Re-Visiting the May 2008 Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa

By Jephias Matunhu
Midlands State University
Department of Development Studies – Zimbabwe

Abstract

Xenophobia is a latent or obtrusive dislike of foreigners. It is anti-social and destructive of property and life. Xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which started around mid May in 2008 in the informal settlements of Alexandria claimed 62 lives. Thousands of foreigners were left homeless. What triggered the xenophobic attacks on foreigners? Better still, what can be done to stop xenophobia and xenophobic attacks in South Africa? This desktop research provides responses to these questions.

Key Terms: Xenophobia, xenophobic attack, May 2008, South Africa

Introduction

Xenophobia is a social vice that is as old as social history. It is based on the politics of exclusion, which is a feeling that foreigners are different from the nationals and so should have a lower status than that of the nationals. Xenophobic atrocities and ethnic cleansing led to the collapse of the socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Since the collapse of Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanians, Bosniaks and Croats have tended to develop a negative outlook on Serbs (Fetzer, 2000). No wonder why Serbs regarded Croatia under the leadership of Franjo Tudjman as similar to that of the fascist Ustase regime in World War II. The regime committed genocide against Serbs. Between 1641 and 1853 Japan’s national closure/‘sakoku’ policy promoted xenophobic feelings against foreigners. The policy virtually excluded and marginalized all people of foreign nationals. In 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur for Racial Discrimination Report castigated Japan’s discriminatory practices, which include difficulties in access to housing, hotel accommodation and other commercial establishments open to the public based on physical appearance and myth.

Xenophobia has also been witnessed in America. According to Fetzer (2000), Americans view foreigners with suspicion, fear and hatred, even when they needed these immigrants for cheap labour. Their illegal status makes it difficult for them to seek legal recourse in cases of labour and social disputes, lest they are arrested and deported. The alien status of the immigrants makes them more vulnerable to frequent attacks by the nationals. According to Amnesty International, the UN and The Human Rights Watch, physical attacks against Haitians by Americans have increased since 1992 and reports of lynching of Haitians surfaced as late as 2006 (Fetzer, 2000). The above author also notes that homes of suspected Haitians are sometimes destroyed and police roundups of "Haitian looking" people are conducted regularly. Americans also hated the Japanese and some
Germans during World War II. Later, the Italians and Eastern Europeans came in for their share of bias directed against them. The current climate of fear and hatred by the Americans appears to be directed towards Muslim immigrants.

Xenophobic tendencies have also been observed elsewhere outside America. During the 2007 election, the populist Swiss People’s Party (SPP) gained 29% of the seats in parliament. The party was accused of increasing racism and xenophobic sentiment by publishing a controversial poster during its campaign. The poster showed a white sheep kicking a black sheep off the Swiss flag. The SPP proposed a change to the penal code to allow judges to deport foreigners convicted of serious crimes once they have served their sentence. If the criminal was under the age of 18, the proposed law allowed the entire criminal's family to be deported as soon as sentence is passed (Crush, 2000). The above histology depicts foreigners as survivors of xenophobia and nationals as perpetrators of the violence. Little is known about the real causes of xenophobic attacks.

**Background to the May 2008 Xenophobic Attacks**

South Africa attained political independence in 1994. The first post-apartheid leader of the country was Nelson Mandela. President Mandela was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki, and in 2009 Jacob Zuma was elected President of the country. South Africa is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In terms of space, it is the largest in the region. The map that follows shows the geographical location of the country in relation to the other countries in the SADC region.

Fig 1: The Republic of South Africa in Southern Africa

The Republic has the largest economy in Africa. Migration patterns demonstrate that the post-1990 trend for African immigrants and asylum seekers has been to go to South Africa following the demise of apartheid. According to Tevera and Crush (2004), the country is a constitutional democracy with 80 percent of the people in the country being religious who believe in the biblical precept ‘thou shalt love your neighbour as you love thyself’ (Mataah, 2009). Yet in 1997, the South African Human Rights Commission
(SAHRC) identified xenophobia as a major source of concern to human rights and democracy in the country (Bronwyn, 2001). According to Landau and Jacobson (2004), in October 1998, the SAHRC launched a public and media education programme known as the Roll Back Xenophobia (RBX) Campaign. One of the unanticipated by-products of the project is a growth in intolerance towards foreign nationals.

