since the collapse of apartheid. It uses qualitative data from personal interviews, excerpts from popular speeches and statements particularly from the African National Congress and local newspaper captions and articles, to explain how these constellation of messages contribute to deepen anti-African sentiments and a culture of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. To collect street level narratives, I interviewed 10 local South Africans vendors, shop attendants and job seekers around Bellville in Cape Town. They were selected using a snowballing approach and interviewed during a broader project on the xenophobic experiences of Somali migrants in Cape Town. It was important to interview local South Africans during this project because Somali participants claimed that they are victimized because of their entrepreneurial skills and also because of local perceptions that Somalis have appropriated all business spaces in Cape Town (see Charman & Piper, 2012; Gastrow & Amit, 2013). In this article, "street level narratives" therefore refer to stories about foreigners, which are mostly based on sentimental reasoning or disingenuous interpretations of the

influx of African migrants or sheer lack of knowledge of immigration laws. I define the narratives from this perspective because although they are mostly constructed by destitute South Africans, politicians and elite citizens sometimes represent foreigners in similar narratives purposely for political gains. This article however preoccupies itself mainly with street level narratives from perennially poor South Africa, with just one or two examples from elite groups.

For politic rhetoric, I use quotes from randomly selected published speeches and statements particularly from ANC politicians. In this section of the article, I concentrate on ANC political discourse because, it is the ruling party and xenophobic violence has been blamed on the failures of the ANC administration. Most importantly, ANC politicians now subscribe to a populist rhetoric which attributes poor service delivery to the invasion of “illegal” African migrants. Because of growing fears of losing political power, these ANC-crafted narratives are used during service delivery protests; to shift South Africans’ focus from the failures of the government (Murray, 2013; Neocosmos, 2010). In terms of data from the media, although I make references to other forms of media, I focus primarily on the framing of Africans and xenophobia in print media because in post-apartheid South Africa, newspaper stories still influence public perceptions just as powerfully as other media genres. Like other media, they also play the traditional role of “agent provocateur”. For example, in local South African communities, newspapers such as Daily Sun and the Sowetan are still very popular in terms of readership and circulation (Danso & McDonald, 2001; Hadland, 2010). These data sets were sorted and categorized according to the three main themes and then analysed as texts with meanings about African migration in South Africa. Finally, mindful of the rich discursive texts about the positive contributions of Africans and their condemnation of xenophobia, I concentrate on hegemonic discourses in post-apartheid South Africa, which continue to frame Africans in very negative stereotypes, perpetuating the recurrence of xenophobic attacks.

4. Street level narratives about African migrants and xenophobia

Studies on African migration and xenophobia such as those by Duncan (2012), Landau (2011), and Hassim et al. (2008) have chronicled South Africans’ perceptions of African migrants, citing common stories that continue to permeate major cities from the day African migrants began to enter South Africa. These stories create a demonic image of African migrants, blamed for all the societal ills of post-apartheid South Africa, ranging from crime, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, scams and witchcraft. The idioms associated with African migrants in South Africa suggest that they participate “in forms of [material] accumulation that are considered immoral and anti-social,[and therefore] enriching themselves at the expense of others” (Hickel, 2014, p. 109). Street level narratives about Africans and xenophobia are often framed around the metaphor of the *makwerekwere*, a derogatory term used to distinguish between autochthons and “aliens”. By framing their narratives around *makwerekwere*, local South Africans are laying claims of spatial ownership and that Africans do not belong in South Africa. The following quote captures a South African’s impression of Africans:

They should go because we have no jobs. I’m a citizen and want to work for 150 rand a day but foreigners will do it for 70 rand a day. In the kitchens and the factories they are taking over our jobs. They bring cheap goods and we don’t know where from. They leave their countries with a lot of skills and we have nothing. Our education is not good enough. (Local South African)

