

## Diction and Contradiction of Xenophobia Conceptualization and Usage in International Relations: South Africa in Focus

BY

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### Abstract

*The focus of this paper, attempts to de-mystify of the concept of Xenophobia, considered the trigger for the recurrent spate of violent attacks by South African nationals on other Africans especially Nigerians domiciled in their country. The paper observed that, there had been a 'bandwagon' attitude in this conceptual usage which had obscured the actual actions as well as responsibility of various actors. Scholars and public commentators, had been quick to situate such happenings in the study area under the above concept without a deep and critical reflection on the nature and dimension of the violent attacks by black South Africans as well as the environmental conditions in that country prelude to the manifestation of such trends. In other words, the symptoms of the problem are being taken to mean the root of this ailment. Adopting a Historio-Psycho-analytic approach, findings of this piece shows that, the solutions to solve a phobic problem as it is called in South Africa, would rather aggravate it and as such, recommended home-grown solutions by South-Africans to tackle this challenge.*

**KEYWORDS:** DICTION, CONTRADICTION, XENOPHOBIA, AFRICA, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

### INTRODUCTION

Every societal problem is a social sickness or ailment depending on the severity of the situation. To properly manage such cases, a diagnostic investigation is always recommended to ascertain the nature of the disease before adequate treatment could be suggested. In the comity of academic disciplines out to ensure the well-being of the society, History is the first port of call needed to carry out a background check on any such situation, to enable one have a clear understanding of contending issues before handing it over to others for specialized management where necessary. Eferibo and Eweke (2018) had outlined the essential functions of the historical discipline to the society which include; investigative, informative and educative.

The concern of this paper is to utilize the investigative (diagnostic) historical tool to find out what had occasioned the several violent attacks by "black" South Africans against other

'black' African nationals in their country. There has been the assumption that, the problem has symptoms of Xenophobia, 'the irrational and pervasive fear of strangers'. Since Nigerians and other nationals had been in South Africa for many years, it is therefore pertinent to investigate whether this is truly the cause or a factor underlying such hostility from "those that owns the land", considered our study area. To give proper direction to the paper, it is incumbent on us to put the problem identified in proper perspective as well as outline the fundamental symptoms of Xenophobia and other related terms through conceptualization before running our test on the South African case to confirm or refute the Xenophobia assumption.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The recurrent violent attacks on Nigerian citizens as well as other African nationals in South Africa over the years, had been a source of concern, not just to Nation-States whose

citizens and their properties as well as businesses are affected, but also, scholars within and without the African Continent who are interested in the seeming contradiction that has characterized intra-African relations in the country in focus. One important thing that would come to mind is that, during the apartheid era, Nigerians and other African States, rallied around the Black Majority in South Africa, to demand for the dismantling of that discriminatory and repressive regime. In this wise, Nigeria and other nations in Africa who had supported them one way or another, are no strangers to their counterparts in South Africa, at least, in a general sense. It could be argued that, the nationality tag to indicate where one comes from, should identify 'benefactor' nationals, a term to refer to black Africans from nation-states that had been there for their kinfolds from our focus area. In the conceptualization of such acts of violence against other nationals in that country vis-à-vis the obvious years of relations between the various peoples, it is pertinent to question whether the violent attacks on Nigerians and other foreign (African nationals), could be termed xenophobic? Mngxitama (2010) observed that, black South Africans hate and fear other black African nationals which was termed 'Afrophobia' or 'Negrophobia'. But 'phobializing' the concept of killing and maiming fellow humans does not still add up. Black South Africans were supposed to 'flee' when they see other black people. Thus, the diction of Xenophobia, contradicts the activities of haunting and hurting human beings. A clear understanding of the concept is fundamental to crafting intellectual positions that would help manage the re-occurrence of such actions. It is pertinent to emphasize that, because Eurocentric social science scholars called it Xenophobia does not mean that is what it is. Such bandwagon effect has been there when a the scholar posited that;

*The overarching concern of this book is a phenomenon termed Xenophobia which I prefer to describe as intra-African racism/black-on-black-racism which has haunted post-apartheid black communities* (Tarifa 2018:ix).

