

An Autopsy of Xenophobia and Xenophobic Attitudes Inherent in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa

S.M. Kang'ethe¹ and Nontsikelelo Wotshela²

Social Work Department, University of Fort Hare, P/B X1314 Alice, 5700, South Africa

E-mail: ¹<skangethe@ufh.ac.za>, ²<nmajola@ufh.ac.za>

KEYWORDS Competition over Resources. Cultural Diversity. Anti-xenophobic Education. Immigration and Refugee Tenets. Advocacy and Lobbying. Xenophobic Episodes/Sentiments

ABSTRACT This paper, through a systematic review of literature debates the underpinnings of xenophobia and xenophobic attitudes in institutions of Higher learning. Findings reveal the following underpinnings: diversity clash; competition of resources; intercultural competition; cultural shock; and poor state of internalization policy. The paper recommends: South African government to appeal to all cadre of its leaders to work to address the state of xenophobia; using the institutions of Higher learning as a platform to mainstream anti-xenophobic education; fostering and reinforcing education on immigration and refugee laws and tenets; educating families on xenophobia and xenophobic dynamics; government to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of the anti-xenophobia campaign; and embracing and operationalizing the tenets and spirit of truth and reconciliation. The paper recommends to the government, NGOs, peace preaching private bodies and individuals to strengthen anti-xenophobic campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

Although the phenomenon of xenophobia is as old as history, it is increasingly becoming a topical and a critical topic in the 21st century especially in the developing part of the world, South Africa being at the epicenter of focus. This is perhaps because of the human rights violation it is associated with and possibly because it forms a potential to tear apart bilateral and multilateral peace agreement that countries solidly hold (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). According to the Oxford Mini School Dictionary (2007) xenophobia "is a strong dislike of foreigners". This means that societies that embrace these attitudes are likely to detest, reject and even possibly go ahead to do heinous acts to hurt them. Perhaps this is why most incidences of xenophobia resort to hurting and doing all sorts of inhuman treatments. Perhaps a departure of the meaning could also imply a state in which some segments of the population, usually of lower socio-economic backgrounds, though citizens of the same country feel unwanted, stigmatized and demeaned by other groups, usually of better socio-economic and class backgrounds. However, some scholars see violence and xenophobia as inextricable phenomenon. This is probably why Kollapan (1999) in Harris (2002) warned that we should not separate xenophobia from violence and physical abuse. According to him,

the concept xenophobia must be reframed to incorporate its practical results or impacts to the victims. Nevertheless, xenophobia is xenophobia and investigating the underpinning factors in different contexts is welcome, not only for that particular geographical context, but also for other contexts to replicate the good practice (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013).

To this end, these researchers contend that exploring the state and phenomenon of xenophobia from the lenses of different stakeholders in the arena of the institutions of higher learning with both local students and staff as well as staff and students of other foreign nationalities is critical and could help unearth an array of underpinning factors that continue to fuel the phenomenon of xenophobia. Hopefully, these researchers consider such an investigation both a pertinent one and a panacea because its results could help the institutions of higher learning to possibly come up with possible mitigation factors.

Also, that these researchers are informed by the intermittent and sporadic xenophobic episodes that have become a common phenomenon in South Africa especially after the much internationally, regional and nationally acclaimed 2008 xenophobic attacks directed towards the Black immigrants of African origin (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). The researchers are also prompted by the fact that South Africa

remains one of the most popular study destinations for students from other countries (Van Wyk 2009). The availability of scholarship especially in most of the formerly disadvantaged universities in these researchers thinking, is also a critical luring factor to many students of foreign nationalities. This should take the readers to view the South African institutions of higher learning from another angle that they embrace diversity and therefore investigating the phenomenon of xenophobia in the institutions of higher learning is therefore critical, topical and urgent. Having stated the above, the focus of this paper is on the academic effects of xenophobia on university students.