In May 2001, then President Mbeki, in concurrence with Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) advised all South Africans to be vigilant against xenophobia. He mentioned that it (xenophobia) was fundamentally wrong and unacceptable (Crush, 2000). In May 2008, xenophobic attacks originated in Alexandra - an impoverished informal settlement in Johannesburg. The death toll in about nine days rose to 62, and tens of thousands of foreign nationals were left homeless and without property. The attacks ran contrary to the principles of Pan-Africanism which embrace ideas like ‘ubuntu’ in South Africa, ‘humwe’ in Zimbabwe or ‘ujamaa’ in Tanzania and Kenya.

There is a school of thought that links the attacks to a Third Force in South Africa. It is alleged that the force sought to oust President Mbeki from power before the expiry of his term of office. Even if the allegation was to be proved true, the question that still remains to be answered is why were the attacks concentrated in poor informal settlements like Alexandria in Johannesburg and Khayalitsha in Cape Town? Poverty might be responsible for the action. In 2006, President Mbeki correctly noted that widespread poverty disfigures the face of South Africa (Mbeki, 2006). Immigrants are more likely to accept low wages, which creates friction with the nationals. Thus, immigrants in South Africa are hated for taking jobs away from the nationals.

**Conceptualizing xenophobia**

Xenophobia is an attitudinal orientation of hostility against that which is foreign to the nationals. According to Smelser and Baltes (2001), the term originates from the Greek words (xenos), meaning "foreigner," "stranger," and (phobos), meaning "fear". It is based on existing racist, ethnic, religious, cultural or national prejudice. A xenophobic attack is a result of human nature to protect certain interests. The nature is also found in animals; there is nothing unusual about animals protecting their territories from intruders. In human beings, the interests can be social, economic, or and political. Xenophobia and racism often overlap, but are distinct phenomena. Racism is based on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair type and facial features. Yet, xenophobia is based on the idea that someone is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation in question.

Xenophobia describes an irrational dislike of strangers and a xenophobe is a person who is contemptuous of foreign peoples. According to Klaude (2001), xenophobia is one of the principal causes of violence around the world. It can also be viewed as the attitudes, prejudices and behavior that vilify persons based on the perception that they are foreigners (Declaration on Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances
against Migrants and Trafficked Persons, 2001). Xenophobic violence has specific perpetrators (nationals) as much as it has specific survivors (foreign nationals).

Xenophobia can be latent or obtrusive; in the latent form it will be suppressed within the minds of the nationals. Obtrusive xenophobia is one that is expressed openly to the foreigners. The May 2008 event was obtrusive. Eruption of xenophobic attacks on a large scale can either be spontaneous or planned. Eruption is spontaneous if the nationals participate in xenophobic attacks with no one instigating the action. Planned xenophobic attacks are those that are organized and executed according to a pre-conceived plan.

In South Africa, foreign citizens are protected from xenophobia by Article 14 of the Constitution. The Constitution declares that all the people shall be equal under the law, and that there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin. In spite of the Article, the world appears to have been shattered by the May 2008 xenophobic attacks on foreigners living in South Africa. Xenophobia does not mean that the foreigners will have done wrong. Americans hated the Irish and the Chinese nationals, but they were good enough to contribute to the development of the country by working on the railroad. The South Africans hated the Zimbabwean nationals and many other foreign nationals but they contributed towards the development of the country by taking jobs that are resented by the nationals. Such jobs exist in the mining, farming and construction industries (Crush, 2000). Immigrants have also taken jobs in the skills shortage strategic sectors such as engineering, survey, nursing, teaching and medicine which are critical in the development of a nation (Chimanikire, 2007). The push factors in the immigrants’ home countries may have given a net positive gain to the South African economy. Push factors are those that motivated foreigners to leave their home countries for South Africa; namely economic meltdown, political strife, social problems or unemployment.