In a country with growing unemployment especially amongst the black majority, African migrants are somehow blamed for local South Africans’ joblessness. Interestingly, with increasing transnational migration, claims of competition for scarce resources have become very common around the world. However, in South Africa, competition especially in the trading sector is driven by prices and historically South African traders “motivations for trading are not necessarily reducible to the idea of maximisation of profit” through prices (Neves & Du Toit, 2012, p. 131). Despite extensive research evidence, which suggests that African migrant traders are contributing to the growth of the informal economy, the construction of negative messages about Africans “forms a point of potential social conflict that can be used to justify xenophobic attacks” (Piper & Yu, 2016, p. 661). Also, by framing

foreigners as job takers, this narrative immediately represents the African as the enemy, a non citizen depriving the citizen of their natural right to employment (Landau, 2011). These perceptions about Africans disregard a clause in the South African constitution which states explicitly that, “South Africa belongs to all those who live in it” and its immigration laws have accorded many African migrants the right to belong. Because South Africa’s constitution and immigration laws provide legal protection to foreigners, the framing of Africans as criminals, job takers and illegal aliens in the media and in political discourse provides an alternative outlet to exclude foreigners. Moreover, in this context the notions of “the insiders and outsiders” or inclusion and exclusion are now defined along autochthonous meanings of citizenship and nationality (Geschiere, 2009; Nyamjoh, 2006). Many locals who claim that migrants have taken their jobs may not even have the requisite skills or academic qualifications for these jobs. But as autochthons, they display an impassioned sense of entitlement, which originates from the ANC government’s promises such as free education and the eradication poverty through job creation. With rising youth unemployment and the worsening of social problems such as poverty and crime as a result of unfulfilled political promises, the government and its citizens seems to have found a scapegoat in African migrants (Harris, 2002, 2003). The authors of these perceptions are sometimes ANC politicians and with the ANC losing popularity even in its own strongholds, instigating local South Africans to spread messages that frame Africans as “the enemy” is in fact a desperate attempt to exonerate the government. This narrative therefore hinges on the contestations about autochthony, social inclusion and the rights to live and participate in the economy of the new South Africa. So, when xenophobia erupts Africans “are attacked because of their not being thought to be South African” (Hayem 2013, p. 80; Landau & Freemantle, 2010). Here, the language of alienation “continues to determine the manner in which [local South African] speaks against” the presence of Africans (Gqola, 2001, p. 95).

In the stories told by local South Africans, attacks on foreigners, especially African, are represented as a cleansing ritual aimed at exorcising foreigners, particularly Africans. During these brutal attacks the print media are inundated with infamous linguistic utterances like “this is our country and we do not want foreigners here” “these makwerekwere you must go back to your country” “hamba makwerekwere hamba”. In these linguistic utterances emerge a form of impassioned hatred “concealing itself in the language of autochthony and alien nature” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 651). For Comaroff & Comaroff (2001, p. 650) and Sandwith (2010, p. 66), this language gives meanings to a set of oppositional conceptions of Africans and xenophobia like

the rights of the autochthon versus the rights of the stranger; the politics of protectionism and exclusion versus the borderless economy; the construction of the immigrant as parasite or benefactor; and the ideology of universal inclusion versus the limits of provisioning commonwealth.

These discrepant idioms provide access to local narratives which capture South African sentiments about immigrants and a strong sense of spatial control premised on the view that “when state institutions evidently failed to deliver on their promises to protect and promote a politically entitled but materially deprived citizenry, the population (or parts of it) took on the obligation to alienate and exclude those standing in its way” (Landau, 2011, p. 3). This sense of spatial control images itself in the violent attacks on foreign-owned businesses in South African townships and it is captured in their stories, as a moral obligation to eliminate the enemy within. One local South Africa claims:

These foreigners are everywhere doing business, they come to the locations and take over the businesses there and we cannot do our business because everyone wants to buy from them. How do they expect us to make money when they have spaza shops in every corner and selling things very cheap. They are destroying our own businesses and lives because our businesses are closing down because of Somali foreigners. They must go back to their countries and things will be better in South Africa (Local South African)