Problem Statement

Observation from these researchers who are university lectures coupled with various literature sources indicate that South Africans are increasingly harbouring and embracing xenophobic experiences and disposition to individuals of other nationalities. This has been evident through experience and observation of circulated discriminatory posters at some universities loaded with insulting xenophobic undertones and insinuations to students from other foreign nationalities. These are symptoms and the grains of xenophobia that these researchers consider harmful to national harmony and co-existence. This phenomenon and experience have motivated and elicited interest to these researchers to investigate and document the magnitude, form and state of xenophobia evidenced through literature review, observations and experiences pertaining to the institutions of higher learning. The justification of this study is also driven by these researchers' worry and concern that xenophobic behaviours and their spinoffs could be carried over to places of work where these students will work, and also in communities where their parents, relatives and other important individuals in their lives live.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a systematic literature review one, whose aim is to elicit debate and discourse on the environment of xenophobia in the institutions of higher learning; and other domains with the hope of coming up with plausible strategies to address the phenomenon in the institutions of higher learning. The paper has used

documented literature from various xenophobic episodes, books, journals on the domain; and the knowledge and experiences of the lecturers on the subject, one who is a South Africa national and the other a permanent resident of the country.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Pertinent Evidences of Xenophobia in the Institutions of Higher Learning

Diversity Clash

In simple and viewed from the lay man's lenses, diversity is existence of phenomena in different kinds, types, shapes, forms, genres etc. The concept also embraces a commitment to recognize the diverse characteristics that make individuals different from one another. Taking the example of diversity from the institutions of higher learning, it would reflect the difference and existence of students embracing and displaying differences in religion, race, origin, gender, socio-economics, culture etc. (Afolayan 2004; Kang'ethe 2013, 2014a). These students are rendered different because of their differences in values, histories, socialization, beliefs, cultures, gender, and the sexual orientation they espouse. Diversity, therefore, creates different demands. As much it offers different opportunities for different people to express their views, aspirations and factors such as religions, diversity could pose some dangerous spinoffs and therefore needs to be handled with great care and precaution. This is to ensure that its impact does not present pinching and horrendous spinoffs that could easily jeopardize a harmonious existence (Kang'ethe and Rhakudu 2010; Kang'ethe 2013, 2014a).

Generally, individuals are the product of both their cultures and socializations (Afolayan 2004; Kang'ethe 2009). It therefore remains an incontrovertible fact that individuals tend to cling to the ways they know things work, get attracted to use the language they are very familiar with and tend to display the attitudes they may have inherited from their parents, relatives or ancestors. Therefore, wherever and whenever people of different regions, races, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and other parameters come together, there are always possibilities of diversity clash. This could always be a platform of

xenophobia or xenophobic oriented treatments and reactions (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013; Lackey et al. 2012). However, these researchers feel that the way the students of other nationalities are treated could be a potential of eliciting pangs of xenophobia. For example, when South African students are told they cannot get accommodation because it is kept for students of other nationalities without adequate explanations, they feel that the university and the country was sacrificing their students in preference to students of other foreign nationalities. The South African students and the desperate situation they may be facing with the problems of accommodation in universities some may not bring or persuade them to understand that the government through the universities has pacts with foreign governments to give particular places and spaces to their students. In the same vein and measure, the South African students may not be brought to understand that such transactions were already sealed by monetary exchange and the university had to honour the obligation. Perhaps the administrators and other forums of information dissemination is necessary to explain such kind of phenomenon in order to avoid South African students building xenophobic sentiments based on faulty understanding of the operations of their university.

Competition Pertaining to the Resources

In many settings of different countries, there appears an inextricable relationship between the state of xenophobia and assumed or real competition of the resources. This is a scenario that cuts across many countries and continents (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). For example, a study on refugee children conducted by Livesey (2006) found that the participants experienced xenophobia in schools perpetrated by their classmates and teachers. For example the refugee children reported being called by the derogatory names such as "makwerekwere" (the derogatory term used by South Africans for the Black African foreign nationals) by South African children at school. This made them feel ostracized and unwanted. In the same vein, Timngum as cited in Livesey (2006) claimed that some of the teachers take sides with the South African children and comment negatively about countries of origin of the foreign students. Likewise, Ramphele (1999) also conducted a study on the ex-

periences of international students in the South African universities. The findings suggested that in 1996 alone, 13,606 foreign students were studying at South African Universities and Technikon. She also found that the presence of international students in South African tertiary institutions had precipitated various types of challenges related to xenophobia. Such challenges manifested in either prejudices or acts of violence. According to Ramphele's study above, the following reasons contribute to the tensions between the South African students and those of other foreign nationalities. These include competition for sponsorships, accommodation, tutorship as well as leadership positions in the universities.

