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Xenophobia in urban spaces: Analyzing the drivers and social justice goals from the Ugandan-Asian debacle of 1972 and xenophobic attacks in South Africa (2008-2019)

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Xenophobic attacks have long been prevalent in post-independence Africa, as shown by the expulsion of Ugandans of Asian origin from Uganda in 1972. Post-apartheid South Africa has experienced continuous xenophobic attacks on Africans since 2008. In both cases the attacks were not framed as xenophobic by the state. Instead, they were framed within a socio-economic context, where the targeted groups were criminalized and securitised by the general population. The goal of this qualitative study is to analyse the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobia in urban spaces. This is done by looking into case studies of the 1972 Ugandan-Asian expulsion in Uganda, and the xenophobic attacks on foreigners in South Africa (2008−2019). The case studies provide key debates surrounding the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobic attacks in both Uganda and South Africa. The paper thus examines the relative deprivation in both countries, which assists in explaining the onset of the xenophobic attacks. Findings are that although the Ugandan-Asian debacle and xenophobic attacks in South Africa were triggered by drivers such as income inequality, inter-group hatred, racism, poverty, unemployment and competition for resources, the quest for social justice emanating from historical socio-economic grievances was deeply entrenched in both cases. Yet the paper further argues that rather than addressing social injustice, xenophobia perpetuates it by creating new victims and shielding the governments from the spotlight on their failings especially in addressing poverty, inequality, and overall access to economic opportunities to mention but a few. The paper recommends a need for political will to tackle xenophobia and the socio-economic challenges and a need for community dialogue and inter-community linkages crucial when dealing with grievances.

KEYWORDS

xenophobia, urban spaces, Uganda, South Africa, social justice

Introduction

Post-independence African states have been prone to intra-state violence, which has normally been on racial lines and ethnic divisions, thus denoting elements of identity and inter-group hatred, one of which is xenophobia. In its conceptualization, xenophobia is the fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013, p. 1); it resonates around discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that are likely to result in violence, abuse in all forms, and exhibitions of hatred toward particular groups in a society (Mogekwu, 2005). As such, studies based on xenophobia stipulate that there are several factors attributed to such hatred of foreigners, such as: the fear of loss of social status and identity; threats – perceived or real; a citizen's economic success; and a feeling of superiority among others (Mogekwu, 2005).

Furthermore, Mogekwu (2005) postulates that xenophobes are not well informed about the people they hate, and because they do not know how to deal with such people, they tend to perceive them as threats (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, Misago et al. (2015, p. 13) assert that xenophobic expressions vary from discriminatory attitudes and remarks to institutional and social exclusion of particular groups, to harassment and overt forms of interpersonal and collective violence.

The notion of xenophobia has close links to racism and ethnic intolerance (Adeola, 2015, p. 255); its characteristics are distinctive because they are based on the fact that xenophobia is rooted in national identity, citizenship, and a rejection of foreign nationals (Commission of the European Communities, 1993, p. 14). In addition, the International Labour Organisation (2001, p. 2) indicates that other manifestations of xenophobia comprise prejudice, attitudinal orientation, and behaviors against foreigners. However, these attitudes and behaviors do not occur in a vacuum. They can be instigated by political incitements, declining economic conditions and concerns over national security, in this modern era of terrorist attacks (Adeola, 2015, p. 255).

Although post-apartheid South Africa is characterized by this form of violence, the reality is that xenophobia is not a new phenomenon in Africa. There are evident manifestations of xenophobic attacks in Africa, such as the expulsion of foreign nationals, threats of expulsion and to a larger degree, violent attacks (Adeola, 2015, p. 255) dating as far back as far as the 1960's.

In 1972, the Ugandan government under the presidency of Idi Amin carried out xenophobic attacks against the Ugandan Asians. While between May 2008 and 2019, South Africans launched a wave of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals. In both Uganda and South Africa, xenophobic attacks occurred due to grievances over existing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, income inequality, access to property and high crime rates (for the case of South

Africa. These grievances were often blamed on immigrants (Wooldridge and Shanna, 1974, p. 1).

In South Africa, the xenophobic attacks were aimed at Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and African foreign nationals from Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Misago, 2016, p. 445). According to Nyar (2011, p. 1). They are therefore perceived as threats and unfair competitors in the struggle for job opportunities, houses, and other valuable resources that supposedly should be enjoyed by South Africans (Nyar, 2011, p. 1). Against this backdrop, the paper sought to analyse xenophobia in urban spaces by exploring the drivers and social justice goals therein. This was done in order to fill the existing gap in the literature on xenophobic attacks in urban spaces, especially drivers and social justice goal in the context of the Asian expulsion of 1972 in Uganda, and the wave of xenophobic attacks in South Africa's major cities between 2008 and 2019.