The problems of violence against black African nationals by black South Africans, had not been properly couched in the term that would convey a clear humanistic meaning amongst scholars of African studies in Africa as well as interested intellectuals and researchers from around the world. It is imperative to put it in proper context to ensure that, the necessary steps to engage this issue are explicitly placed on the table for scrutiny. Before doing that, it is imperative that, the various idea of Xenophobia, are interrogated to ascertain the diction of the term under investigation as it is prevalent in

general usage before pointing out the contradictions in practice through historical tools.

### **XENOPHOBIA, FEAR AND VIOLENCE IN INTER-GROUP RELATIONS: A CONCEPTUALIZATION.**

The first and most visible variable in this discourse is Xenophobia. According to Melville (1978:196-202), Xenophobia is a social phobia that signifies a persistent and unreasonable fear of strangers. From this perspective, there must be interactions between individuals or groups before a manifestation of such could be seen. Other kinds of phobia are zoophobia – animals; beards – pogoniphobia; blood – hematophobia; books – bibliophobia; worms – helminthophobia; Sexual intercourse – coitophobia; etc. It is important to note that, most individual have a special fear. Such fears includes that of crowds, death, injury, failure as well as illness, which is peculiar to people in their sixties (Agras, et al, 1969).

However, it is a reality that, fears are different from phobias. From the view of Comer (2007), fear refers to the Central Nervous System's (CNS) physiological and emotional response to a serious threat to one's well-being. It is an adaptive function of prompting the human body for either 'fight or flight' when it seems danger looms. For example, the fear of failing a course, might make a candidate study hard for exams; that of accident would ensure a driver move carefully during a rainy day as well as work hard at one's job to get promotion, avoid demotion or possible sack.

Fear makes people to be cautious and mindful of the need to avoid life-threatening situations, actions or places. In other words, it is like a check on the excesses of human's urge to express self limitlessly. It is the natural mechanism that act as a check on human actions to enable one engage fatal and dangerous situations.

On the other hand, a phobia is a more intense and persistent fear that could be termed irrational and the desire to avoid the object or situation is greater (APA, 2002). People with phobia are said to often feel so much distress that their fears may dramatically interfere with their lives. For example, a professional footballer's phobia for flying in an aero-plane, might hinder that player from participating in a match where the venue could quickly be reached by air.

From the above, one can deduce that, all phobia are fears that are termed irrational while fear are rational checks on human excesses. Thus, there are two kinds of fears; one rational, the other irrational which is generally seen as phobia. Put differently, phobia are fears that cannot be rationalized. More succinctly, under no condition can human life be taken without recourse to a fair trial in a country's legal system when any individual becomes 'a star' on the spotlight for contravening the grand norm. The killing of fellow humans

without provocation cannot be rationalized or justified under any guise.

The thing with phobia is that, it is personal to the individual involved based on accumulated historical experiences. It is seen as a persistent and unreasonable fear because people with phobia do not get close to the 'dreaded' objects or individuals often to see that, what they fear are not as dangerous as perceived under controlled circumstances. Instead, they avoid 'totally', what they fear as they move away from them. So, if a person or group of people are afraid of strangers, what they would do is now clear; avoid such individuals and move away when there is likelihood of contact. However, this is not the case in South Africa as there are evidences that, indigenous black peoples of that country, are always on the 'hunt' for black nationals who they perceive, are 'threats' to them. The point is that, people avoid 'threats' and not move towards 'threats' that they want to eliminate. Threats are not usually created by the individual facing it. It is most times, external to that being. Making an individual a threat in other to 'eliminate' that person, is a psycho-social problem.