In terms of sponsorship, for example, international students constitute the majority of those who receive university grants. Such kind of gesture afforded to students from other foreign nationalities prompt the South African students to complain that students from outside South Africa are treated better than them by their university and by extension their country. While the South African students may fail to process the fact that most of these sponsorship such as the postgraduate ones are linked to performance and qualification, their interpretations of the phenomenon make them feel cheated and fooled, and hence become prone to elicit and harbor xenophobic ideas and tendencies. Sometimes because of the fact that the academic systems from foreign countries is stronger or prepare their students better than the South African's Matric system, with the effect that some students from these countries perform better than their South Africa compatriots, the South African students may feel that students of other foreign nationalities are praised, recognized and applauded by the staff for doing better than them. This has been apparent when students of foreign nationals display a great likelihood of attaining better grades compared to their South African compatriots. A case in point is exemplified by 2013 graduation when all the 8 cum laudes in the Bachelor of Social Work at the university of Fort Hare were attained by students from other nationalities (University of Fort Hare 2013). In this context, it is pertinent to make it clear to all the students that there are always preferences and rewards that are associated with better performance in any occupational setting, with educational setting following suit (Lawler 1994). It is to this

understanding that Kang'ethe calls for different contexts to recognize the role of incentive to the workforce in order to keep the spirit of motivation and accruing great dividends (Kang'ethe 2011).

Inter-cultural Competence

Culture, according to Kang'ethe (2009, 2014a) is the mirror of any society. This is because cultures have been empirically validated to determine the dos' and don'ts of any group of people; as well as to determine attitudes and a certain terrain of thinking. Cultures ground any group of individual in their particular cocoon that could be socially, morally, religiously and otherwise, different from other organized groups (Kang'ethe 2009, 2014a; Afolayan 2004). To this end, Shindondola (2002) asserted that the South African students lack information on their history, culture and heritage. This, in his contention is a stronger factor that sets the stage for xenophobic sentiments between the locals and students of other foreign nationals. Shindondola further claimed that the South African universities have failed to enlighten their students about this rich account. In these researchers reaction to Shindondola's assertion, perhaps a visionary response to the challenge is to have the institutions of higher learning continually and frequently organize educational events which shows the impact that colonization had in Africa. To say the least, colonialization, and in South Africa, the apartheid legacy cannot escape the blame of being disorganized and interfered with the cultures of people of the developing part of the world. If these researchers are to agree with Kang'ethe's contention (2014b) that cultures are a panacea executing the role of being an identity marker, this means then, that apartheid could have done immense damage to the process of making the South Africans enjoy a stronger culture. Although cultures are also dynamic, the extent to which cultures maintain their strong roots and identifiable unique norms and ethos as pointers of a particular society is critical (Kang'ethe 2014b). These researchers also would like to have aspects of culture resuscitated and strengthened through the observance of days such as the Africa Day as a platform to learn about different cultures in the African continent and their significance. For Jones (2009), inter-cultural competence

amongst students can also be acquired through social integration.

