

Journal of African Foreign Affairs (JoAFA)

ISSN 2056-5658 (Online) ISSN 2056-564X (Print)

Published consistently since 2014

Indexed by: IBSS, JSTOR, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, ProQuest,
J-Gate and Sabinet

Volume 11, Number 1, April 2024

pp 59-71

Perspectives of Xenophobic Attacks and United Nations' Peaceful Co-existence Order: A Study of South Africa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2024/v11n1a4>

Kelechi Johnmary Ani

*Afrocentric Governance of Public Affairs North West
University South Africa Kani4christ@gmail.com*

&

Nwali Richard Chidi

*Department of Political Science Ebonyi State
University Abakaliki Email: nwalirichardchidi@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study aimed at ascertaining the impacts of the mayhem on the peaceful co-existence of the United Nations member countries. The study utilised case study and content analysis owing to its qualitative nature. However, the study revealed that xenophobic attacks in South Africa have tampered with the United Nations' purpose of maintaining international peace and security among member nations, both their citizens and their properties, and have also tampered with member countries' friendliness, equality and mutual respectfulness. The study concluded with the following recommendations: the United Nations should impose heavy sanctions on the government of South Africa to prevent other countries from perpetrating such dastardly acts in the

near future; and the South African government should, by all means, prevail on its citizens to establish and maintain friendliness and brotherliness with foreigners in South Africa.

Keywords: *Foreign nationals, Peaceful co-existence, South Africa, UN, Xenophobia.*

Introduction

Xenophobic attacks – one of the most trending academic discourse – have risen to question the United Nations' mandate for the maintenance of peaceful co-existence among member nations. The mayhem's target was the foreign nationals and their properties. Further, the mayhem, which has its route in the country through the Tshwane region in 1994, has done much harm on the United Nations' peaceful co-existence. The concept 'xeno' that has Greek origination refers to "stranger" or "guest" while 'phob' refers to "fear or hatred". The term historically is traceable to the 19th century while the earliest citation is from 1880. The two words can inversely mean fear or hatred against strangers or guests. Guido (2003) posits that 'xenophobic attacks' refers to hatred against foreigners or citizens of other countries that are perceived as unholy and, at the same time, the reason behind every calamity and criminality in their areas of residence. Guido (2003) adds that the attacks against the nationals of other countries in South Africa have caused colossal damages of many lives and property worth billions of dollars.

However, a xenophobic attack is simply an attack against foreigners by the nationals of a particular country based on fear or hatred. It is noteworthy that this ugly situation has truncated the relative peaceful atmosphere that existed in South Africa after the inhuman apartheid regime. Nyamnjoh (2014) establishes that the outbreak of xenophobic attacks, which raised serious concern about the safety and security of foreign nationals residing in the country, started in 1994. Nyamnjoh adds that the attacks were traced to have emanated from the Tshwane region of South Africa, although the attacks later spread to other parts of the country such as Durban, Johannesburg, KwaZulu, etc.

Emphatically, Nyamnjoh (2014), who traces the origin of xenophobic attacks in South Africa to 1994, asserts that the attacks became increasingly severe in the area between 2000 and 2008, leaving many casualties in the wake of the attacks. It was recorded, according to Nyamnjoh, that 129 people were reported butchered within that period,

although few of them were South Africans. Tamir and Budiman (2019) add that the attacks recorded in 2015 at different locations in the country prompted many UN member countries to evacuate their citizens and threaten to retaliate if such dastardly acts against their citizens resident in South Africa did not stop. The authors conclude that the study of 2018 reveals that a greater percent of South Africans see foreigners as their major threats who take over a higher percentage of the job opportunities and other opportunities available for them as citizens of the country.

Indeed, these unfortunate attacks against foreign nationals and their properties in South Africa have led to mixed reactions among the United Nations member countries, following the loss of lives and property. This has necessitated this study. Misago (2009) notes that the Somali government who frowned upon the high level of killings of their citizens wrote, requesting the government of South Africa to ensure the preservation of Somalian citizens in South Africa or else expect the worst against South Africans in Somalia. According to Misago, about 3000 Zimbabwean farmers were ejected from their homes and shops, being accused of paying labourers below the minimum wage.

