Research Article

Xenophobia and Africa in the 21st Century: Towards a Xenophilial Framework for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Africa and in fact all of the globe is experiencing unprecedented and fast-paced changes at virtually all fronts; political, ecological and economic, among others. The almost inseparable twin phenomena of globalization and digitalization have created what can best be described an Heraclitean global society of constant flux; a society of constant change that reminds us of the Greek Logos of Heraclitus. The continent Africa in particular finds itself in a constantly evolving globe where time is of the essence and where no one waits for the other to catch up. Africa in the 21st century exists within a framework of global competitiveness and knowledge economy; a world where what you bring to the global table determines or defines your identity or place in the global village. The germane question is: is the continent Africa ready to take its place in the emergent globalized society of the 21st century? Put differently, is the continent Africa on the path to sustainable development? Are the dynamics playing out on the contemporary African continent supportive of the kind of roadmap capable of engendering growth and development? Against the background of the prevalent and contemporary experiences of xenophobia and xenophobic attacks in Africa, the paper attempts to interrogate the phenomenon xenophobia vis-à-vis the desideratum for sustainable development in Africa. The paper comes in three overlapping parts. In the first part we conceptualize the phenomenon xenophobia. With particular reference to South Africa, the second part of the paper discusses the content and consequences of the African experience of xenophobia and xenophobic behaviors and tendencies. Against a background of the need to address the threats poised by contemporary xenophobic trends and tendencies, the paper, in the third part, develops an epistemological construct xenophilia as a veritable opposite to counter narrative to xenophobia. The fourth and concluding part of the paper prescribes a xenophilial framework, which the paper argues provides a veritable tool for positioning Africa for development in the 21st century.

Key words: xenophobia, xenophilia, Africa, sustainable development.

Part 1: Conceptualization: The Phenomenon Xenophobia

Etymologically speaking the word xenophobia derives from two Greek words xeno (which ordinarily refers to foreign) and phobia (which refers to fear). Thus, technically xenophobia is used to refer to fear of that which is foreign or alien. English dictionaries variously define xenophobia as some kind of intense fear, hatred or strong dislike for anything foreign (Dictionary.com, 2019; Cambridge.org, 2019).

Arising from the phenomenon xenophobia (or xenophobism) is the construct xenophobe (or xenophobist, meaning one that may be said to be driven by xenophobic beliefs and practices). Xenophobia is then some kind of metaphysical construct founded on an attitude of hate or dislike for things, ideas or phenomena outside one's immediate culture or environment (Steinbauer, 2019). Xenophibic tendencies are grounded in some kind of sense of cultural superiority. The xenophobe considers the stranger as coming from a culturally inferior background. xenophobes are therefore individuals who are, with a passion, unwelcoming of strange, unknown and unfamiliar tradition, phenomenon or culture. For the xenophobic, a stranger or a foreigner is almost as good as an intruder or a trespasser; or an unwanted guest who has come to have on undue share of his social economic and ecological space.

Thus when conceptually analyzed, xenophobia or xenophobism has socio-cultural, ecological, economic and political dimensions. The xenophobe sees the non-indigene or the foreigner as encroaching his or her socio-economic and ecological space. By implication xenophobic attitudes and tendencies suggest some kind of fear in the face of limited or scarce resources. To the extent that resources everywhere are limited, the xenophobe is concerned with the issue of resource control or the question 'who gets what?'. The stranger or alien is viewed with disdain and suspicion.

The mentality or thought-system of the xenophobe is sketched thus: "Mr. X, a culturally inferior and unwanted alien has crossed his boundaries to compete with me (and on my soil, for that matter) for the limited pastures or opportunities that I should ordinarily have access to. If Mr. X fulfills his desires for greener pastures or better opportunities on my soil, I shall remain doomed and subservient to him (on my own land). Therefore, I must do everything to prevent Mr. X from accessing the green pastures or opportunities on my land.

The above hypothetical and xenophobic reasoning explains and characterizes all forms of known xenophobic attitudes and

tendencies through the ages. The history of xenophobic tendencies attests to this. To the Ancient Greeks, for example, foreigners were "barbarians"; that is people of low and inferior caste only fit for enslavement. (Harrison, 2002). The popular speech attributed to Manius Acilius of Ancient Rome also confirms racist and xenophobic tendencies of the Ancient Romans. For according to Manius Acilius "There, as you know, there were Macedonians and Thracians and Illyrians, all most warlike nations, here Syrians and Asiatic Greeks, the most worthless peoples among mankind and born for slavery." (Isaac, 2006)

In modern times racist and discriminatory moves have been taken against Canadians that are of the Islamic and Sikhist faith's in Canada. African Americans are also known to have faced xenophobic, racist and discriminatory challenges in America. As Cornel West notes "racism is an integral element within the very fabric of American culture and society. It is embedded in the country's first collective definition, enunciated in its subsequent laws, and imbued in its dominant way of life." (West, 2002).

