XENOPHOBIA ATTACKS: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS

EZE R. C. (Ph.D)
Department of Political Science
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,
Anambra State, Nigeria.
AGENA JAMES E. (Ph.D)
Department of Political Science,
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki,
Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Abstract: Nigeria and South Africa enjoyed a robust relationship especially taking cognizance of the various contributions of Nigeria during the liberation struggle in South Africa. With the successful dismantling of apartheid and the consequent entrenchment of black majority rule, South Africa sees Nigeria as a good brother and a major contributor to the dismantling of white minority rule in her country. Be that as it may, recent happenings between both countries do not depict a rosy relationship. This paper interrogates into the post-apartheid Nigeria-South Africa relation in the wake of xenophobia attack on foreigners especially Nigerians by South Africans. The paper reveals that the attacks on Nigerians and other foreigners especially Africans might not be unconnected with the rising wave of crime and criminality in South Africa attributed to foreigners, the high unemployment rate among the youths in South African who hitherto visit their venom on their African brothers who are enterprising and wealthy in their land. The paper however recommends and increasing and constant diplomatic engagement between Nigeria and South Africa as a panacea.

Key Words: Xenophobia attack, Apartheid, Crime, Diplomatic engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria and South Africa enjoy a very interesting and robust relationship. Being the two countries within the African continent that enjoy very unique characteristics (Nigeria being the most populated and South Africa most developed), other African countries look up to them to advance the course of development in the continent. During the era of white minority rule with its dehumanizing apartheid policy, Nigeria was at the forefront for the dismantling of the apartheid regime and contributed immensely toward the eventual realization of black majority rule in South Africa. The friendly relationship between Nigeria and South Africa became even more pronounced with the restoration of black majority rule in South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of the Republic of South Africa.

However, not too long after the restoration of black majority rule in South African which Nigeria was a major contributor, the relationship between the two countries experienced various hiccups thereby graduating from cooperation to competition within the African continent. This obvious battle for supremacy between both countries had seen them take opposing stand in key regional issues in Africa. Hannatu 2013: 15-17 observed that the following areas have taken centre stage in the supremacy battle between Nigeria and South Africa.

- South Africa’s criticisms and backing Nigeria’s expulsion from the common wealth of Nations in 1995 after the execution of the famous Ogoni 8 and Nigeria’s response in withdrawing from participating in the 1996 African cup of Nation hosted by South Africa.
- Disagreement between both countries via disparate approaches in tackling the post-election conflicts in Ivory Coast, while Nigeria adopted a belligerent posture towards Laurent Gbagbo, who refused to concede defeat after losing the country’s election. South Africa provocatively sent a warship to the Gulf of Guinea in Nigeria’s traditional domain/stronghold; however South Africa belatedly recognized Allassane Quattara’s victory.
- The opposing stance of both nations over the embattled late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi and the recognition of the government of the Transitional National Council (TNC) during the Libyan revolution. While Nigeria recognized he TNC based on the African Union Constitutive Act Principle section 14, South Africa back the embattled Gaddafi regime saying TNC was illegal.

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The 2012 salient diplomatic clash between both courtiers at the AU summit in January, over recognition of the government in Guinea-Bissau which Nigeria was supporting and South Africa was opposing.

The 2012 deportation of 125 Nigerians including legislators on the unsubstantiated claim of fake yellow fever vaccination cards and Nigeria’s response in deporting 84 South Africans in 2 days, forcing South Africa to apologise.

The struggle by both countries to be the African country to occupy a permanent seat in the UN Security Council when eventually there would be the admission of more members to accommodate all the continents.

Also commenting on the supremacy battle between Nigeria and South Africa, Ibanu, Nwosu and Umezurike (2007:1) equally outlined three important aspects that stand out in the relationship. In their words: In exploring the rhythms of Nigeria-South Africa relations, three important aspects stand out. The first is the link between the global system, national interest and the dominant socio-economic groups in Nigeria and South Africa. The second is the impact of the interest of the ruling groups in the two states on their diplomacy. Third are the contexts in which the states engage in competition and cooperation in their contemporary relations. In sum, their competition or cooperation depends on the magmatic pursuit of the objective interest of the ruling groups of the two countries and is based on specific issues rather than any idealistic commitment to brotherly relations or African unity.

Despite the obvious supremacy battle between Nigeria and South Africa within the continent and the global arena, the two countries have continued to maintain overt friendly relations, however, the upsurge of xenophobia attacks by South Africans on their African brothers and sisters which Nigerian citizens in South African are the major target had obviously created a scenario where there exist a diplomatic row not palatable for a brotherly relationship between the two countries.