Moreover, Nahla (2008) opines that Human Rights Watch reported in 1998 that South African indigenes attempted to commit battery against the citizens of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi who were residing in the small town of Alexandra around 1995. The author reveals that the aggrieved armed countrymen, who marched their victims direct to a police station, claimed that they wanted to sanitise their environment that had been polluted by the foreigners in their areas. The issue remains – are the acclaimed foreigners in South Africa not the citizens of the member countries of the United Nations who is the world's crusader of peaceful co-existence among member nations with mutual respect for human lives, dignity and properties? However, this issue that remains unravelled has continued to raise agitations among social science scholars and the countries of the affected citizens. Ilonze (2023) alleges that two indigenes of two African countries were thrown out of a moving train on a baseless argument that foreigners were the brain behind the criminalities, prostitution, joblessness and other socio-economic issues ravaging the country and her citizens. Ilonze adds that, between 2000 and 2001, in a town called Zandspruit, more than seven Zimbabweans were shot dead, some heavily injured, some abducted while the rest were ejected, with their properties looted and some damaged.

Egbute (2023) reports that, between the late 2005 and the early 2006, about six Zimbabweans were butchered like animals in Olievenhoutbosch, with South African perpetrators blaming the foreigners for the death of a local farmer in the area. The unfortunate situation saw the properties of the foreigners set ablaze while the locals or indigenes of South Africa demanded the security agents to evacuate foreigners from their country if there must be peace in the area. Egbute further states that Somalia lost about 47 indigenes in the area between July and August 2006. The unfortunate incidents prompted the Somali refugees to appeal for protection from the South African government. He also notes that several foreigners from Pakistan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and other countries were massacred within the township of Western Cape in 2007 and early 2008, with many shops and properties set to fire. Till date, one has lost the count of losses of both lives and property worth billions of dollars in the country at large as a result of persistent attacks.

Methodology

The study used documentary analysis from literature to present the place of xenophobia in undermining national peace and security in South Africa. The findings from the literature were thematically interpreted and presented in a way to enrich the intellectual discussion on xenophobia in South Africa.

Review of Related Literature: Ideological Perspectives

Functionalist Views

The focused area of this sociological view is mainly on the proper maintenance of societal stability and orders within a certain geographical area, or within a socio-political location at all times. These sociologists believe that any perceived breakdown of order or instability in the societal norms may always result in crises by the negatively affected party. This group admits that people resort to crisis mostly when they perceive any threat to their available alternatives, especially those that do not have more than one alternative. There is this popular parlance that states that 'he that lives in a glass house does not throw stones'. This implies that

those who have nothing at stake always resort to violence as against those who have something at stake.

Magubane (2015) accuses the government of South Africa through the Honourable Minister of Small Business Development, Ms Zulu Lindiwe, of instigating unrest in the country through his official public statements that the businesses of South Africans can never have a favourable competition with the foreign businesses owned by foreigners. The minister claimed that foreigners were more skilful and experienced than the indigenes of their country, which implies that the only remedy was to evict foreigners out of the country for the survival of their countrymen. O'Halloran (2016) asserts that the councillors in the country were openly encouraging attacks against foreigners by using sentimental remarks that forbid renting or leasing of shops to foreigners whom they perceived wanted to dominate their land in every sector.

However, this school is criticised on the grounds that the attacks against foreigners by South Africans reflect a lack of the maintenance of social order. The argument here is, who is responsible for the maintenance of social contract and order in South Africa? Is it the foreigners who are mostly entrepreneurs or the locals who have the legitimate rights to contest or vote for candidates of their choice for the purpose of leadership dividends or provision of social order in their country? From the above scholarly views, it is deduced, among others, that xenophobic attacks against foreigners by South Africans, precisely the 'Blacks', are viewed as a transfer of aggression as a result of discrimination and marginalisation meted out to them by their white-skinned counterparts during the apartheid regime. This is said because they left the people who dealt with them during the apartheid regime and even left the previous and present governments who have the responsibility for rehabilitating them and also providing other amenities, but rather vented their anger on foreigners.

The Pluralist Perspective

The pluralist school of thought focuses on how multi-ethnic groups and religions that have different interests and ideologies struggle to dominate their realms of operations as none would want to be subordinated (Olu-Adeyemi, 2006). Agreeing to the pluralist argument, Otite (2000) states that conflict remains an inevitable necessity in human existence as much

as different groups of people are involved in their different interests, beliefs, ideologies and perceptions. To Otite (2000), every group would want their voices and intentions to be recognised and approved at all times and in all situations. He adds that no group would want to be intimidated, dominated, relegated, neglected and/or silenced in the society.