Part II: Contents and Consequences of Xenophobia: The South Africa Experience

In recent times South Africa has become synonymous with xenophobia. Globally, South Africa remains perhaps the easiest referent for xenophobia attacks and xenophobic tendencies in the 21st century. Hitherto popularly referred to as the rainbow nation, that is a nation of people of different clouds and races, South Africa is today a shadow of its rainbow, a stormy and hostile environment for foreigners, and blacks in particular.

The pertinent question at this juncture is how and why did South Africa get to the status of a nation that both connotes and denotes Xenophobia? How did a country once ruled by the great humanist and pan-Africanist Nelson Mandela derail into a country of predominant xenophibic thinking and culture? Answering these questions, among others, requires that we closely analyze the content of xenophobic attitudes and behavior in South Africa. An outline of the history of xenophobia in South Africa provides a A veritable starting point for examining the content or character of xenophobia in South Africa.

Xenophobic attitudes in South Africa predates 1994, as immigrants faced racist and discriminatory attacks before the advent of majority rule in 1994. Contrary to expectations that an emergent majority rule in South Africa will birth the death of xenophobic tendencies and behaviors, the intense dislike for foreigners remained unabated. (Neocosmos, 2010). As further documented by Nyamnjoh not less than 67 people died between 2000 and 2008 as a result of xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2014).

The month of May in the year 2008 stands out as a blackspot on the calendar of Xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Series of unprecedented and wildfire-like xenophobic attacks swept accross South Africa leaving 62 people dead and several injured in May 2008 alone (Vahed and Desai, 2013)

The year 2015 was also characterized by unending xenophobic attacks which necessitated repatriation of immigrants by governments in their home countries. The language of reportage on xenophobic attacks in 2015 reflects intense fears and violence as demonstrated by this headline, among others, "Attacks on foreigners spread in South Africa; weekend violence feared" (Los Angeles Times, 2015). The results of a poll conducted by Pew Research in 2018, indicates that 62% of South Africans have the perception that immigrants constitute a burden to South Africa as immigrants take up most jobs and also enjoy social benefits. (Tamir and Budiman, 2019).

In 2019 the incidents of attacks arising from fear of foreigners reached a feverish peak as several immigrant business owners, especially Nigerian and Mozambican small shop and small scale business owners became the object of attacks (Burke, 2019). Several lives were lost and several businesses and properties were destroyed in acts best describable in Hobbessian language as nasty and brutish.

The trajectory of xenophobic attacks in South Africa is multidimensional. Almost three decades after freedom from apartheid or racist rule, the average South African still battles with questions of unemployment, poverty and inequality. The promises of Mandela and other leaders of anti-apartheid struggle remain unfulfilled. Post-apartheid South Africa has not succeeded in unifying its people of various languages, tribes and colors (or "rainbows"). South Africa is itself tribalistic; the man from the remote or rural part of South Africa is treated with disdain and suspicion in the modern town of Johannesburg. Particularly o the average black South Africa. The promises of freedom of movement, freedom of association and equal access to opportunities in a post-apartheid South Africa remain a mirage and an almost mission impossible for minority tribes.

Aside being tribalistic and unable to hold her colors (or races) together, post-apartheid South Africa continually manifests both official and informal discriminatory tendencies against immigrants. Safe the Madibo, Mandela, successive politicians, both in government and opposition, point to black immigrants as largely responsible for the woes of the average unemployed black South African. Whipping up of sentiments against innocent foreign traders and small business owners is a common feature of electioneering. Campaign promises are absolutely premised on creating more job opportunities and a better life for South Africans by addressing the vexed issue of immigrants who have taken up jobs and opportunities meant for South African.

Politicians tell the South African poor and unemployed what they love to hear. The poor are in the majority. The votes of the majority counts, and therefore the majority are not told the hard truths. The poor majority are told half truths about entrepreneurship and job opportunities. The political leadership whip up sentiments against time tested hard truths of everyday economics: job creation is a function of entrepreneurship (Amodu, 2019). The more the average South African refuses to wear the thinking cap of an entrepreneur, the more the desperate-to-survive immigrant keys into untapped

opportunities and makes a living.

One of the largest economies in Africa, South Africa is impliedly a land of opportunities. Documented and undocumented immigrants are economically attracted to do business in South Africa. Most immigrants in South Africa work in the informal sector as artisans, shop owners, petty traders, drivers, security guards and domestic servants. Thus, most immigrants work in sectors that the average South African considers menial or un-dignifying. With time and with persevered engagement in menial and informal jobs the average immigrant saves enough to live above average. Fear then sets in as the unemployed average South African feels socially and economically threatened. The following thought experiment illustrates, for example, the xenophobic reasoning of the average South African male xenophobe: Mr. X is an immigrant whose continued presence threatens my worth and personhood; Mr. X arrived here with virtually nothing and now has access to things I long for (modest comfort and lifestyle); Mr. X has even more access to my fellow South African girls than I do. If I do not act against the continued presence Mr. X, Mr. X will take over my land. Therefore Mr. X must go.

The above xenophobic reasoning is no doubt a specimen of bad thinking. The question is: what is it that the average immigrant is doing that the xenophobe is not doing? The answer is straightforward: the average immigrant, in his quest for greener pastures sees opportunities in South Africa. He sees opportunities in menial jobs, petty and small business left undone. He explores, takes risks and invests. Thus, against the narrative that the immigrant is "stealing jobs and women" the immigrant is actually creating jobs, making wealth and attracting women.