Empirical studies have shown that, there had been the deliberate exclusion or placement of barriers that would deter certain individuals from actively participation in various activities in a country, to ensure that were perpetually made 'outsiders' (Akinyele 2009, Fourchard 2009, Douglas 2002, Higazi 2007, Bach 1997). However, this could take place without resorting to violence especially against foreign nationals. In local communities in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, there are local frameworks that bestows socio-political and economic advantages on those who have historical claim to any environment. Aside the Jos conflict quagmire, most others do not have clear cut evidences of one group having exclusive right to disputes lands as well as mineral resources. The *Area Boys*, *Omonile*, *Almajiri* as well as 'Men on group' mentality, ensures that, privileges and advantages, are conferred perpetually on certain persons. The case in South Africa, does not essentially needed historical exclusion of others because historical advantages before, during and after the creation of the nation-state in Africa, had been firmly fixed against 'aliens'. In other words, rights of citizens, who constituted the citizenry, could not be challenged in the current inter-nation-state structure. The supposed 'xenophobia killings, were therefore not necessary to put foreigners in their proper places.

Xenophobia could be managed from the ideas proposed by clinical psychologists. According to Comer (2007:132-3), the major behavioral approaches to treating it includes desensitization, flooding and modelling. These are referred to as exposure treatments because in all approaches, the persons with the phobia are exposed to strangers they dread. A critical question to be asked after having an idea of what a phobia is, relates to the fact that, after witnessing the patterns of violent

attacks and killings of black Africans by black South Africans up until 2020, could the exposure treatment be recommended or utilized to address the problem?. Do phobic people kill or destroy what they dread?. From the visual evidences of how other nationals have been violently murdered and their properties as well as businesses destroyed in organized ways over time in South Africa, can that be said to be Xenophobic from the conceptualization so far?. If it is not, what is the appropriate categorization and what are the likely measures to tackle it?. The answers to the above can be attempted after an interrogation of inter-group relations in South Africa in the twentieth (20th) century.

### INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century in South African history is very fundamental as it is for other countries in Africa. For clarity of the boundaries of the research, the timeline of the twentieth century is pegged between 1900 and 1999. Apart from being the century where colonialism held sway in the 'dark continent' as well as its dismantling to allow indigenous leadership, it was a period where South Africa was transferred from one colonial episode to another. The hallmark of South African history in the twentieth century, was the high tide of White minority rule in the country. What followed was that, laws and state policies, were crafted as well as executed principally for the benefit of those that controlled the machinery of government.

The nation-state called South Africa, came into fruition by the imperial efforts of Britain to create an overseas dependency for itself, capitalizing on the pioneering efforts of the Dutch, by further incorporating Boers as well as the Bantu aborigines who became second class and inferior humans in their natural space. The British no doubt, favoured the leadership by Boers when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910. In other words, there was the continuation of slavery and neo-imperial tendencies as it was from one 'white' rule to another when it is obviously visible that, the world acclaimed democratic ideals, were not expressly operationalized in the country.

The South African nation-state therefore, was a conglomeration for various groups such as those from Europe, Asia, America and their African counterparts as well as the peculiar Boer breed, who saw the land as their source of survival though, approached it differently. A summary of the group categorization in the country in focus showed that; there was the 'special', privileged, wanted and threatened groups. The special group comprised the Europeans and the Boers; the privileged had coloured peoples such as Indians, Chinese as well as peoples of mixed races from the Americas. The wanted group housed individuals from African countries who provided cheap labour for South African industrial endeavours. The final group, the 'threatened', were aborigines

of South Africa who considered themselves, and rightly so, the ‘owners’ of the land. They were threatened by those who ‘came’ into their environment for economic purposes and tactically alienated the Bantus from their land, excluded them from participating in entrepreneurial engagements that would make them economically competitive with the special group

through laws as well as regulations that changed the contours of intergroup intercourse against the ‘locals’. Before moving on to discuss the general nature of the engagements between these groups, it is imperative to have a pictorial explanation of the group classification as given below;