Methodologically, this article adopted an explorative research design. Qualitative methods was adopted in this paper to assist in exploring textual literature on the drivers and social justice goals from the Ugandan Asian debacle and xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The paper further relied on secondary data drawing from previously published literature. It is in this light that the article delved into the xenophobic attacks that took place in both Uganda and South Africa. This was done with the objective of presenting an in-depth analysis of the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobia. The guiding assumption of the paper was that xenophobia in urban spaces such as in Uganda and South Africa have socio-economic drivers and social justice goals. Failure to address them leads to an unending cycle of violence. The study is divided into four sections. Firstly, the paper provides the background of the study. Secondly, the paper provides a conceptual framework, a review of the literature dealing with xenophobia in Africa, and then delves into the study findings and analysis to draw conclusions on xenophobia in urban spaces.

Conceptual framework

Theoretically, the paper drew from the relative deprivation theory. This theory is closely linked to the work of Gurr (1970), who explained it as the difference between what an individual or group think they deserve, and what they actually have or receive in reality. Historically, the concept of relative deprivation can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Aristotle contended that deprivation is the ultimate driver of a revolutions and revolts, as he believed that deprivation was caused by inequality (Richardson, 2011, p. 1).

In studies of civil wars, relative deprivation explains the subjective dissatisfaction resulting from one person's relative position to the position or situation of another person's (Gurr, 1971, p. 2). According to Murshed and Tadjoeddin (2007, p. 15)

the significant difference between an individual's ambition and personal achievements can determine whether the individual is satisfied with their social status. For instance, the attainment of educational certificates raises the hopes and aspirations of young people, whereas the prevalence of unemployment will cause disappointment and might result in the formation of conflict movements (Murshed and Tadjoeddin, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, Collier (2002, p. 7) contend that relative deprivation has formed the basis of various grievance in the explanation of intra-state conflict, whereby public violence is linked to discontent emanating from the relative deprivation of political, economic or social interests.

Gurr (1972, p. 2) further notes that relative deprivation plays a significant role in strongly influencing both the behavior and attitudes of people. This includes the amount of stress experienced in communities and their political views. To a larger extent, relative deprivation and its influence are often listed as the reason for the emergence of public violence such as xenophobic attacks triggered by social discontent resulting from political grievances. By nature, these grievances may breed terrorism, urban riots, civil wars, social protests and any other form of social deviation (Gurr, 1972, p. 2).

According to Collier (2000), relative deprivation is a subjective dissatisfaction that seems to trouble many people. This dissatisfaction is caused by the comparison between one person's situation and other's situation. Gurr (1972) indicates that at times, individuals exposed to relative social deprivation feel that they deserve to have or receive the same as others. Walker and Pettigrew (1984, p. 303) postulates that this is influenced by pressure imposed by society because others may not feel equal when they miss out on receiving material benefits. Walker and Pettigrew (1984, p. 303) stipulates that these comparisons are relative because they are compared according to existing standards. Which are not absolute.

In the words of Gurr (2015), most acts of violence employed by groups of people have a negligible effect on political institutions. However, some of these acts have been enormously destructive of human life, resulting in human insecurity (Gurr, 2015). In turning the argument to ethnic lines, Gatto et al. (2018, p. 2) posit that the relative deprivation theory is at times considered to be one of the central theories in the explanation of intergroup conflict, perpetuated by grievances existing between them. This given, a major assumption of the relative deprivation theory is that a person or a group's satisfaction is partially related to their objective circumstances, while they focus on their condition relative to other people or groups that exist around them (Gurr, 2015). Therefore, in such situations where social injustice exists between people or groups, relative deprivation takes the position that unfavorable comparisons can ignite feelings of deprivation that ultimately lead to rebellion by the group that feels deprived (Gatto et al., 2018, p. 2).

The perspective provided by Crosby (1976, p. 86) is that deprivation is relative, not absolute. As such, people tend to feel unfairly treated or insufficiently compensated when they compare their present situation to some of the standards that surround them (Crosby, 1976, p. 86). Moreover, Crosby (1976, p. 86) itemized five necessary and sufficient preconditions that define a person who is in a state of relative deprivation: when an individual sees others possess a desirable X; wants X; feels entitled to X; thinks it's feasible to attain and accumulate X; and does not blame him/herself for not having access to X (Walker and Pettigrew, 1984, p. 304).

In a worst-case scenario if all five mentioned preconditions are not met, what is likely to arise are different emotions such as disappointment, indignation, or jealousy (Walker and Pettigrew, 1984, p. 304). Yet Useem and Miller (1975, p. 53) while quoting Karl Marx noted that:

> A house may be large or small; and as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut (Useem and Miller, 1975, p. 53).