Inextricable Relationship between Cultural Shock and Xenophobia

In this discourse, cultural phenomenon cannot escape being attributed to states of xenophobia or forming a recipe of xenophobia among the students in South Africa. This is probably why some scholars indicate that culture is the mirror of the society, informing attitudes, thinking, do's and don'ts in many societies of the world (Kang'ethe 2009). To this end, some authors indicate that some students exhibit xenophobia as a reaction of exposure to different and strange cultures. To elaborate the inextricable relationship between cultural shock and xenophobic tendencies, Furhnam (2004) conducted a study on the foreign students and cultural shock in Europe and found that students were experiencing difficulties associated with cultural shock such as not being socially welcomed by host students. Oberg (1960) in Furhnam (2004) defined cultural shock as a phenomenon displaying the following characteristics: strain due to effort of making psychological adaptations; a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to friends and possessions; being rejected by or rejecting members of new culture; confusion in role and values; anxiety and disgust after becoming aware of the new cultural differences; and feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment. One of the recommendations of this study was that in order to buffer the negative impacts of cultural shock, forming meaningful friendship networks with host students was pertinent. The foreign student family stability and support also counted as beneficial in preventing experiences of cultural shock. Bochner et al. (1977) in Furhnam (2004) suggested a functional model for friendship network for foreign student as a possible panacea to counter cultural shock. Importantly, fostering and forging primary mono cultural network of close friendships with fellow foreign students in order to maintain and express their own cultural values is central. Secondly, forging and fostering a bicultural network, where foreign student becomes friends with significant host students and academics in order to succeed and adjust to new cultures is of central importance. Thirdly, forming multicultural network which provides

companionship for non-cultural and recreational activities, is even a significant endeavour to surmount cultural shock.

Poor Internationalization Policy in the Institutions of Higher Learning

Each South African university ought to have an internalization policy in their midst. The objective of this legislative framework is to regulate the admission, retention and throughputs of the international students. These policies should be in line and based on the existing immigration policies of the country. Mashiri (2010) argued that policy legislations such as Refugees Act No. 130 of 1998 as well as Immigration Act of 2002 are not adequately mainstreamed in the institutions of higher learning. And even in case these policies are in place, some prove to be discriminative and somewhat xenophobic in nature. This is due to poor internalization of some institutions of Higher learning. It is critical therefore that the institutional management ensures that their institutions full embrace all the tenets of internalization.

Theoretical Frame

Racial and Cultural Identity Development Model

Howard-Hamilton and Frazier (2005) proposed that there are five stages that establish an integrated racial or cultural identity (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2010). The first stage is the conformity stage which entails people identifying closely with the dominant white society. The individual might avoid, deny and change one's culture. A person at this stage has a low internal self esteem and boosts it by mimicking White speech patterns, dress code and goals (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2010). The second stage is the dissonance stage. This is the stage where a person becomes aware that racism does exist and that there is proportion of good or bad in all cultures. The individual starts to think positively about one's culture and have some suspicions about the dominant culture (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2010). The third stage is the resistance and immersion stage. The resistance and immersion stage is the stage which is characterized by resolution of confusions that have occurred in the past. The person also develops

anger to white society. This stage is followed by the fourth stage, the introspection stage where the individual realizes that the feelings of anger and dislike can be psychologically draining. The individual devotes energy to positive self definition and proactive sense of awareness. The individual experiences confusion between group and individual views as well as between the white functional culture and the minority culture. The final or the fifth stage is the integrative awareness stage where the minority group develops inner sense of security. In this stage confusions are not resolved, but greater control and flexibility are attained. There is a positive self-image and racial pride emerges. Trust and relationships are allowed to develop.

CONCLUSION

The state of xenophobia continues to paint a bleak picture to the country of South Africa. It is further becoming a worrisome state of affairs if the institutions of higher learning show xenophobic tendencies. Using SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) paradigm/concept, these researchers would like the administration of the institutions of higher learning to consider the issue as either a weakness or a threat; and work to turn them into strengths and opportunities to mitigate xenophobia, or annihilate it altogether. These researchers also take this forum to ask the government, NGOs, peace preaching private bodies and individuals to strengthen the anti-xenophobic campaign. South Africa, considered as the economic powerhouse of the continent needs to shine in its bilateral and multilateral collaboration. Importantly and significantly, all aspects of culture that speak peace and reconciliation such as *therisanyo mmogo* (community consultations in setswana), *kagiso* (peace in setswana), *ubuntu* (humanity in isixhosa); and *botho* (humanity in Setswana) should be recalled, remembered, and reinforced to various diverse groups of the South African population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