Diagram of the social hierarchy of Group classification in South Africa in the Twentieth Century

Imbua et al (2017) has dealt broadly but not exhaustively on the origin, settlement as well as expansion of the European population in the South Africa environment that had occasioned the inter-racial challenge for the struggle for resource control. It was essentially for economic reasons that the Dutch East Indian Company, set out to engage the peoples in the Asiatic Continent before the wreckage of their ship off the shores of the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. From the point when Dutch citizens set feet on that space, it was only a matter of time before the fruits of their inter-mingling with the Bantu people, the *Boers*, manifested signs of ‘identity integration’ to enable them carve a special place for themselves in the struggle for ‘who gets what, when and how’.

The *Boers* had recognized early enough that, there was racial superiority exerted by the Dutch and other European peoples against Africans on one hand while also acknowledging that, peoples of Africa especially the aborigines of the South African environment, were not comfortable with the ill-treatment meted on them in their own land. Since they could claim attributes of both sides, the *Boers* had to claim the superiority toga utilized by one end as well as the indigene status appeal from the other, to proclaim their group an ‘heaven sent group’ to enable them garner support from every quarter for their future endeavours. This could be likened to a popular folktale where the tortoise who was assisted to attend a feast, claimed all benefits of guests when the name ‘all of you’ was arrogated to itself since the gifts as well as refreshments was meant for ‘all of you’. In other words, the tortoise excluded others from benefitting and treated accordingly through the adorning of a general nomenclature that covers the described beneficiaries.

This paper is concerned about why such violent attacks on other black African nationals by black South Africans. This is because black Africans had not exploited, excluded and made black South Africans inferior in their own country as the structure as well as system of the economy, was crafted by Europeans without the input of Africans. The several efforts by African nationals from within as well as without the continent in solidarity of their ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in South Africa, are well noted. Via the consciousness of Pan-Africanism, which emphasizes the sameness in the history, challenges as well as destiny of all ‘black peoples’ the world over, there was massive mobilization of resources to ensure the emancipation of indigenous peoples of the country in focus from continuous ‘minority’ oppression. For Nigeria, Africa had always been the centre of her Foreign Policy approach from the administration of Abubakar Tafewa Balewa. As a result, the problems in South Africa, had always been a source of concern to the ‘Giant of Africa’.

According to Tarerefa Michael, although black nationals especially those from Sudan and other East African countries had not only lost their lives but their small businesses as well as investments in local shops and retail outlets, there had also be under-reportage of white killings and lootings especially on farm settlements and countryside. In other words, the killings, lootings and intolerable behaviour of some black South Africans, defies the attributes of a phobia as anyone as well as everyone had been at risk of attack.

The approach of writing about the happenings in the study area has no doubt, influenced the perception of various parties over the years. Eweke (2021) observed that, ‘the history of historical writings of African peoples, later took an ethnic