Scholars like Collier and Hoeffler (1998), Collier (2005) and Hibbs (1973) have linked poverty to protest actions. Therefore, where extreme poverty levels exist, protest action and rebellion are inevitable (Collier, 1999). Poverty stricken countries are prone to host hungry, unemployed and dissatisfied populations, which often resort to protest action and public violence as a means of expressing their discontent (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998). It is in this context that the xenophobic attacks that occurred in both Uganda (1972) and South Africa (2008–2019) comprised some elements of relative deprivation. For example the existence of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in both countries translated into frustration amongst citizens who embarked on xenophobic attacks accompanied by looting of foreigners' businesses, destruction of property and infrastructure (Nyar, 2011, p. 6).

Xenophobia an ever-present challenge: review of the existing literature

Xenophobia in the global context is not a new challenge, as forceful expulsion of non-citizens by governments for socio-economic, and political reasons have been noted throughout history (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 89). Adyanga et al. (2021, p. 89) fail to highlight that, in such circumstances, it is not the government that initiates the action of expulsions, but citizens of a particular country who are of the view that their government is failing to expel non-citizens from their countries. In such cases, this paper argues that, instead of such governments taking responsibility for their citizens' actions, they tend to deny that the actions are xenophobic (influenced by ethnic differences) but are criminal in nature.

From a global context, in 1954 over one million Mexican migrants were deported back to their country from the United States of America. According to Astor (2009), the formal claim was that Mexican migrants had entered the country illegally, and thus their removal was in line with US law. Astor (2009) asserts that, through the execution of "Operation Wetback," tens of thousands of immigrants from Mexico were forcefully deported from the US. Moreover, Adyanga et al. (2021, p. 89) argued that "Operation Wetback" was executed with the cooperation of the Mexican government, which wanted the return of Mexican nationals to improve the shortage of the labor force in Mexico.

Similarly, in the African context, the evident manifestations of xenophobic violence materialized through the expulsion of foreign nationals, threats of expulsion and, to a larger extent, violent attacks on immigrants (Adeola, 2015, p. 255). The manifestation of xenophobia in Africa dates as far back as the 1960s. For instance, in November 1969, Ghana's Prime Minister, Kofi Busia, introduced the Aliens Compliance Order, (known as the Aliens Order), through which Kofi Busia sought to expel undocumented aliens from Ghana (Adeola, 2015, p. 256).

According to Gocking (2005, p. 156), "The Aliens Order required aliens who lacked work permits [to] get them within a period of 2 weeks or leave the country." This Aliens Order was triggered by general perceptions of foreigners as the cause of existing high unemployment rates that continued to serve as grievances amongst citizens of Ghana (Aremu, Aremu and Ajayi, 2014, p. 176). However, most immigrants in Ghana came from Western African countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. Amongst these groups, Nigerians constituted the majority in Ghana, and they were successful in operating businesses in Ghana, thus leading to an influx of other Nigerians. Tensions consequently started to rise in Ghana due to the increasing influx of foreign nationals, and the dreadful socio-economic conditions under which Ghanaians were living (Adeola, 2015, p. 256). Owing to the looming anti-government pressure by Ghanaians, the government adopted measures such as the Aliens Order and Ghanaian Business Promotion (GBP).

Asamoah (2014, p. 187) asserts that the GBP was established to reserve selected businesses and opportunities for Ghanaians. According to Oppong (2002, p. 26), the Alien Order "led to the mass exodus of between 900, 000 and 1,200,000 individuals from Ghana" (Adeola, 2015, p. 256). As a result of this action, Ghanaians praised the Alien Order and concluded that it was a nationalistic initiative, established with the sole purpose of ensuring that the creation of jobs was for Ghanaians only (Aremu, Aremu and Ajayi, 2014, p. 176).

Following a period of economic boom in the 1970's, which resulted in declining economic conditions in the early 1980's (Adeola, 2015, p. 256), in 1983 Nigeria expelled more than two million foreigners from the country (Aremu, 2013, p. 340). According to Otoghile and Obakhedo (2011, p. 340) amongst those who were expelled from Nigeria, over a million were from Ghana. In furthering the argument, Aremu (2013, p. 341) posited that the worsening in economic conditions was not the only reason that led to the expulsion of foreigners from Nigeria; another key factor for the expulsion was their involvement in crime in the country. In addition, Otoghile and Obakhedo (2011, p. 140) highlighted that in 1985, yet another wave of expulsions occurred, which saw 300 000 Ghanaians being expelled from Nigeria. Like the first wave of expulsions, these were triggered by worsening economic conditions which served as a basis for the expulsions (Otoghile and Obakhedo, 2011, p. 139–140).

In Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990's, former President Bédié came up with the idea of *ivoirite* as a means of responding to the declining economic situation, and sought to weave Ivorian identity into socio-economic and political access (Kimou, 2013, p. 18). This idea fuelled resentment against foreigners, hence the institutionalization of Ivorian identity led to a divided Ivorian society. According to Human Rights Watch (2001, p. 4), in 1999, between 8 000 and 12 000 citizens of Burkina Faso were expelled from Côte d'Ivoire as a result of existing tensions between Ivoirians and Burkinabe farmers.

According to Naluyaga (2013), the government of Tanzania expelled close to 11 000 undocumented foreigners in 2013. This was done in order to rid the country of criminal elements (Adeola, 2015, p. 259) whereas before the expulsion, the President of Tanzania had given undocumented foreigners a 2-week ultimatum to leave the county (Adeola, 2015, p. 259). However, the president's decision was informed by two facts. First, on the complaint "from villagers over acts of armed robbery, bus attacks, and kidnappings attributed to illegal immigrants in the area" [of Kagera] (Naluyaga, 2013). Secondly, the president's decision was influenced by the fact that undocumented foreigners "overstretched' government's ability to offer services to its people" (Naluyaga, 2013). Among those expelled were 300 Ugandan citizens, 4 100 from Burundi, and 6 400 from Rwanda (Naluyaga, 2013).

From the literature, the deprivation of native inhabitants from socio-economic and political benefits often results in acts of expelling foreigners, who are blamed for existing socio-economic and political challenges in host countries. As such, the paper occupies a gap in the literature, which is to analyse the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobic attacks in both South Africa and Uganda. This is done because in the literature, no study has combined the social and economic challenges and social justice goals of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals, and the expulsion of non-native citizens. The following section delves into the study's findings and analysis, and is divided into two parts: the first looks into the case study of the Asian debacle Uganda in 1972, while the second part of the section delves into the case of xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008–2019.

Research findings and analysis

The context of the 1972 Asian expulsion

During the period of colonization, at the time of implementing colonial economic policy, the British colonial authorities pursued a deliberate racial policy in the development of Uganda (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 89). For example, the responsibility of administration and development were perceived to be European occupations, whereas trade, commerce, and craftsmanship were granted to the Asians while native Africans supplied cheap labor to the developing cities to Armitage (2015, p. 3–4).

Following this social stratification in Uganda, three imperative developments were witnessed. First, the Asian population in the country was granted almost total control of commerce and trade, which influenced the post-independence results and saw 95 per cent of Asians controlling commerce and trade in Uganda (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 89). Secondly, the stratification created a racially politicized perception post-independence, whereby Asians were not seen as Ugandans despite the reality that they were second or third generation in Uganda. As a result of this stratification, calls were made for the Africanization of trade and commerce, causing the anti-Asian disturbances of 1945 and 1949 (Hansard, 1959).

The call for the Africanization of trade and commerce led to the formation of Trade Development Sections (TDS) in 1952, done with the aspiration of increasing African participation in the commercial sector (Hansard, 1959). Later in 1959, another disturbance led to a boycott of Asian goods, and causing anger toward the British for perpetuating Asian control of the commercial sector (Hansard, 1959). However, in the post-independence era, as a means to correct this imbalance, the government of Uganda attempted to increase African participation in commerce through legislation (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 89). For example, a Trade License Act was passed in 1969 which was intended to prevent non-citizens trading in specific items and in particular communities. According to Adyanga et al. (2021, p. 90), the Trade Licensing Act also restricted Asians from trading in urban centers, and from trading on certain streets. All this was done in an effort to accelerate the ideal of "Ugandanization" of both wholesale and retail trade, in the interests of Ugandans (Wooldridge and Shanna, 1974, p. 3).

Subsequently, although the expulsion of Asians was underpinned by considerations of economic nationalism, the quest for social justice was also fundamental for the Ugandans. For example most Ugandans were troubled by the fact that Asians had control over all sectors of Ugandan commercial life, primarily in manufacturing, importing and retail stores (Armitage, 2015, p. 4). This control prevented the emergence of an African middle class in Uganda (Amor, 2003, p. 55). In this sense, the expulsion to follow in 1972 was a ticking bomb that was bound to detonate at any time due to rising frustrations amongst the deprived native Ugandans. Moreover, instead of training Africans as administrative members, colonial authorities imported larger numbers of Asians and deployed them in the middle-level grades of the civil service, the railways and the postal system (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 90).