The evocation of economic misfortunes in street level narratives is sometimes linked to the myth of witchcraft where locals attribute migrant business successes to the use of “muthi” to attract customers. What is equally interesting in local narratives is the misuse of the term “foreigners”, which means non-citizens residing in South Africa regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality. But here, the term has been deconstructed and used loosely by local South African as a synonym for “illegal African” and therefore the attacks on African migrants are framed as the cleansing of undesirable illegal aliens. This suggests that what is considered xenophobia is in fact “Afrophobia” or “negrophobia” because with the exception of Pakistani citizens who also operate businesses in the townships, there is hardly any evidence of similar attacks on Europeans and Asian businesses in South Africa. There are no well-documented narratives about European or Chinese business owners because they mostly operate in urban areas and unlike Somalis shop owners they are not perceived as potential threats to local livelihoods. Despite the exponential growth of China cities in major South African cities and European restaurants in affluent suburbs, there is no empirical evidence which reveals that European and Asian businesses were burnt or looted during xenophobic violence.

Furthermore, when the xenophobic attacks broke again in Durban 2015 and spread to other parts of South Africa, they were blamed on the Zulu traditional king’s reverberation of the stereotypes about African migrants, calling for their repatriation.

... the influx of foreign nationals ... most government leaders do not want to speak out on this matter because they are scared of losing votes. As the king of the Zulu nation, I cannot tolerate a situation where we are being led by leaders with no views whatsoever. We are requesting those who come from outside to please go back to their countries. The fact that there were countries that played a role in the country’s struggle for liberation should not be used as an excuse to create a situation where foreigners are allowed to inconvenience locals. I know you were in their countries during the struggle for liberation. But the fact of the matter is you did not set up businesses in their countries (King Goodwill Zwelithini: Reigning King of Zulu kingdom in South Africa, 2015)

Although the Zulu king is a well-known traditional leader and member of the Zulu nobility, his utterances about foreign nationals do not reflect his elite status. This quote is therefore represented here as a street level narrative because of its uncanny similarity to narratives from destitute South Africans. In fact, the king’s commentary was highly criticised for inciting xenophobic violence in Durban in 2015 because as it filtered to the masses, it swiftly legitimised common street level misconceptions about Africans. Like other street level narratives, this frames the African migrant in a parasitic image “an inconvenience” affecting the quality of South African lives. The justificatory discourse of the parasite fraught in local narratives suggests that the fear of the African migrant in South Africa has been “the ground upon which social responses to uncertainty are displayed, an emotional regime that controls a particular economy of emotions, and a body of social responses around who is a ‘friend’ or an ‘enemy’ ...” (Riano-Alcala, 2008, p. 4). Imagining Africans as the demon or enemy that must be eliminated or cleansed shows the “omnipresence of fear in the daily lives” of both South Africans and Africans in the township.

The responses to African threats to local livelihoods are justified through a narrative of illegal immigrants which limits Africans’ legitimate right to belong and gives local citizens the right and moral obligation to exorcise them. The discourse of illegality is neatly chronicled in Morris and Bouillon (2001), which argue that in the post-apartheid period there is a widespread tendency to label immigrants from the African continent as “illegal immigrants” or “illegal aliens” (p. 22). While this rhetoric can be misconstrued as local South Africans’ lack of knowledge of immigration policies, it has also been employed conveniently by locals and tactically by notable politicians to justify xenophobic attacks of Africans. As Peberdy (1997, p. 296) puts it:

... the depiction of African migrants as “illegal aliens” and “illegal immigrants” implies both criminality and difference. The persistent use of illegal to describe undocumented migrants suggests a close connection with crime and criminal acts ...

By reducing African migrants to criminals or aliens, we are confronted with a powerful image of an illegal alien seen to pose a serious threat to the sanctity of an already troubled state and as such the violent attacks on Africans are justifiable mechanisms to purge criminals from their local communities. After the 2015 attacks, instead of the ANC government addressing the causes of the attacks, it launched a military operation codenamed *pfela* and this operation resulted in the arrest of many allegedly “illegal immigrants”. The operation showed that “anti-foreign [African] sentiments are not only an organic or spontaneous response to street level tensions but have also been shaped and legitimized by politicians and bureaucrats” (Landau & Freemantle, 2010, p. 378).