dimension and scholars wrote to project their cultural identity over others which was not glaring during the colonial period. This was because, the common 'enemy' was initially the colonial leadership of Britain as well as the Dutch and when independence was achieved, the enemy-mentality found worthy replacement in the ethnic groups of various countries. The battle was now over who should 'rule' or was not given enough space for meaningful engagement in the state'. More disturbing for the area in focus relates to the fact that, the shared spirit of 'Pan-Africanism', could not hold back the animosity that was witnessed in subsequent years. Before the liquidation of the Apartheid Policy in 'principle', there was black solidarity across the length and breadth of the world for the emancipation of the black indigenous peoples of South Africa. It must be emphasized that, Nigeria dubbed the 'Giant of Africa', lived up to this billing during the crusade for dismantling perceived colonial and oppressive structures in the continent. It is estimated that, Nigeria alone spent more than sixty-one (61) billion Dollars and also lost more than forty (40) million Dollars for refusing to do crude oil business with Apartheid South Africa as a show of solidarity for their oppressed relatives. More importantly, Nigerian Civil Servants as well as public office holders, contributed two (2%) of their monthly salary to the South Africa Relief Fund (SARF) established in 1976 for the purpose of bringing relief and support to black peoples of that area. Students of Nigeria origin were not left out in the nationalist pressure for freedom of the black personality in the focus space, sacrificing their meal allowances for the course. The irony in the twenty-first century as that, Nigerian educational system especially student support services, are non-existent as young individuals from the country, have embarked on the *Japa* cruise with South Africa as one of the places to find succour. It would be unfair not to mention the artistic contributions of individuals such as *Fela*, whose popular song, 'Beast of No Nations', exposed the supposed international conspiracy in instituting and sustaining the Apartheid regime in South Africa and Sonny Okosun's, 'Papa's Land', that reechoed the oppression of African peoples through their disengagement from their traditional homelands by the European Colonial enterprise. These and more Nigeria did using available opportunity in political, social especially sport and music engagements as well as religious teachings, to demand for total freedom of Black South Africans. The story does not only contain Nigeria's contributions to the anti-Apartheid course.

Countries that made up the South African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), also played critical roles in ensuring the implementation of egalitarian principles that would uplift every South African especially the Black people. Countries such as Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Angola, provided their territories as 'safe havens' for

persecuted African National Congress (ANC) officials who patriotically led the struggle. Tanzania and Zambia are singled out for provided military support for liberation front through the ANC. Even states such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, who were to a large extent, economically dependent on South African economy, encouraged the struggle for the dismantling of the rigid structural political and economic institutions against blacks. Again, it becomes disturbing to see that, despite all these efforts, the Black people of South Africa which includes the Zulu, Xhosa, Basotho, Pedi, Tsonga, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele as well as Tswana, to mention but a few, would later term other African nationals, 'STRANGERS' and become afraid of them. We cannot also forget that, these groups have strong cultural relations with their kith and kin in neighbouring countries of Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Botswana, amongst others, which begs the xenophobic classification of South African citizens' attitude of violence against others Black African nationals. South Africans are not unaware of the various peoples of Africa as well as the support freely given when needed. The problem arose from the deliberate used of ahistorical ingredients to generate amnesia about the events of the past. Thus, we have Black South Africans who are aware of the Apartheid era but not essentially about the contributions of other peoples of Africa towards the 'partial' emancipation of Black South Africans. As had been noted by a study, the 'supposed' end of the Apartheid era, ushered in the beginning of another where Black South Africans had to fill the 'enemy vacuum', with other black nationals in their environment (Eweke, 2021). In other words, since the 'whites' had withdrawn into their political cocoon, Black South Africans mistook any entity, attempting to co-own the public space with them as an enemy.

### STRUCTURAL CONSPIRACY FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The structural nature of the nation-state in Africa, is skewed to project assumptions and assertions with Eurocentric biases and colouration. In fact, the political and economic configuration of the various state entities in the 'dark continent', were crafted in the 'image and likeness' of Europe especially the projections from the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885. This is an affliction Black peoples have to deal with for the rest of their existence especially transforming the negative intentions into positive outcomes (Basil, 1992).

As evident in the History of South Africa, the state was founded on oppression and brutality against Black peoples by the Dutch and later, British colonial initiatives. In other words, the culture of violence and exclusion had been entrenched in the South African space since the entrance of European elements into her world space. Arriving in 1652, the Dutch displaced indigenous peoples from their lands and exploited