Furthermore, Bonee (1974, p. 136) noted that a common element of urban settlements across East Africa was the inequality among communities. A case in point was the luxurious old colonial section with its beautiful homes with well-maintained gardens. Then, in these cities, there is always a showcase business sector with modern hotels and tall office buildings (Bonee, 1974, p. 136). However, there was also a sprawling, overpopulated Asian section with family shops at street level and living quarters above, and a number of Hindu (and sometimes Muslim) temples (Bonee, 1974, p. 137). Lastly, it was the poor sections which were occupied by Africans who came to the city after migrating from their traditional farming villages in a quest for a better and more exciting life in urban spaces. These Africans lived in crowded shanty towns of wood, mud and tin roofs.

Besides, in Uganda, there were differences between incomes earned by Africans and Asians for the same job. This was a salary practice that was structured and determined by race. Hierarchically, the Europeans were at the top of the scale, followed by the Asians in the middle, with Africans at bottom of the hierarchy (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 90). In addition, in the words of Tandon (1973, p. 4) "an average Asian male in private industry earned about six times more than an average African earned."

It is clear from the above narrative that in Uganda at the time of Idi Amin, social injustices existed that led to Ugandan resentment, while the native Africans were the target of racial discrimination prior to the expulsions (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 90). For example, Ugandans who were equally as qualified as Europeans were paid far less in salaries than their white counterparts for the same job. Armitage(2015, p. 5) further contends that in other instances, Ugandans were being placed to work under the supervision of whites who were not qualified for the positions they held. For instance, there was the case of a native Ugandan who went to Cambridge University and graduated with an honour's degree in education, and was supervised by the son of a white European planter who had merely acquired a diploma in education (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 90)

Moreover, Bonee (1974, p. 173) contends that the dominance of Asians in Uganda was widely spread as they had almost a total monopoly on all imported goods – from Scotch whisky to hair shampoo. In the words of Wooldridge and Shanna (1974, p. 3), Asians served as middlemen for the sale of crops brought to town by African farmers. As Tandon (1973, p. 4) noted, Asians sold and mended clothes, and the Africans hated them with an immeasurable passion (Adyanga et al., 2021, p. 90).

Even with the challenges that emerged post-independence, the colonial social stratification sowed the seeds of grievance that emerged between the Ugandan-Asians and the rest of the Ugandan population. The decision by Amin to get rid of the Asians did not solve the economic issues of the Ugandan population. The respite was temporary, especially as most people who took over the businesses owned by Ugandan-Asians did not know how to manage them. With the Asians gone, new enemies were sought; for example, Idi Amin claimed that part of Kenya belonged to Uganda. He then invaded Tanzania in 1978, after claiming that part of the Kagera region belonged to Uganda. The expulsion of Ugandan-Asians was a populist policy that contributed to the collapse of the Ugandan economy and the conflicts thereafter.

The dynamics of xenophobic attacks in South Africa (2008–2019)

South Africa became a new nation in 1994, born out of democratic elections and declared as the "Rainbow Nation" by the first democratic president, Nelson Mandela. By nature, this proclaimed "Rainbow Nation" was bound to represent a fundamental change in the social, political and geographical landscapes of the past (Harris, 2002, p. 169). This being the case, in post-apartheid South Africa, unity replaced segregation, while equality replaced legislated racism, and *de jure* democracy replaced apartheid, because *de facto* the country was subjugated to high inequality, seen through racial lines (Misago, 2016, p. 446). Consequently, despite the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, post-apartheid South Africa is marked by prejudice and violence that continues to plague contemporary South Africa (Harris, 2002, p. 169).

The ANC-led government has seen new discriminatory practices of violence on foreign victims. According to Harris (2002, p. 169), the foreigner stands at the site where identity, racism and violent practices are reproduced. Within this perspective, this section attempts to look into the rising levels of violence that are presently directed at African foreigners and non-African nationals in South Africa. Thus, the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobic attacks in South Africa are addressed in this section.

Xenophobia in South Africa is driven by several factors, according to Pillay (2008, p. 99). Among the drivers of this xenophobia is the South African government's inability to tackle the crisis of unemployment and inequality. Mmusi Maimane, the then parliamentary leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), claimed that "the root of this problem lies in our inability to bring about economic growth and decrease the inequality that plagues our nation." In support of these claims, in their studies Landau (2011, p. 3) and Misago (2016, p. 449) argued that the post-apartheid government had, on various

occasions, failed to meet their promises made to constituents about the development of South Africa and improvement of the lives of every South African. Thus, being faced with the reality of these unrealistic promises, some black South Africans became frustrated at being spectators rather than participants in the rich lifestyles of some of the black South African elites (Pillay, 2008, p. 99).