Though prior to 1994 immigrants from elsewhere faced discrimination and even violence in South Africa but to the chagrin of foreigners especially Africans, the restoration of black majority rule in 1994 in South African rather than bringing to a halt this ugly trends, there was an obvious increase in the incidence of xenophobia in South African. The increase in xenophobia after the restoration of black majority rule in South Africa was clearly depicted in a 2004 study published by the South African Migration Project (SAMP) which stated thus: The African National Congress (ANC) government in its attempts to overcome the divides of the past and build new forms of social cohesion embarked on an aggressive and inclusive nation-building project. One unanticipated by-product of this project has been a growth in intolerance towards outsiders. Violence against foreign citizens and African refugees has become increasingly common and communities are divided by hostility and suspicion. (SAMP 2004:12)

One fundamental and yet unanswered is why xenophobia attacks by South Africans towards their African brothers and sisters should increase immediately black majority rule was restored in the country. While the centre piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy remains Africa, the new spare of violence and wanton destruction and killings of the properties and citizens of Nigeria by South Africa has a lot of negative implications in the brotherly and robust relationship between Nigeria and South Africa.

II. THE CAUSES OF XENOPHOBIA ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA

It was in the spirit of Africa brotherhood that all the countries of Africa supported their South African counterpart during the hey days of apartheid and they singularly and collectively contributed their own quota towards the dismantling of the white minority rule which herald black majority in South Africa.

However, to the bewildement and chagrin of other African countries not long after attaining black rule in the country than xenophobia attacks by the South Africans especially against their African brother started. This development elicited the obvious question as whether attacks on their African brothers and sisters are the best way to show gratitude over their assistance in ensuring that the inhuman and obnoxious apartheid regime was dismantled by the d.

There is no unanimity of opinions or reasons for the various xenophobia attacks in South while the first school of thought view the xenophobia attacks as a consequence of increased crimes and criminality being perpetuated by foreigners in South Africa, the second school on the contrary attributed the causes to the envy South Africans have on their enterprising brothers from other countries in their soil and equally the inability of black South Africans to shake off the psychology of the dehumanising torture they underwent during the apartheid regime.

The main reasons given by South Africans especially the locals who are the perpetrators of these violence hinges on crimes and criminality and other several weak reasons. According to Carien (2009:23) while institutional failures could be seen as the root causes of the growing frustrations among South Africans, the locals thought otherwise. In his words
local residents claim that foreigners took job opportunities away from local South Africans and they accept lower wages, foreigners do not participate in the struggle for better wages and working conditions. Other local South Africans claim that foreigners are criminals, and they should not have access to services and police protection. Foreigners are also blamed for their businesses that take away customers from local residents, engage in drugs and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

The second school of thought was quick in dismissing the argument of South Africans especially the locals for their violent attacks on their African brothers from other countries. Dismissing the reasons as vague, Bayo (2017:8) stated thus:

South Africans have been attacking foreigners who they accuse of stealing their jobs and women. In my opinion, the accusations are preposterous. How could one steal a woman when relationship between two adults is supposed to be consensual; it also does not make sense that foreigners have been depriving South Africans of jobs. If South African employers find those from abroad better qualified than the South African counterparts, why blame foreigners.

Bayo however went down memory lane to trace the root cause of the aggression. According to him:

South African has a long history of subjugation of the indigenous black population. The state sponsored apartheid regime was designed to keep the blacks at the lower rung of the social order. Apart from being viciously restrained from achieving parity with the whites in their homeland, the blacks could also not access such critical social amenity like education. Their inability to receive education during apartheid has ensured that the generation of blacks have not acquired the skills necessary to successfully compete in a post-apartheid, the white minority still controls the economy of the Rainbow nation while the black majority remains in township to watch the dream of a post-apartheid Eldorado unrealized. Frustration has turned into hatred towards other African who the now accuse of taking jobs meant for them. (Bayo, 2017: 9)

For Adewale (2017: 17-18), there are several precipitating factors that have encouraged the perpetration of xenophobic killings in South Africa:

- First, is the generally feeling of insecurity on the part of South Africans that foreigners are taking over the jobs that should ordinarily be reserved for them. Hence, the only logical way for them to show their grievance and antagonism is to launch attacks on such foreigners with the thinking that they would be protecting and jealously guarding what is solely theirs.
- Secondly, law enforcement agents in South Africa, most especially the police, appear to be slow in responding to distress call by victims whenever they are in danger. It is for this reason that many observers believe that police officers often take sides to the advantage of South Africans. This should not be. Law enforcement agents are expected to perform their duties without any bias, fear or favour.
- Thirdly, is the dwindling economic fortunes of South Africa over the years under the ruling African National Congress. The main effect of that dimension is that many South Africans themselves are in dire need of employment as the economic situation bites harder.
- Fourthly, is the poor knowledge of history by the aggressive youths. It is not a funny thing when younger generations have no or very poor knowledge of the past. They seem not to appreciate the vital role played by Nigeria and other African countries in the struggle for the liberation of many South Africa countries from the shackles of apartheid.