**Statement of the Problem**

Xenophobic attacks are generally destructive to life and property; and they cause stress and depression to the survivors. The attacks are expensive in that they erode the material gains that might have been acquired by the survivors prior to the violence. On the part of the state, the attacks forced the government of South Africa to spend money to quell the violence and to provide relief for the displaced survivors. The other problem is that the attacks put pressure on the judiciary who suddenly find themselves with an enlarged list of cases to be tried. Xenophobic attacks destroy trust, fuels cold wars, and can become the root cause of criminality on both the survivors and the perpetrators. Xenophobic attacks send a bad image of a country around the world and scare away potential tourists and investors.
Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to contribute in the creation of a society where human life and dignity are respected irrespective of individual’s nationality. The specific objective of the study is to participate in the search for a solution to the problem of xenophobia in South Africa. The study is also valuable in that it sought to establish the factors that caused the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in the country. An understanding of these factors is likely to invoke appropriate national policies and procedures by which further attacks might be avoided in future.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The discourse discusses xenophobia using a Social Collision Theory. The theory borrows heavily from the Kinetics Theory as propounded by Peter Waage and Cato Guldberg who in the 19th century pioneered the law of mass action in chemical reactions. The theory holds that chemical reactions do not take place in the absence of reactants. Similarly, the social collision theory (SCT) holds that xenophobia is a result of social, economic and political pressure. If pressure reaches unprecedented levels; stress and depression may weigh down an individual. The point of rupture might be suicide, crime or other form of anti-social behaviour. Social pressure may vent out in the form of xenophobic attacks, genocide or uprisings. In this discourse, widespread poverty is regarded as the major driver of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The situation of poverty is more painful in communities where wealth distribution is inequitable. Halsey (1985:xxiii) notes, “society is a shared life. If some and not others are (extremely) poor, then the principles on which life is shared are at issue; society itself is in question . . .” The fact that the xenophobic attacks started in poverty-stricken informal settlements tends to substantiate the claim that poverty might be the major cause of the xenophobic attacks in question.

Research Methodology

In order to gain a comprehensive insight into xenophobic attacks in South Africa, discourse analysis was employed as the main data collecting method. Discourse analysis is more of deconstructing the literature and coming out with new interpretation. According to Spurr (1993), discourse analysis is conducted in various disciplines, with different research traditions. It is through discourses that social scientists have shaped the current truth in xenophobia. The discourse analyses covered a wide variety of sources, including texts. Data were collected from the internet, newspapers and books on xenophobia. The researcher found discourse analysis to be a powerful instrument for interrogating stances which used to be taken for granted in xenophobia, hence producing new knowledge about the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa.
Research Findings

The 2008 xenophobic attacks were linked to several causes. Most of the causes point to the failure of both the governments in South Africa and those outside of South Africa to manage society. This section highlights some of the causes of the attacks.

Poverty and xenophobic attacks

South Africa is one of the most developing countries in Africa. According to Nyawo-Shava (2008), the country is regarded as the “Europe” of Africa. However, there is a high level of racial inequality between blacks (the majority in the country) and whites (the minority in the country). Over 72 percent of the black South African citizens live under extreme poverty, which is a result of colonialism and apartheid (Ntsebeza and Hall, 2007). Extreme poverty is defined as people’s inability to meet the basic needs for human survival. The basic needs include water, clothes, food and shelter.

The striking common features in the experience of poverty are that poor people’s lives are characterized by powerlessness and voicelessness. The Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, addressing a three-day UN summit in Rome on how to help developing countries feed themselves, said extreme poverty is the most devastating weapon of mass destruction on our planet that does not kill soldiers, but innocent people including children who are not even one-year old.

Poverty triggers a state of disequilibrium in the person’s state of mind. It is this instability that motivates individuals to participate in obtrusive xenophobic attacks. According to Smith (1991) and Alcock (1993), one of the most vulnerable social groups is the unemployed people, especially the youths. The major cause of poverty among this category is lack of earned income (World Bank 2000). The poverty levels in South Africa can be traced to the political system of the pre-independence era, which marginalized Africans. According to Hope and Timmel (1995:08),

“the people in Africa before they were discovered had not invented gunpowder and may not have known the technological inventions of Europe, but they were self-sufficient in terms of food; few people went hungry except in times of famine . . . and the general level of human well-being was better than the abject poverty in which millions of people live today in these same places.”