them as slaves for agricultural and mining ventures as well as domestic engagements. The British were no different from the Dutch. Their conquest of the area in the 19th century, saw the creation of four (4) colonies namely, Cape Coast, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. The history of oppressive and exploitative ventures are also suppressed as historiographic efforts by the 'invaders' are deliberate to obliterate the wrongs of the past to protect and insulate them from future restitutive activities. But the past cannot be killed so long the peoples who were parties to it, continues to exist. Even though one party might be no more, there would still be glimpses of what transpired in the past through archaeological engagements as well as slippery narratives from those who committed the pogrom. Issues of rape and sexual exploitation as well as killing black peoples for fun, are ignored and downplayed in writings about such intergroup exchanges. Like that of the slaves' plight in the Americas, the invaders exploited and violated African men, women and environment in the course of economic exploitation. Despite the fact that such questions about inhumane treatment are not addressed in official records of the colonial enterprise, the story of Sarah Bartman aptly showcases how African women were violently exploited and denigrated. The point of these exposition is that, the nature of the state structure as regards law enforcement and human rights, which are in scaled in European terms, would have triggered a process of ensuring justice was done not just to other Black Africans killed by Black South African citizens, but also, the culpability of the European colonial exploitation in South Africa as well as over the world. Thus, the writings of Europeans and western allies, avoid condemning Black South African citizens' violent actions which invariably indicts them (Geyer, 1953; Nigel, 1993). Put differently, the use of the term, xenophobic attack, on the activities of Black South Africans, is as a result of the moral burden the west have on their shoulders. The inability of the West especially Britain as well as the United States of America (USA), and European Economic Community (EEC), to stay true to the resolutions of the United Nations (See Resolution 181, 1963; Mandatory Arms Embargo, 1977; International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, 1973) is instructive. The idea of Trauma Theory, provides a rich perspective on moral and political questions arising from White-Black engagements, and the inability of the 'world' to call these killings and violence, 'Crime against Humanity' (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009).

Fundamentally, the way history was taught in South Africa, has been observed as 'problematic' (Robinson, 2018). The curriculum and teaching methods on the past of the country in focus, shows a disjointed relationship as both teachers as well as students, struggle to deliver the content as well as comprehend learning objectives due perhaps, to the obvious

elimination of perceived negative narratives that might project the 'white community' in bad light. More so, the aftermath of the post-Apartheid South Africa society, had not being studied as most textbooks ended in 1994 especially after the elections. As a result of the above, young people who were toddlers in 1994 or born after this date, do not essentially appreciate the contributions and efforts of other African-nation-states as well as implications of the Apartheid era on the inequality in wealth distribution amongst Black South Africans in particular and Africans in general.

The sum of this paper's argument is that, the concept 'xenophobia', is used mostly to 'trivialize' the enormity of crime done against various peoples from as well as beyond the African continent. One do not have to present the figures of estimated persons killed, individuals maimed as well as properties destroyed to enable an understanding of the sanctity of the human personality and lives. A humanistic appeal to the issue under interrogation, would place one in the stead of the 'casualties and deceased' to appreciate the pains and travails of those treated in the crudest and inhumane ways (Misago, 2016). When a better understanding of the agony and meanness of these violent attacks on Black African nationals in South Africa is achieved, the actions would not only be dealt with by international institutions, but also national governments whose citizens fight for the protection of their posterity.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has made sufficient work towards having a redirection on the issues of Black on Black violence, by Africans in Africa, with firm focus on the supposed 'Apartheid' nomenclature. It is observed that, the coinage of the term, excuses the perpetrators of such dastardly acts, the culpability of facing trials for the wrongs done. Also, the South African government is tacitly absorbed that, implicitly supporting these violence against humanity would enable them escape facing the issues of socio-economic deprivation of her citizens.

Eurocentric description of the actions of killing and maiming of lives as well as destruction of properties of black African nationals by black South Africans as being induced by 'fear of strangers', instead of situating it within the context of socio-economic exclusion and emasculation/manipulation by the State over the years, is typical of Western demeaning and discriminatory attitude towards Africa. As encapsulated in the Hamitic Hypothesis, Africans have been comprehended as being 'timid and uncultured' and any improvement/innovation seen in Africa since the Pre-Colonial times, was introduced by forces, external to her. In other words, Africans had not being capable of distinguishing worthwhile ventures, thereby accounting for her backwardness and underdevelopment.

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