Therefore, the pluralist argument was debunked on the basis that it is not every diverse interest that can cause crises or divisions. It is believed that some conflict of interest can bring mutual respect and progress because, in the course of argumentation, every party would want to make correct sense, and not noise, just as lawyers always establish that 'We disagree to agree' (Dansoe, 2011). However, Jonathan and Wade (2016) consequently opine that the South African government under ANC attempted to bridge the divisions occasioned by racism in the country in times past. The peacebuilding initiative of the government aimed at building tolerance towards outsiders in the country became an imperative measure to stem the tide of high-level hostilities, killings, maiming and wanton destruction of foreigners and their properties in the country. Tamir and Budiman (2019) posit that the findings of a South Africa-based research organisation see foreigners to be burdens and threats whose agenda is to hijack the available job opportunities of the citizens and socio-economic virtues of South Africa. To the aggrieved average South Africans, foreigners are the major triggers of crimes in the country, especially between 2010 and 2011, adding that immigrants are also responsible for their unemployment, lack of progress in their businesses and even lack of access to public health facilities and education.

From the above scholarly views, it is deduced, among others, that xenophobic attacks against foreigners by South Africans, precisely the 'Blacks', are not based on the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities struggling for survival but on the lack of willingness to compete skilfully with foreigners.

Institutionalist Perspective

Taking a different dimension, the institutionalist school of thought focuses on how institutions of governance and authorities make laws and enforce the laws and order without nepotism or favouritism for the betterment of all the groups and entities in a country (Wilkinson, 1977 in Ojukwu & Onifade, 2010). Specifically, they focus mainly on the

dynamism that exists among different institutions responsible for the settlement of conflict of interests, conflict resolutions and management among different ethnic groups. Wilkinson (1977), in Ojukwu and Onifade (2010), further outlines the situations that can turn conflicts into violence as follows: when governments at all levels or their agents trample on the people's rights and liberty, and when one ethnic group – whether big or small – attacks another without the intervention of the government or its agents. ABC News (2019) submits that the government of South Africa had neither made an attempt to arrest nor prosecute those involved in the killing and intimidation of foreigners in the country despite their own peacebuilding efforts anchored in respect and tolerance among all ethnic groups and so on.

Consequently, following the argument of Wilkinson (1977) in Ojukwu and Onifade (2010), people can resort to violence when the governments at all levels or their agents trample on the rights and liberty of the people. Similarly, people also become too worried about why such arbitrary xenophobic actions were meted out to foreigners who know little or nothing about deprivations caused by their South African aggressors or its agencies in their lives.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of relative deprivation and frustration aggression is most appropriate in this discourse because it is a direction pointer to a better understanding of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. This theory was first espoused in 1939 by Dollard in Yale. According to him, people engage in crises when they perceive any threat of deprivation. This means that any anger motivated by deprivation induces crisis. Gurr (1970) sees crisis as the end product of people's perceived deprivations that birthed frustrations. He views deprivations that birth frustration as the discrepancy between man's value expectations and man's available values. According to him, the following frustrations can trigger aggressions in the society: first, people resort to aggressions or crises at any time they anticipate any difference between their goal expectations and goal availability; second, the poor are more vulnerable to violence any moment they perceive threats to their only available opportunity, unlike the rich that have many alternatives; and thirdly, the greater the

expectations of man to get a particular objective or target, the greater aggressive he becomes when he misses it.

This theory was justified most appropriate because it provided insights into the major triggers of the attacks in the country concerning perceived threats on available resources, frustration and so on.

Discussion of the Findings

The attacks against the foreigners in South Africa have tampered with the United Nations' purpose of maintaining international peace and security among member nations

The study findings reveal that xenophobic attacks in South Africa have tampered with the United Nations' purpose of maintaining international peace and security among member nations both their citizens and their properties. Drawing its inference from the postulations of Gurr 1970 "Why Men Rebel", the study has established that xenophobic attacks in South Africa were necessitated by frustration, adding that crisis is the extremist product of deprivation unto frustration. Therefore, people resort to aggressions or crises any time they anticipate any difference between their goal expectations and goal availability. Further, the poor are more vulnerable to violence any time they perceive threats to their only available opportunity, unlike the rich that have many alternatives.