Consequently, resentment boiled over, resulting in violent attacks on foreign nationals who were blamed for the misfortunes of the poor black South Africans (Bearak and Dugger, 2008, p. 2). Pillay (2008, p. 100) added that due to the aspirations of poor black South Africans on seeing the lavish lifestyles of some black South African elites, xenophobic attacks manifested through a series of violent attacks on foreign nationals, resulting in killings and the stealing of their properties (Hayem, 2013, p. 78).

According to Everatt (2011, p. 7), social problems such as unemployment have been one of the challenges that the post-apartheid government has had to face. Foreign nationals in South Africa have tended to worsen this situation by forming a pool of cheap labor, that sees many of these foreigners widely employed in different sectors throughout South Africa (Nyar, 2011, p. 5). In this case, the foreigners provide cheap labor to their employers, and for that reason they tend to out-compete the poor black South Africans when competing for jobs (Everatt, 2011, p. 3). For instance, foreigners with formal qualifications stand a better chance of being granted a job in South Africa, as it is believed that they excel in whatever job or business in which they operate, as opposed to their fellow poor black South Africans who were economically disadvantaged by the then repressive regime of apartheid (Bearak and Dugger, 2008, p. 2). In addition, Solomon (2019, p. 159) contends that regrettably in this case, foreigners have always been ready to accept cheap labor jobs whenever employment opportunities arose, making them stand a better chance of employment than native South Africans, who expect higher salaries (Solomon, 2019, p. 160).

According to Bearak and Dugger (2008, p. 2), the deprived black South Africans became frustrated over not only the fact that some of the black elites in South Africa were living lavishly, but many became frustrated over the fact that foreign nationals, who lived beside them, were far better off (Pillay, 2008, p. 100). In this regard, the paper argues that the turn to violence and the exclusion of foreign nationals in South Africa is rooted in vast frustration, social inequality, and the prevailing political relations in the country's political landscape. Moreover, according to Cooper (2009), the acts of looting are situated around their aspirations of social inclusion (social justice) and the modern urban lifestyle in their democracy, which have failed the poor black communities (Cabane, 2015, p. 58).

In South Africa, foreign nationals are targeted in such a way that resorting to law enforcement and the police is not viable (Nyar, 2011, p. 12), because some of the perpetrators of crime toward immigrants are in cahoots with members of

the South African Police Service (SAPS). On the other hand, the South African Police Service (SAPS), with the assistance of South African citizens, has also targeted foreign nationals who are undocumented but living in South Africa, thus making their stay in the country miserable (Hicks, 1999, p. 402). In condemnation of the justification of xenophobia against immigrants, the then South African Minister of Police, Nathi Nhleko, was quoted by eNCA (2015) as uttering these words "poverty and unemployment are not justification for attacking foreign nationals. We are all human beings and as a result we only have one heritage that we share, and that's humanity. That is the starting point."

It is believed that the May 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa was triggered by a human "tsunami": a mass influx of foreigners into South Africa during the period preceding the violence, and the general breakdown of national border controls (Misago et al., 2009, p. 29). Local communities in South Africa felt overwhelmed by the influx of foreign nationals, and with the high number of new arrivals from Zimbabwe.

From the perspective of an *induna* (chief) and the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in Madala hostel in Alexandra (Gauteng), proclamations were made that the influx of foreigners to South Africa was causing unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty (Nyar, 2011, p. 13). The failure of government to respond to these challenges, propelled the community to address them. In the words of an *induna* (chief) and leader of the IFP in Madala hostel in Alexandra (Gauteng):

> The government is now pampering them and taking care of them nicely; as long as the foreigners are here we will always have unemployment and poverty here in South Africa […] there was no poverty and unemployment in South Africa before the influx of foreigners […] there is too much of them now, if the government does not do something people will see what to do to solve the problem because it means it's not the governments problem, it is our problem (Misago et al., 2009, p. 29)

Drawing from the above statement it is evident that residents from different communities in South Africa felt overwhelmed by the current immigration levels in their country. Hence, in justifying their actions, the perpetrators of violence argued that their actions served as attempts to compensate for the lack of border control (Misago et al., 2009, p. 29). The May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa have in part been attributed to incompetent border management. For instance, the Institute of Race Relations argues that: "Poor policy decisions and simple incompetence in border policing … contributed directly to the presence of a large illegal population in South Africa. Without adequate legal standing in the community, these people became easy or soft targets for mob violence" (Nyar, 2011, p. 23)

The wave of May 2008 xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals and strangers erupted in South African townships and informal settlements (Nyar, 2011, p. 2). The initial outbreak of violence resulted into looting and burning of properties (Cabane, 2015, p. 58) in Johannesburg and rapidly spread throughout the country (Misago, 2019, p. 646), predominantly in South Africa's major cities of Gauteng, Cape Town and Durban. The wave of violence led to 62 deaths, hundreds were wounded, and between 80, 000 and 200, 000 people were displaced (Cabane, 2015, p. 58). Misago et al. (2009, p. 29) recorded that more than 500 shops were looted or burnt down and that about 100, 000 African migrants, refugees, and citizens were displaced (Misago et al., 2009, p. 29).