Studies have shown that xenophobic attacks among South Africans were low during the apartheid era. Perhaps this was because of repressive laws of the regime. Xenophobia in the country increased significantly after the installation of a democratic government in 1994 (Neocosmos, 2010). This could have been a result of unfulfilled expectations by the post-colonial state in the country. Zondi (2009) observes that the new government in South Africa has failed to challenge and transform the spatial arrangement of colonialism; for instance, economic resources are still concentrated in the hands of the minority while the majority is still marginalized and there has been no integration in terms of space between the people with property and those without.
Informal settlements such as Alexandria are associated with poverty. It is the poor who cannot afford to either purchase or construct houses in designated suburbs who turn to squatter camps/informal settlement like Alexandria. As the population of the poor increases naturally and as a result of the continuous stream of immigrants feeding into the economy, the struggle for survival becomes more difficult while the competition for scarce resources and opportunities becomes fiercer. In October 2001, residents of Zandspruit informal settlement gave Zimbabweans ten days to leave the area; when they failed to do so the foreigners were forcefully evicted and their shacks were set on fire and looted. The community accused the foreigners of taking their jobs and for committing crime (The Independent Online, 2008).

The struggle for survival in a poverty-stricken environment might have encouraged the foreigners to take up low paying jobs, engage in acts of lawlessness such as prostitution, robbery, corruption and burglary. This could be one of the reasons to why the perpetrators of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks alleged that foreigners were responsible for taking their jobs as well as engaging in crime and corruption.

Effects of the 2008 Xenophobia

The 2008 xenophobia attacks had a social, political and economic effect on South Africa. The attacks sent negative signals to the organizers of the 2010 world cup. Despite the attacks, South Africa managed to host a successful FIFA world cup tournament. Xenophobic attacks tarnished the image of South Africa in the eyes of the sending nations. The government of Nigeria was reported to have assessed the damage incurred by its nationals with the intention of demanding compensation from the government of South Africa.

The xenophobic attacks led to the destruction of property that belonged to foreigners. For instance, stores and tuck shops that belong to migrants were looted and destroyed causing psychological trauma to the survivors. Some of the survivors had stayed in the country for many years. According to Nyawo-Shava (2008), some migrants had married South African women and some had established properties which they could not turn their backs on. It was difficult for the migrants to jettison and go back to their home countries. Trauma is associated with long term stress and depression, which robs persons of the zeal to work. The net effect of the xenophobic attacks was that the number of displaced persons in the country increased and this might have put pressure on the tax payers who finance the Department of Social welfare.

The government of South Africa incurred expenses as it committed resources to quell the disturbances. The government had established a Distress Grant to assist the displaced immigrants. This was a direct cost to the South African tax payers. The government also spent time and money looking after the survivors in compliance with Section 27 (1) (b) of the Bill of Rights, which states that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water and (c) to social security if they are unable to support themselves and their dependency (Bronwny, 2001). Xenophobia was capable of leading to political
unrest as the people of South Africa questioned the legitimacy of the Mbeki administration. Some South Africans queried why Present Mbeki approved the deployment of the army to deal with the xenophobic attacks. They asked questions such as, whose priority comes first to Thabo Mbeki—those of foreigners or those of the nationals. President Mbeki’s deployment of the security forces to deal with the rioters became the first such action in the post-apartheid era. When the new ANC leader (Jacob Zuma) addressed people in Johannesburg appealing for the people of South Africa to accept foreigners as their brothers and sisters, he was told to leave the meeting and take his so-called brothers and sisters away from among the nationals.

Dealing with xenophobic attacks entails dealing with the causes of the problem. It entails fighting poverty and correcting the socio-economic and political scenarios in the sending nations. The responsibility of reducing the incidence of xenophobia in South Africa should be the responsibility of the sending governments and the people of South Africa. A sending government is the home country of the foreigners like Zimbabwe, Somalia, Nigeria, Malawi, and Ethiopia just to mention a few. The governments of both South Africa and those of the sending countries needed to deal with the issue of poverty in a decisive way. This could have motivated foreign nationals to travel back to their home countries. If the political and economic crises in Zimbabwe, Somalia and other sending nations were to be resolved quickly, millions of foreigners could have returned to their countries. This would have relieved pressure on South African resources.

**Recommendations**

**Land Reforms**

South Africa and its sending nations are advised to de-concentrate informal settlements through systematic land reforms. State-assisted land reforms unlike the land market reforms, is likely to facilitate the transfer of land from the hands of the rich (who form the minority) to those of the poor (who form the majority). Such an action may benefit the poor in the informal settlements. The legal basis of the proposed land reforms is underscored by Feder’s (1987), argument that in all societies, the law can serve to freeze the existing structure of society and to give an aura of respectability and justice by ordering the reallocation of resources to the people.