African Union Influence in South Africa

It is wishful thinking from these researchers that the government of South Africa should keenly advocate and lobby against xenophobia. The

government needs to consider the fact that since it is a South African that chairs the African Union, it should ensure through massive anti-xenophobic campaigns and sensitizations that all South Africans respect and embrace the state of co-existence with individuals of other nationalities. The chairperson could engage the government in directing some of the funds to the human rights bodies to stage powerful anti-xenophobic campaigns. The government should use the position to influence all its leaders to list xenophobia as any problematic area that has potential to stifle development and other facets of bilateral and multilateral importance. The government could also consider having a commission to look for measures and approaches to muscle the state of xenophobia. This is because in these researchers' contention, xenophobia is a challenge of national importance. Such campaigns should emphasize very important values such as "Ubuntu". Important social norms that denotes peace and co existence, such as those embedded in the Xhosa saying "Umntu ngumntu ngabantu," which means that each and every individual becomes because of others, should be reinforced and mainstreamed especially to different community forums.

Using Institutions of Higher Learning as a Platform to Mainstream Anti-xenophobia Education

The place of the institutions of higher learning should take a pivotal role in educating the students on and about xenophobic issues. This is because literature holds that there is institutional based xenophobia. These sectors should honor peace-oriented and advocacy forums such as African Day that underscores the importance of cultures and panacea of co existence among diverse populations. Importantly, such days and events should be included in the Universities annual calendar and prospectus. Each academic department should also include the subject of xenophobia in their academic programme and unit. This is because of the fear that xenophobia is increasingly entrenching its roots fast into the fabric of the South African societies. Significantly also, these institutions should be the hub of research as they have this human resource at their disposal. To this end, it is important to indicate the following as solutions of xenophobia from the findings of a research in 2012 by the

University students of Fort Hare: creation of anti-xenophobic awareness programmes; encouraging and embracing diversity within and among student groups; embracing the cultural values such as *ubuntu* (humanity in Isixhilsa), *botho* (humanity in Setswana), and embracing and operationalizing community consultations (*therisanyo mmogo* in Setswana language) (community consultations).

Fostering and Reinforcing Education on Immigration and Refugee Laws and Tenets

The government should consider launching strong anti- xenophobic campaigns especially directed to people of lower socio-economic status who are usually lured to be part of the xenophobic wave. The government leadership organs at all the levels should disseminate to its workforce the contents of the Immigration Act of 2005 as well as Refugees Act 130 of 1998. This will ensure that people largely understand the dynamics and the terrain of xenophobia. The dissemination process should encourage participation of the workforce in looking for a sustainable solution to the quagmire.

Fostering Campaign to Educate Families on Xenophobia and Xenophobia Dynamics

The department of Social Department should undertake or facilitate family-based campaigns to address xenophobia as they conduct their routine programmes. These campaigns can include the workshops on parenting skills on the manner in which individuals should co-exist with diverse people from other countries. The campaign should emphasize the fact that families will always be the vital building blocks of the communities. These researchers consider it pertinent that anti-xenophobia campaigns are addressed from the the micro level as this directly or indirectly affects the mezzo as well as macro levels. This is where the family members obtain the foundation of important African values such as "*Ubuntu*" (humanity-Isikholsa), *botho* (humanity-setswana), *kagiso* (peace-setswana) and *therisanyo mmgo* (community consultations-Setswana). Importantly, the issue of xenophobia should be an inventory of tasks that the social workers need to address on their routine tasks.

Ensure Effective Monitoring and Evaluation of the Xenophobia Campaign

The government should show and embrace goodwill by ensuring a stronger machinery to evaluate and monitor anti-xenophobic campaigns. This is important because literature and a score of researchers appear to point a finger to the government for not doing enough to address xenophobic challenges. As in many instances, the government appears to be dealing with the outcomes rather than nipping the bad seed at the earliest time possible. Measures should be put in place to continuously assess the progress that has been achieved as well as the impediments that warrants attention. This will ensure that the goals that were set are indeed successfully achieved.

Embracing and Operationalizing the Tenets and Spirit of Truth and Reconciliation

The spirit of truth and reconciliation worked very well during the ushering of the post apartheid South African government. This, in these researchers' contention worked in that South Africans have lived in peace as a rainbow nation. These researchers believe that the government should continue or embrace the tenets of this practice to ensure South Africans preach peace, and serene co-existence etc.