5. The government’s narratives about African migrants and xenophobia

In the heart of the xenophobic attacks, one’s amazements are usually the images of African migrants portrayed in political narratives constructed by mainly ANC politicians especially during political campaigns; public debates about the relationship between migration, unemployment and crime, and/or during service delivery protests. The idiomatic expression of xenophobia as criminality, a catastrophic consequence of illegal immigration, hate crime, or the handiwork of a third party illustrate the government’s stratagem to avoid a serious societal problem undermining its very own political rhetoric of African Renaissance and Ubuntu (Hayem, 2013; Landau & Freemantle, 2010). It is also an increasing reluctance from politicians to acknowledge that the new South Africa is indeed an immigration region desperately in need of foreign skills and labour (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Geschiere, 2009). These responses therefore reinforce the “us” against “them” narrative, which represents African migrants as life sucking parasites. In dealing with the violence, political narratives have tended to represent xenophobia in a historical discourse of the liberation movement. They have attempted to position xenophobic attacks as attempts to tarnish the reputation of leaders and to derail their political achievements since the institution of democracy in South Africa.

In a ministerial response to an April 2016 social protest on electricity outages and illegal connection in Khutsong, Mbombela, the Member of Executive Council (MEC) for community safety, security and liaison, Vusi Shongwe uttered:

All those who don’t have identity documents *bazonya*. We will meet your needs as government but first we want to evict all the illegal immigrants. I will bring police officials and all those without IDs will be deployed back to their countries. (Shongwe, News 24 29 April 2016)

By framing his response around the presence of illegal immigrants, the MEC entrenches the perceptions that African migrants are to blame for the social crises in this community. Again the right of migrants to belong is undermined by an implicit discourse of criminality with the potential to incite violence against any migrant whether they are illegal or not. By prioritising their deportation, the MEC astutely positions migrants as the prime suspects and re-directs the anger and frustrations of local South Africans from the government to African migrants.

Interestingly, the stage for a xenophobic post-apartheid South Africa was set immediately after the demise of apartheid and the first democratic elections. With the influx of Africans, which marked this political dispensation, idioms of illegal aliens, hatred and exclusionism and the blame game began to recur in political discourse (Morris & Bouillon, 2001). In 17 April 1997, the Minister of Home Affairs of the first democratically elected government Mangosuthu Buthelezi, in his parliamentary budget speech claimed that:

With an illegal immigration population estimated at between 2.5 million and 5 million, it is obvious that the socio-economic resources of the country, which are under severe strain as it is, are further being burdened by the presence of illegal aliens. The cost implication become even clearer when one makes a calculation suggesting that if every illegal cost our infrastructure say R1000 (US \$ 200) per annum, then multiplied with what even number you wish, it becomes obvious that the cost becomes billions of Rands per year. (Buthelezi, 1997)

Buthelezi's budgetary analysis of the burden of migration at the inception of a new political dispensation characterised by promises of economic prosperity and better social conditions, was enough to incite fear, anxieties and paranoia about the presence of Africans in the lives of local South Africans. This political discourse was indeed a preamble for the set of emergent narratives about African migrants in post-apartheid Africa. Since South Africa is constitutionally obligated to provide legal protection to all those who live within their borders, there is always an urgent need for an alternative narrative to give meaning to the unconstitutionality of state actions against foreigners. To justify the government's expected challenges to deliver on its political promises, African migrants are framed around a homogeneous identity- "illegal aliens", which images them as parasites and unwanted people draining financial resources and ultimately sucking life out of a fragile South African economy. It is a discourse of political patronage, which blamed South Africans' miseries, and misfortunes on Africans, and which set the stage for "black on black violence" (Gibson, 2011, p. 195). The minister's testimony captures a nativist political rhetoric "where the poor are continually told that African "aliens" are to blame for the situation and the ruin of their country" (Gibson, 2011, p. 195). In this case, African migrants are used as pawns in a fractured state, which for more than two decades has been unable to provide viable solution to its own socio-economic and political challenges.