There is no social justice in having a few people holding on to large spans of land while the majority is landless, poor and crowded in informal settlements. Land redistribution in favor of the poor people should be informed by applicants’ interest and potential to make a profitable use of the resource. To do so requires trust and dialogue between the government of South Africa and the poor people in the country. The current land market transfer may not be effective in reducing poverty because of numerous bottlenecks. For instance, the poor might not be able to raise the money with which to purchase land from the market (Moyo and Yeros, 2005).

Land reforms need to be systematic and informed by the needs of the poor. Poor people need to be fully involved in dialogues that aim at reducing poverty. The advantage of
Dialogue and participation is that poor people share their own perceptions of a problem, offering their opinions and ideas, and having the opportunity to make decisions or recommendations. Participation and dialogue encourage the poor people to speak own words and not the words of people who are not poor. According to Hope and Timmel (1995), building trust and dialogue in society cannot be done by pronouncements or by some “magical waving of a wand”. Dialogue and sharing of information between the poor people and the state should begin at the local level. Sharing of information should not be confused with participation. Meetings where information about new legislation and government policies is cascaded to the people are necessary but they are not the same with participation of people.

Lack of dialogue between the poor people and the not poor people may result in conflict, which might exacerbate poverty. The fast track land reform in Zimbabwe provides a model of what ad hoc land reforms are capable of achieving. Many people grabbed land because it was politically the most fashionable thing to do but most of that land was not put to good use. The ‘Mugabeisation Land Acquisition Model’ achieved a lot in a short space of time but it is doubtful if the real poor did get the land.

Land Tenure

The position of land is a major in determining poverty. If land holding is not titled, people tend to have low motivation to invest in the land (Zalewska (1992). Financial institutions also hesitate to give development loan to people who do not have collateral security. It is not only the agricultural land that is required by the poor. People’s perceived land tenure security is the main determinant of their decisions to invest on their land (Broegaard, 2005). Viable land tenure is capable of empowering the inhabitants of the informal settlements to be engaged in economic activities that may increase their income levels. Research in Kerala and West Bengal in India, Peru, Nicaragua, Ethiopia and Chile indicate that land reforms and land rights have had immediate effects on the pattern of income distribution and on the levels of poverty (Maxwell and Wiebe, 1999).

Given the importance of land in the asset portfolio of the average household in the country, increasing the poor’s control over land can have a strong and immediate effect on the welfare of the next generation. Governments in South Africa and the sending countries are advised to strengthen the poor’s land tenure rights to empower the poor to improve their lives through agriculture. Government involvement in the transition of land has to be substantial, ranging from fixing a ceiling on the size of land holdings to the establishment of the beneficiaries’ financial obligations as well as setting the type of land rights.

Corruption

South Africa, like any other part of the world faces corruption. The practice of corruption has negative connotations both in South Africa and in the sending nations. In many instances corruption is regarded as a breach of morality. The World Bank (2000) aptly
defines ‘corruption’ as the abuse of official powers for personal gain. Some politicians and bureaucrats forge a dependent patron/client relationship through which administrative decision making occurs for the benefit of the cronies themselves. The very people who are supposed to defend the poor have instead been responsible for institutionalized looting. Corruption exacerbates poverty and xenophobia. The South African Police Service has not been very helpful to foreigners, whom they have regarded as moving banks from which they can extort bribes (Landau, 2004).

The impact of corruption extends beyond the specific actions of the perpetrators. The overt result of the practice is unfinished roads, political and social turmoil, crumbling schools and crippled health systems. These negatives culminate into a depressed community. Perhaps this is what triggered the xenophobic attacks in Alexandria. A successful elimination of corruption in the development equation may result in reduction in poverty in the informal settlements. According to NGO Working Group on Migration and Xenophobia for the World Conference (2001), corruption poses a developmental challenge in that it diverts resources away from development projects. More so, in the political realm, it can seriously undermine democracy and good governance which are key pillars of sustainable development and poverty reduction. In legislative bodies, corruption suspends the rule of law. Jails and prisons are for the poor. For those that are rich, it is their money that is convicted and not them. Some rich people defeat the course of justice by corrupting the judges and the police force while the poor are convicted of crimes that they may have not committed. In public administration, corruption results in the unequal provision of services (SADC Regional Report, 2000).