However, the display of hostility by black nationals of South Africa against the foreigners could be perceived as a transfer of aggression over lack of landmarks, unconducive educational environment, low-quality education, lack of potable water, lack of quality health care delivery, etc. They still struggle with foreigners for the fewer available ones. Nahla (2008) notes that, in 1998, there was physical assault against foreigners in Alexandra town of South Africa on the grounds that they (South Africans) wanted to carry out a clean-up exercise in the land, accusing foreigners of polluting their land physically and spiritually. This inhuman act in which they marched the foreigners to the security quarters was tagged 'Buyelekhaya' which implies 'go back to your home or country'.

Figure 1: South Africa's xenophobic attack cases

Year	Incident locations and the victims
1997	They assaulted foreigners who hawked within Johannesburg.
1998	They threw out of a moving train one Mozambican and one Senegalese travelling to Johannesburg from Pretoria.
2000	One of the Sudanese refugees was also pushed out of a moving train on his way to Johannesburg from Pretoria.
2006	25 citizens of Somalia and Zimbabwe were murdered in
2008	Olievenhoutbosch, following the death of one indigene of the country.
2010	69 foreigners were massacred in Cape and around Pretoria; while about 100,000 people were displaced, 700 people were reported wounded.
2011	2 Somali businessmen were murdered around the town of Gauteng.
2012	Some groups of foreigners living in Alexandra, Johannesburg were given seven days to quit RDP homes.
2017	It was reported that about 500 foreigners residing at Botshabelo in Freetown were assaulted.
2019	Abike Dabiri-Erewa, an aide to the former President of Nigeria on diasporas, confirmed that about 118 Nigerians were gruesomely killed in South Africa.
	60 people were reportedly killed and thousands displaced in South Africa

Source: Nwobashi et al. (2017) and SABC (2019)

Xenophobic attacks in South Africa have tampered with the member countries' friendliness, equality and mutual respectfulness.

The finding of this study reveals that xenophobic attacks in South Africa have undermined the image of the countries' friendliness and mutual respect for humanity. Drawing its inference from the postulation of Gurr 1970 "Why Men Rebel", the study sees crisis as the end product of people's perceived deprivations that birthed frustrations. Gurr views deprivations that birth frustration as the discrepancy between man's value expectations and man's available values. According to him, people resort to aggressions or crises at any time they anticipate any difference between their goal expectations and goal availability. He adds that the poor are more vulnerable to violence any moment they perceive threats

to their only available opportunity, unlike the rich that have many alternatives.

To buttress this, the demonstration of unfriendliness against foreigners in South Africa is a contravention of the UN's peaceful co-existence order among member nations. ABC News (2019) opines that the government of South Africa had neither made an attempt to arrest nor prosecute those involved in the killing and intimidation of the foreigners in the country despite its own peacebuilding efforts anchored in respect and tolerance among all ethnic groups and so on.

Summary

Xenophobia is increasingly becoming a global social problem. The rise of nationalist leaders and parties in positions of power and authority has widened the gap between the citizenry and visitors, settlers or migrants into different parts of the globe. The implication is that there is not only the consciousness and division between the real sons and daughters of the soil as against the settlers but that the quest by the settlers to eke out a living in their current places of residence is also often received with deep suspicion and systemic environments for conflict manifestations. This study – presenting the negative wind of hatred against foreign nationals – has documented how xenophobic attacks have undermined nation-building in the country and affected foreigners.

Conclusion

The study has focused on the impacts of the scourge of xenophobic attacks on the United Nations' peaceful co-existence order and has revealed that the attacks on foreign nationals have tampered with the United Nations' purpose of maintaining international peace and security among member nations, both their citizens and their properties. Similarly, the attacks have tampered with the UN member countries' friendliness, equality and mutual respectfulness. Indeed, the study, employing a case study design approach with content analysis, was guided by relative deprivation and frustration aggression theory.

Recommendations

1. The United Nations should impose heavy sanctions on the government of South Africa to prevent other countries from perpetrating such dastardly acts in the near future.
2. The South African government should, by all means, prevail on its citizens to establish and maintain friendliness and brotherliness with foreigners in South Africa.

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