In the same year, responding to questions on fighting violent crime in South Africa, the then Minister of Defence Joe Modise, made similar disparaging accusations about Africans in London Al-Quds.al.arabi:

As for crime, the army is helping the police get rid of crime and violence in the country. However, what can we do? We have one million illegal immigrants in our country who commit crimes and who are mistaken for South African citizens. That is the real problem. We have adopted a strict policy and have banned illegal immigration in order to combat the criminals coming from neighbouring states, so that we can round up criminals residing in South Africa. (Joe Modise 19 November 1997)

Modise's narrative images post-apartheid South Africa as a pure and flawless state that has been "raped" by African criminals and drug lords. The narrative of crime portrays "the splitting of body politics into worthy and unworthy citizens ... self-respecting ordinary South Africans versus outright criminal elements" (Sandwith, 2010, p. 70). Like Buthelezi, Modise nursed the seeds of street level idioms used to legitimize xenophobia in 2008 and again in 2015 and 2016. These narrative constructions reveal that post-apartheid South Africa was, from the outset built on "the legacy of the internalisation of colonial values, one that includes negrophobia" (Gibson, 2011, p. 194).

From 1994 and until today public spaces have been dominated by political rhetoric which continues to blame African migrants for the irruption of xenophobia in local communities. In response to the looting of African businesses in the townships in 2015, the Minister of Small Business Development defended the violence by stating that:

"[f]oreigners need to understand that they are here as a courtesy and our priority is to the people of this country first and foremost ... They cannot barricade themselves in and not share their practices with local business owners".

Like the preceding political rhetoric, this is yet another accusatory narrative which supports the looting of African businesses. Street level narratives that demonise African migrants are continuously being validated and reinforced by key politicians who disingenuously see the presence of migrants as a threat to their fledgling democracy. Although they try to masquerade their hatred of African migrants with appeals to African Renaissance and Ubuntu, state politicians' responses to xenophobia have been a mockery of the same philosophies they preach.

Furthermore, the justificatory narrative about the burden of migration and the urgency to repatriate the so-called “illegal aliens” is captured in the current Minister of Home Affairs Malusi Gigaba’s first address to victims of xenophobia in Durban in 2015. In a less empathetic and vaguely apologetic manner, he hastily offered to assist migrants who wished to return “home” as a solution to inhumane attacks, which have deprived other human beings of the right to exist. He commented:

... The important thing in that case is for them to register their names with their community leadership so we can know who they are, which countries they come from, and then we will facilitate their return to their home countries (Gigaba, 2015)

This offer to assist disregards the pains of victimisation and spatial displacement and the sheer fact that South Africa has become a permanent “home” for thousands of Africans. Whilst victims struggled to deal with the fear, pain and trauma of victimisation, he sanctioned the verification of permits of victims in search of illegal immigrants, enforcing the narrative of illegality dominant amongst local South Africans. His immediate and somewhat instinctive response shows that South Africans’ “exclusionary attitudes not only stem from street-level tensions but have also been shaped and legitimized by politicians and bureaucrats” (Landau, 2007, p. 65). This perspective is captured in the following commentary:

The fear, hatred and envy of foreigners is an ongoing reality in South Africa and has to be confronted. There is no sense in playing semantic games, such as the claim that the violence is simple criminality, or the latest dodge by our politicians, who are blaming “Afrophia”. We are not fooled and neither is the outside world (Mail & Guardian, 17 April 2015)

This is not surprising because the same Minister has supported new draconian immigration legislations passed to tactically frustrate African migrants and hopefully force them to leave the country without the xenophobia-type of violence, which tarnishes the image of South Africans globally. African professionals and students now find themselves in what Achille Mbembe refers to as “a kafkaian situation that extends to foreign students who entered the country legally, had their visas renewed all this time, but who now find themselves in a legal uncertainty, unable to register and unable to access the money they are entitled to ... through its new anti-immigration measures, the government is busy turning previously legal migrants into illegal ones” (Mbembe, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2006). To this, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) argue that “black foreigners-are the object of consternation and contestation across the new nation, from politicians and their parties, through the media and trade unions, to street hawkers and the unemployed ...” (p. 647).