Corruption also undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance. In South Africa, Tony Yengeni (the African National Congress chief whip) is being charged of corruption, forgery, perjury and fraud in the US$5 billion arms procurement deal (Dempster, 2011). In the private sector, corruption increases, the cost of business through the price of bribes themselves, the management cost of negotiating with officials, and the risk of breached agreements or detection. The sum effect of corruption is that it compromises social and economic development of a nation, which may bring about disgruntlement by the civil society. According to Ayres (1998), corruption can be curbed through high probity, transparency, accountability and answerability. It is not the duty of the state alone to fight corruption but everybody’s responsibilities (Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act no 12 of 2004). A robust education system is the main vehicle for fighting corruption in the country.

**Education**

No amount of investment in any anti-xenophobic behavior is likely to succeed without the support of an education system. The anti-xenophobic and entrepreneurship education should be part of the school curriculum right from primary school to university level (Hjerm, 2001). The education system may need to target the public so that it understands the situation that the immigrants face in their home countries. The public may be educated through the media, conferences, workshops and seminars.
A report on Open Hearings on Xenophobia and Problems Related to it, hosted by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs (2004) revealed that the South African Police Service (SAPS), the department of Home Affairs (DHA) and the Lindela Repatriation Centre displayed the highest levels of xenophobia. This is in contravention of the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of the 1996 which emphasizes the value of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights to all the people in South Africa. According to SAHRC (1999), members of the SAPS abuse their powers through arbitrary arrests and detention of foreigners; destruction of legal documents, and bribery, corruption and extortion. The Lindela Centre was also accused of violating Section 35 (1) of the Bill of Rights. For instance, security officers at the centre violate human rights through inhuman treatment such as assault and bribery of detainees (SAHRC, 2000).

A good education system reshapes the value system of a people by emphasizing on tolerance of cultural diversity, human dignity, sympathy and empathy for one another irrespective of color, creed and country of origin. Apart from being anti-xenophobic, the education system should also aim at empowering poor communities. The current education system in both South Africa and the sending nations is flawed in that it is job-seeking oriented.

Public hearings are one of the options for educating the public on xenophobia. During the public hearings people would be encouraged to express their views on the subject. Such hearings could be organized and run by the SAHRC as mandated by Section 184 (1) and (2) of the constitution. The need for such outreach is emphasized by the CASE Refugee Baseline Study of 2003 which found out that about 70% of South Africans do not like foreigners (Belvedere, Mogodi and Kimmie, 2003). The education system should also aim at integrating migrants with South African communities. Trying to lock foreigners in security camps should be a temporary measure as government tries to negotiate with the host communities on the possibility of them accepting back the foreigners. The use of force to fight xenophobia is repressive and may not yield a lasting solution to the crisis at hand.

Pro-activity rather than Reactivity by the State

One of the ways to deal with xenophobic behavior is for the government of South African to be proactive rather than reactive when dealing with social problems of this nature. The government of South Africa was not only reactionary in terms of its failure to address the above issues; it was also reactionary in that many of the 'solutions' it proffered failed to address the desperate concerns of the poor. Changes have largely been reformatory rather than being transformatory. For instance, many apartheid social structures are still in place in the new South Africa. The apartheid policy of retaining the cheap labour system in the extractive industry (mining, agriculture and construction) has seen thousands of poor foreign workers being pushed into informal settlements. The SAHRC 4th Socio-economic Rights Report noted that refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa are excluded in the housing policy (Brownyn, 2001). The ANC government is advised to make it mandatory
that workers in the extractive industry are afforded decent housing irrespective of their nationalities.

The government of South Africa is also reactive in that it deals with problems as they emerge. The insistence of Thabo Mbeki that there were no economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe was incorrect and therefore was capable of drawing attention away from the root causes of the displacement of people from their home countries. The economic and political recession in Zimbabwe, Sudan and Somalia has forced millions of people to migrate to South Africa for political and economic refuge.

Conclusion

Xenophobia is a social ill that is caused by many factors which are political, social and economic in nature. The paper identified poverty as the main driver of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The attacks claimed about 62 lives and left thousands of foreign nationals displaced in just about a week. The problem of xenophobia was explained using the Social Collision Theory. The discourse suggested measures for preventing future xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The suggestions also concern the sending nations. Above all, the success of any anti-poverty and anti-xenophobic strategy depends on the cooperation of both South Africa and sending governments and the support of their nationals.

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