At the epicenter of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, is the fact that the country is following a path of racism, directed particularly toward African migrants (Choane et al., 2011, p. 132). Solomon and Kosaka (2013, p. 2–5) assert that this insidious hatred of immigrants by South Africans derives from drivers such as the fear of losing their social status and identity, and the conviction that foreign nationals pose economic threats to the native South Africans and their feelings of superiority (Solomon and Kosaka, 2013, p. 5). Consequently, the existing widespread fear of foreigners seems to be strong in South Africa.

With reference to the 2009 xenophobic attacks that broke out in the Western Cape, specifically in De Doorns, thousands of foreigners, many of whom were from Zimbabwe, abandoned the shacks in which they had been living (Nyar, 2011, p. 7). This occurred after violent confrontations with local residents who claimed that foreigners were robbing them of seasonal jobs on farms in the De Doorns area (Choane et al., 2011, p. 132). According to Misago (2009), in November 2009, about 2,500 Zimbabweans nationals at Stofland, an informal settlement in De Doorns (Western Cape Province), took refuge in government buildings after many of their shacks (informal dwellings) were attacked and destroyed by local residents.

According to Burns (2008, p. 120), although South Africa is perceived to be one of the continent's leading economies and perhaps the most industrialized, the reality is that the country is still challenged with severe inequality and discrimination. This is clearly seen in the allocation of wealth in socio-economic spheres. As a result of this disparity in terms of distribution of wealth and resources, an unacceptable gap between the rich and the poor has been created and sadly, this reality serves as a driver of resentment amongst South Africans, especially poor black South Africans (Solomon, 2019, p. 158). These grievances are based on insecurity and annoyance over the lack of service provision – if any service provision at all – their housing conditions and the lack of government consultation with the populace. The existence of these social injustices within poor black communities in South Africa served as trigger for the violence toward migrants that ensued, because they often are caught in the cross-fire when citizens act out their frustrations against their government. Instead of challenging the government directly and engaging in dialogue in municipal spaces, South Africans often resort to attacking soft targets such as foreigners,

who are blamed for government's failure to provide basic service to its people.

Thus, in attempting to address social injustices, acts of xenophobia create more of the same by victimizing more groups. Heywood (2022) notes that people who engage in xenophobic acts (like the poor) are victims too yet their attacks on foreigners insulate the business elites, and government whose culpability is veiled crocodile tears and well-guarded house complexes. The failure to adequately address the social inequalities set in motion by the era of apartheid has created one of the most unequal societies in the world.

A case in point; the economic hardships that South Africa faces, denote the roles played by the different eras (apartheid and post-apartheid eras) within different political dispensations, which have contributed to the history of inequality in the country (Zondi, 2008, p. 28). In addition, Zondi (2008, p. 29) further argues that the characteristics of most poor settlements on the margins of major urban cities house overcrowded and poverty-stricken populations that are socially alienated. The dominant group in the poorest of the poor is the black youth, who compete fiercely for limited resources. This being said, it is clear that the existence of economic inequality has major effects on how people behave, especially when taken within the context of relative deprivation, the position of one person is compared closely to the person next to them. When people feel dissatisfied with what they experience in reality compared to what they expected, then frustrations boil over and violent action and criminal activities prevail, including xenophobic attacks (Gurr, 1970).

Misago (2016, p. 457) contends that South Africans tend to bark up the wrong tree, because instead of addressing their socio-economic challenges through political channels, they resort to criminality by looting funds and belongings from foreigners in their country. Thus, Mongale (2022, p. 13) argues that during South African protest actions, foreign nationals are often attacked with the intention of stealing their belongings. This being the case, Mongale (2022, p. 14) adds that there is interconnectedness between urban riots and criminality. For, in their quest of social justice, when embarking on protests, South Africans have a tendency to perform criminal acts such as looting, arson, vandalism and physical fighting. Hence, Mongale (2022, p. 14) went further and questioned whether South African protests are executed under social discontent or whether they are merely a tool used to embark on criminal activities while hiding behind the lack of social justice.

Hence in pursuit of social justice, xenophobia creates more social injustices especially as the attacks on foreigners not only affect them but the South Africans they interact with as employees for businesses, family for example wives/husbands and children. This in the end creates a cycle of social injustices especially as foreign nationals who may be the key bread earners are either killed or forced to flee South Africa leaving employees and families destitute.