6. Print media reportage of Africans and xenophobia

Other sets of narratives that have exacerbated tensions in post-apartheid South Africa are print media reports on Africans and xenophobia. In fact, a free and independent media is an important institution in any constitutional democracy like South Africa. It is often represented as the voice of the voiceless, the powerless or the disenfranchised, constantly shaping ideologies, perceptions and worldviews in the public sphere. But the alchemy of modern media has been the subject of very uncompromising debates with a rich amount of literature arguing that the media often veers from the basic principle of fair, accurate and objective reporting to the dissemination of political propaganda and tabloid-like news with the potential for inciting mass protest and violence (Asakitikpi & Gadzikwa, 2015; Hadland, 2010; Mkandwire, 2015). This is true especially in the case of print media which is a “combination of diverse components, language, text, ideology and culture” (Hadland, 2010, p. 124)

Virulent print media reportage about African migrants or foreigners has permeated local communities since Africans began immigrating into South Africa. The narrative or metaphors of illegality, criminality or the image of the “alien” associated with African migrants have been headline stories in international as well as in white and black popular print and mass media for many years. These

images or metaphors have been used to construct a homogenous identity for Africans living in South Africa (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013; Danso & McDonald, 2001). Headlines like “illegal migrants are flooding into the country to find work” “illegal migrants involved in crime” “National Defense Force had seize 228 weapons from illegals” are aired during primetime television, on popular FM stations and printed on the front page of local newspapers like the Sowetan, and Daily Sun with a significantly large viewership or readership. These damaging representations of migrants rapidly spread in townships with high rates of unemployment and crimes forcing locals to immediately blame their socio-economic challenges on African migrants operating businesses in these localities.

When the xenophobic violence broke in 2008 and 2015/2016, the media was instantaneously accused of complicity, and labeled the “agent provocateur”, which played “an unambiguously malevolent role in the exacerbation of tensions and perhaps in the resulting contagion of violence” (Hadland, 2010, p. 136). Print media coverage of the violence in townships was construed as sensationalism and condemned by many locals and foreigners for the reinforcement of stereotypes about migrants and ultimately provoking more violence. For many, the media especially local print media such as the Sowetan, and Daily Sun, were not only instigators of violence in local communities, they were also blamed for framing messages that portrayed the ANC government as being unable to decisively deal with the violence. For example:

The profound shame that xenophobia brings on this nation is the same kind of shame that apartheid brought on the people of this land. What is so shaming is it alienates us from our neighbours and calls into question the integrity of our entire constitution. It exposes the systemic violation of injustice: today it is foreign nationals and tomorrow it will be Indians and after that it will be whites. There is anger and hatred growing among us. (The Guardian April 17, 2015)

This quote from an international newspaper expresses a similar type of media reportage in both white and black newspapers cited below. From this excerpt, the framing of print media reportage did not only legitimise street level narratives about migrants but it also reduced the ANC government to a reign of terror shattering “the dream of a nation founded on unity and respect for difference” (Sandwith, 2010, p. 63). This perception was also captured vividly in very disturbing local newspaper headlines like “It’s war on aliens! 20 bust for attacks!” (13 May 2008, p. 4); “Cops said I was an alien! Homeboy angry after jail horror” (14 May 2008, p. 1); “War against aliens! Thousand forced to flee Alex” (14 May 2008, p. 2); “Aliens: The truth! Daily Sun tells why Alex exploded” (15 May 2008, p. 1); “Alex aliens want to go home” (15 May 2008, p. 2); “orgies of violence” (The Mercury, 26 May 2008); “Flames of Xenophobia Hatred” (Business Day, 19 May 2015); “You’ve got a House, I haven’t. Get out or Die” (The Sunday Independent, 18 May 2008). This phrasing of headline messages shows that not only has the South African media helped to provoke violence against other Africans, it has symbolically constructed xenophobia “as a continuation of apartheid discrimination by those who should know better” (Sandwith, 2010, p. 63).