REFERENCES

- Afolayan F 2004. *Culture and Customs of South Africa*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press.
- Furhnam A 2004. Foreign students: Education and cultural shock. *The Psychologist*, 17(1): 14-19.
- Harris B 2002. Xenophobia: A new pathology for a New South Africa. In: D Hook, G Eagle (Eds.): *Psychopathology and Social Prejudice*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, pp. 169-184
- Howard-Hamilton MF, Frazier K 2005. Identity development and the convergence of race, ethnicity and gender. In: D Comstock (Ed.): *Diversity and development: Critical Contexts that Shapes Lives and Relationships*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks Coleh, pp. 67-90.
- Jones E 2009. *Internationalization and the Student Voices: Higher Education Perspective*. United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis.
- Kang'ethe SM 2009. Inadequate Male Involvement in Health Issues: The Cause of Gender Skewed HIV and AIDS Situations in Botswana. In: T Maundeni, BZ Osei-Hwedie, E Mukaamambo, PG Ntseane (Eds.): *Male Involvement in Sexual and Reproductive Health. Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS in Botswana*. Cape Town: Made Plain Communications, pp. 7-27.
- Kang'ethe SM 2011. Exploring the awarding of incentives to caregiving productivity in Botswana. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 47(1): 1-14.
- Kang'ethe SM 2013. *A Diploma in Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training Context Awarded in May 2013*. Alice: University of Fort Hare.
- Kang'ethe SM 2014a. Repositioning, reclaiming and rejuvenating the niche of traditional practitioners in the face of modernization in selected African countries. *MJSS*, 5(27): 1112-1119.
- Kang'ethe SM 2014b. The panacea and perfidy of culture as a platform of behavior change with examples from Botswana and South Africa. *MJSS*, 5(14): 504-510.
- Kang'ethe SM, Rhakudu M 2010. *Religious Education Book for Form 2*. Gaborone: Heinemann Publishers.
- Kang'ethe SM, Duma V 2013. Exploring dimensions of post -Apartheid xenophobic sentiments towards African immigrants in South Africa. *Insight on African*, 5(2): 157-168.
- Lackey L, Mbontsi-Njoli Z, Ntisana N, Ntshanka-Mahlati N, Ralarala TG 2012. *An Exploration of the Perceptions of Students on Xenophobia Faced by Foreigners at the University of Fort Hare Campus*. Fourth Year Social Work Research Project. Alice, South Africa: University of Fort Hare.
- Lawler EE 1994. *Motivation in Work Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Livesey TK 2006. *A Survey on the Extent of Xenophobia towards Refugee Children*. Pretoria: UNISA.
- Mashiri J 2010. *The Status of Refugees and Asylum seekers in South Africa with reference to the implementation of the South African Refugees Act, No 130 of 1998*. Thesis, Unpublished. South Africa: University of Fort Hare.
- Oxford Mini School Dictionary* 2007. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Ramphele M 1999. *Education and Immigration: The Issue of Foreign Students at South African Tertiary Institutions: South African Migration Programme*. Idasa, Cape Town, Queens: University of Canada.
- Shindondola H 2002. Xenophobia in South Africa: The Experiences of Students from Africa. A Case Study of RAU, *Paper Presented at South African Sociological Association 2002 Congress*, 30 June to 3 July 2002, East London, South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa Report 2000. *Measuring Poverty in South Africa*. South Africa.
- University of Fort Hare 2013. *University of Fort Hare 2013 Graduation Ceremony*. Alice, South Africa.
- Van Wyk J 2009. Foreign Students are Flocking to South African Universities. *Sunday Times*, August 11, 2009. From <<http://edulibpretoria.wordpress.com/2009/08/11/foreign-students-are-flocking-to-south-african-universities>> (Retrieved on 19 November 2012).
- Zastrow CH, Kirst-Ashman KK 2010. *Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment*. Belmont: Thomson Learning Inc.

Paper received for publication on August 2014
Paper accepted for publication on October 2016