Considering the foregoing, the key question to be posed is: why are foreigners always the first target of the working class in times of economic turbulence? Nell (2009, p. 235) states that foreigners are often attacked because they are hardworking, and that the government is usually patient with foreigners when the country's economy is flourishing. Consequently, when the economy is in a downturn, foreign nationals become easy targets to blame. On the other hand, Choane et al. (2011, p. 132) indicated political drivers for xenophobic attacks, that include failure by the state to achieve human development; poor services and collapsing infrastructure; and high poverty rates – all of which proved to be justification for violent xenophobic attacks which resulted in urban (in) security throughout the whole country.

Hence socio-economic issues are governance related and need political responses. Yet the political class has been fundamental in fuelling xenophobia as this keeps the discourse from government failings to foreigners. Though the space to maneuver for the political elites is in constant flux especially as more foreigners flee the country. With little or no enemies to blame the spotlight will return to the governance challenges as witnessed during the #feesmustfall (Sempijja and Letlhogile, 2021) and service delivery protests.

Conclusion

The paper has noted that for many years, the issue of xenophobia has been one of the pressing challenges that continues to plague political life in post-independence African states. Drawing from the cases in South Africa (2008–2019) and Uganda (1972), the paper argued that these series of violent attacks against foreign nationals did not occur in a vacuum. Mostly the attacks were linked to socio-economic grievances such as poverty, unemployment, poor service delivery, inequality, high crime rates, and rapid urbanization. Consequently, the prevalence of socio-economic inequalities in both Uganda and South Africa precipitated attacks on Asian-Ugandans and foreign nationals respectively, leading to threats to personal security such as loss of life, expulsion from the country as well as poverty and hunger, lack of access to healthcare services, population displacement and post-traumatic disorder. The paper hence argued that the drivers and social justice goals of xenophobic attacks tend to impact negatively on urban security and have led to insecurity in urban spaces. Besides, rather than addressing social injustice, xenophobia perpetuates it by creating new victims and shielding the governments from the spotlight on their failings especially in addressing poverty, inequality and overall access to economic opportunities to mention but a few.

In order for this challenge to be avoided, there is a need for governments such as that of South Africa to improve the implementation phase of its National Development Plan (NDP),

which serves as a framework which directs state developmental goals. Failure by governments to adopt social and economic policies that seek to improve the standard living of constituents, leads to resentment and frustration. As the relative deprivation theory argues, the deprivation of people from socio-economic gains creates room for rebellion, rioting and protesting. In practice, foreigners who are living in host countries often bear the brunt of violence as they are used as scapegoats for any misfortune that citizens of their host countries are experiencing. The events of the 1972 Asian expulsion in Uganda should have been a lesson to contemporary South Africa that the existence of inequality in a society is the main trigger of xenophobic attacks against foreigners who have limited political rights and are seen as soft targets.

A number of lessons can be drawn for other countries especially the reduction in unemployment as it is a major threat to socio-economic stability (Onifade et al., 2020). Further impetus should be put on reducing inequality within the population as this breed more instability. Xenophobic attacks or expropriation of property are facades that may be packaged as viable redress but end up creating more victims thereby perpetuating more grievances and possible future violence.

Therefore, there is a need for political will to deal with xenophobia and not merely call it criminality. The fact that it has been taking place since 2008 in South Africa is an indication of how serious a threat it is especially in urban spaces. The political will should go further in providing restitution to families that have been affected by xenophobia and create a safe environment for people of all nationalities. For example, Uganda in 1994 had to invite the Asians that had been expelled and offered them compensation (Lacey, 2003) for the businesses they lost. Since 1994 the Asian community has been able to thrive and is currently fundamental to the economy of Uganda.

Moreover, as government and civil society interventions have largely struggled to stem xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Misago, 2016) there is a need to adopt community dialogue and inter-community linkages especially when dealing with grievances. Community dialogue is vital for creating a communication line between different groups to resolve conflicts or differences that may emerge. For the case of South Africa issues have revolved around sale narcotics and engagement racketeering and prostitution by some foreign nationals. The lack of inter-community dialogue has often resulted into mob justice and arson attacks on suspected groups and even innocent ones. Therefore, presence of community leadership is vital in engaging with law enforcement arms to properly deal with such matters when they arise.

Inter-community linkages can take the form of inter-cultural engagement like arts, entrepreneur projects and joint community activities vital in creating melting pots and reducing formation of separate communities within the same area. The creation of inter-community linkages thus opens up space for multi-cultural co-existence and interactions. For example, since their return to Uganda, Asian-Ugandans have revamped their relationship with black Ugandans through improved working conditions (Dawood, 2016).

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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