Now, there is also the narrative that immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants are responsible for frequent crimes and drug dealing. Accusing immigrants for most of the criminal and perverted acts in South Africa is an exercise in *scapegoatism.* Crimes and other social vices are known phenomena in every society, black or white. Crime has no color nor race. There exists white criminals as there are black criminals of South African and Nigerian extraction.

Targeting black foreigners as responsible for the majority of crimes in South Africa is tantamount to making black foreigners scapegoats for crimes about which they may largely know next to nothing. Scapegoatist thinking and fallacious pontifications in official and unofficial circles have resulted in colossal damages for black foreigners: loss of innocent lives, massive looting of shops, broken homes and shattered dreams, among others.

The South African experience with xenophobia puts a blackspot and stigma on Africa in a technology-driven and knowledge economy where other continents have moved ahead with the fourth industrial revolution. A country that gained neighborly support from most black African nations and communities across the world during the apartheid years, South Africa is fast gaining reputation as the most unfriendly nation to foreign blacks in the 21st century. The hostilities of South Africans towards foreign blacks is almost becoming a movement. The widespread non-hospitality of black South Africans betrays the popular South African philosophy, Ubuntuism. A humanist philosophy founded on the significance of otherness, Ubuntuism declares "I am because we are". Contemporary realities in South Africa draws a trajectory that is anti-thetical to Ubuntuism: "you must go, so we can be".

Part III: The Desideratum: A Xenophilial Framework for Sustainable Development

Africa in the 21st century still harbors a large percentage of nations that have been categorized as developing nations. Characteristic of developing nations, the nations of the Arican continent still battle with questions of basic needs for survival. Basic human needs such as water, light, food and shelter still remain a luxury for a majority of Africans. The poverty rate in most African nations is so frightening that the question of attaining the status of developed nations in the 21st century does not even appear to be the issue.

The stark realities of tribalism, racism and xenophobism within and among the nations of Africa constitute a threat to sustainable development. No people nor nation survive in an atmosphere of intense hatred or hostilities. Development is engendered in an environment of mutual love, trust and understanding. Mutual feelings of love for one another is key to development. Feelings of fear, hatred and prejudices give rise to conflictual experiences which undermine development.

Thus, for the nations of the African continent to attain sustainable development in the 21st century, they must embrace a filial framework that counters the bitter xenophobic experiences of the South African kind. As a counter-narrative to xenophobia, Africa must adopt, develop and embrace the content of the phenomenon we identify as xenophilia. Technically, we define xenophilia as intense feeling of love or likeness for foreigners. Africans must, as a matter of urgency, transcend tribalistic, xenophobic and racist mentalities. The Nigerian Yoruba must for example develop likeness for the next door neighbor of Ibo tribe and vice versa; the South African must develop a love and respect for the average Malawian immigrant in South Africa; and people of African extraction, in general, must learn to appreciate and respect people from other continents, and vice versa.

An envisioned Xenophilial Framework for Sustainable Development (XF4SD) in Africa will therefore encapsulate the following. First African leaders must think beyond present self-centered or generational interests and deliver the dividends of good governance in the interest of both present and future Africans.

XF4SD requires that deliberate intra- and inter-African projects or programs for inter-cultural understandings are vigorously pursued. Socio-cultural and economic integration, among others, becomes possible in an atmosphere of mutual respect for cultural differences. Over a period of time, a continental commitment to the delivery of well structured multi-cultural programs will lead to general subscription to an emergent African identity while also eliminating xenophobic

suspicions and also protecting tribal identities.

As a counter-framework to xenophobia XF4SD has overlapping social, environmental and economic dimensions. Sustainable development is characterized by inexorably intertwined expectations; economic and ecologic. Thus, the average African must be made to appreciate, through well grounded education and training, that the economic activities of foreigners and indigenes, likewise, have implications for the environment. Every tribe, every race and people of every continent all have potentials of being environmental pollutants.

A Xenophilial Framework for Sustainable Development will then seek to promote the idea of striking a balance between economic and ecological practices, not just among foreigners, but also among indigenous land owners.

More importantly, there exists a number of traditional philosophies in Africa which attests to the fact that Africans are traditionally xenophilial by nature. For example, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Julius Nyerere are known to have respectively developed traditional belief systems of Negritude and Ujamaa, among others. Both Negritude and Ujamaa resemble, in content and character, the humanist philosophy of the South African Ubuntuism. Thus, there exists in Africa traditional xenophilia system of beliefs and practices which can be harnessed in support of an envisioned XF4SD in Africa.

In conclusion, we declare that for Africa to actualize the objectives of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations by 2030, the leadership and followership in Africa must develop and commit to a mechanism for abolishing the phenomenon of xenophobia. On our part, we have prescribed a Xenophilial Framework for Sustainable Development as a veritable tool for *extincting* xenophobia and engendering a shared feeling of love and humanism for regional and global development.

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