Print media reportage therefore portrays xenophobia as a state of chaos and South Africa as a fractured nation with “an expression of disillusionment of the government’s ability to deliver” on its political promises (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013, p. 194). By so doing, particularly white-owned media are in fact not helping to dispel the myths about Africans, which have been the prime cause of the attacks. Instead they preoccupy themselves with discrediting the black-led government, creating the impression that nothing has changed in the new South Africa. This type of accusatory journalism during the attacks helped to normalize xenophobic violence the same way it has normalized gang violence in South Africa. For instance:

Shops looted and set ablaze. Terrified foreigners hiding in police stations and stadiums. Machete-wielding attackers hacking immigrants to death in major cities in South Africa. As attacks against foreigners and their businesses rage on, killing at least six people this week, other nations in the continent are scrambling to evacuate their citizens from South Africa. But this is not the first time xenophobic violence has exploded in a country that tries to portray itself as a diverse “rainbow” nation. (CNN, April 19 2015)

The likening of xenophobic attacks to apartheid-like violence immediately after 1990 brings back memories of a dreadful past, triggering a state of panic and paranoia amongst local South Africans, increasing their determination to eliminate the “dangerous alien”. The message illustrates the powerful psychological tensions emanating from xenophobia violence in post-apartheid South Africa and how it undermines the notion of ubuntu, exuded here in the “us against them” syndrome, “an inability to respect basic human rights and the repudiation of the Pan-African family” (Sandwith, 2010, p. 63). Like street level and political narratives, print media reportage tends to criminalize xenophobia, masking the brutal and psychologically disturbing murders of migrants as sheer acts of criminality. Interestingly, the South African justice system is yet to prosecute and incarcerate perpetrators of these supposed acts of criminality. This framing of xenophobia continues in the following newspaper excerpt:

The spread of xenophobic violence against African immigrants in Gauteng is cause for great alarm, given its potential to create anarchy in many parts of the province. Most worrying, too, is the effect of the violence on the cosmopolitan outlook of Johannesburg and other parts of the province, a feature credited with giving the city its unique vibrancy. But all that is in danger if the violence continues to polarise the province, creating the dreaded no-go areas that were a relic of the 1990s political violence. Behind the violence is undoubtedly a criminal element bent on carrying out its nefarious activities under the cover of public violence ... “Hence the imperative for the government to muster all resources to nip the lawlessness in the bud before it’s too late. We dare not return to the climate of fear that enveloped the country in the 1990s” (Sowetan, 2008, p. 14)

By referring to xenophobia violence as a state of “lawlessness” the message images South Africa as a mutilated state taken over by “mob irrationality and intimations of African savagery” or “community vigilantism taken to dangerous extremes” (Sandwith, 2010, p. 62). This contested print media reportage continues in the following statement:

The brutality of South Africans turning on their neighbours was brought home yesterday morning as people stood by while a Mozambican man was stalked, stabbed and killed as he lay in township filth, pleading for his life. (Sunday times, April 17 2015)

This message portrays South Africa as state without a sense of humanity, psychologically and physically immune to animalistic violence, a state whereby the butchering of Africans is “an understandable and legitimate reaction to this state of affair” (Smith, 2008, p. 4). Although the story is framed as an apocalyptic narrative showing the desperation of locals and the failures of the government to restore social order, it seems to normalize this form of post-apartheid violence. The phraseology of the message here is not condemnatory but justification of this social order because it is what the new South Africa has become.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the sets of post-apartheid narratives about foreigners, particularly Africans that have contributed to exacerbate xenophobic violence in South Africa. Using framing theory, the article has argued that, the construction of messages about the presence of Africans in a slew of negative images and metaphors has contributed to the uncontrollable culture of xenophobia and exclusion in South Africa. These narratives create the impressions that the psychosocial problems bedeviling the country would miraculously disappear if the country is cleansed of Africans. Unlike many studies on the representation of African migrants in discursive texts, this article has attempted to combine narratives from three distinct yet interdependent domains to understand the framing of messages and its effects on the social existence of other Africans in South Africa. It has analysed selected quotations from local South African narratives; political statements and from print media reportage, showing how these sets of hegemonic narratives in post-apartheid South Africa shape our understanding of South Africans’ sentiments and the multiple contours of xenophobia. These narratives have tactically framed African migrants as the adversary that must be attacked and exorcised if South Africans hope to find peace and prosperity in the new political dispensation.

The article has not simply replicated existing body of knowledge on racialised violence in South Africa. It has attempted to tease out how these discursive texts about African migrants in particular, are constructed in the public domains and most importantly how they intersect to popularise anti-African sentiments. In addition, it has explained how the intersection of these narratives triggers xenophobic violence in major South African cities.

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