Tshabalala (2015) sees xenophobia at the heart of South Africa’s complex problem as the term which has to do with hatred for foreigners is usually viewed differently in South Africa as the term ‘foreigner’ usually refer to African and Asia non-nationals as other foreigners especially these from the Americans and Europe are lumped up with ‘tourists’ or even better, referred to as expatriates. In his words:

Many South Africans look at the attacks on enterprising African immigrants from Somalia the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria and Malawi often running shops, stalls and other businesses in the informed economy and resolve that the current attacks on foreigners are more afrophobic, than xenophobic. Many ask “why is it that a Somali man can run a shop in a township, get raided and beaten up, while a white immigrant in town continues to run a restaurant full of patrons?

He concluded by stating the reason for the attacks on black foreigners is South Africa was the consequence a hangover from the past, fuelled by present. He reasoned that apartheid was an insidious tool used to induce self
hate and tribalize people of the same race and long after the scourge of apartheid, the prejudice of the past is being refuelled in the present.

While the position of the two schools lend a lot of credence to the happenings in South Africa especially recognizing the fact that the dismantling of apartheid saw to the influx of citizens of other African countries into South leading to the increase in the wave of crime, the security services which the government uses as an instruments to protect lives and properties be allowed to do their constitutional duties rather than the people taking laws into their hands. Also South Africans should rather than envy their enterprising African brothers lend a helping hand by making the environment safe for their businesses as they are proven to be more helpful to them than their white counterpart.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS

The brotherly and cordial relationship between Nigeria and South Africa especially in the post-apartheid era was put to test in wake of xenophobic attacks against other African citizens by South Africans. While hatred against Africans was prevalent during the apartheid era in South African, the upsurge of xenophobic attacks against South Africans is by black South Africans following the dismantling of apartheid is most disappointing and unexpected.

The new wave of xenophobic attacks in post-apartheid South Africa started in 1998 and was purely directed towards the citizens of other African countries residing and doing business in South Africa. According to Landau (2011), “in May 2008, a series of attacks left 62 people dead, although 21 of those killed were South African citizens. The attacks were apparently motivated by xenophobia”. Since the 2008 attacks, they had continued to be an incessant xenophobic attack in South Africa. There was a planned attack in 2010 but was put on hold because of the work cup hosted by South Africa, however between 2012 through 2017 hardly did any year go by without an incidence of attacks on fellow blacks from other African countries by the blacks of South Africa, the destruction in human and material resources can hardly be quantified. This ugly development has pitched South Africa against other African countries especially Nigeria. The implication of xenophobic attacks in South African against Nigerians and other blacks from African countries can be viewed from the political, economic and social angles.

**Political Implications**

Politically, the current and incessant wave of violent attacks on Nigerians in South Africa has a lot of implications if the two governments fail to muster enough political will to deal with this unbecoming situation.

- It can mar the ties between both countries. In diplomatic circles, once there is a severe row between countries the next option is recalling ambassadors and whenever there exist any breakdown of relationship between countries, it usually take time for such to be restored and taking into cognizance the position of Nigeria and South Africa in the African continent, it will be also to the detriment of the progress of other African countries.
- Loss of African solidarity: African usually regard each others as brothers and in so many circumstances speak with one voice in the international arena, it is reasoned that a break in relationship between Nigeria and South Africa will lead to a divided Africa thereby limiting their chances in making wave in international politics.
- Tough visa policies/restrictions: People migrating in search of safer and more prosperous living conditions is as old as man and the right of any person to leave any is enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (Orovwuje, 2017: 2). This clearly depicts people’s freedom to seek good in any part of the world. However, this freedom can be restricted through stringent visa policies and it is envisaged that xenophobic attacks is capable of making Nigeria and South Africa to adopt stringent visa policies thereby killing the spirit of African brotherhood and making nonsense the new Pan-African Passport.

**Economic Implication**

The economic implications of the recurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa will be very enormous. Fundamentally, one of the principal reasons for xenophobic attacks in South Africa is tied to the economy as according to South Africans, other African countries’ citizens are taking over their jobs and businesses leading to high rate of unemployment especially among locals. While this argument appears to be correct but it is relatively weak as these people are doing genuine and legal businesses in South Africa. Equally, taking cognizance of the fact that South Africans are also doing businesses in other African countries, it will be better imagined of there exist reprisal attacks on South Africans in residing and doing businesses in other African countries. The implications for the overall economy of Africa should this scenario play out were clearly depicted by the Nigerian-South African Chamber of Commerce. The chamber holds the view that the outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa and the reprisal events in Nigeria, including direct attack on foreign-owned businesses in both South Africa and Nigeria poses a threat to Africa’s fragile economic recovery. According to the chamber:

> There is a strong and positive symbiosis between Nigeria and South Africa that has benefits for both as both markets provide job where companies are invested. Trade between the two countries is significant. Total trade between the countries has risen from R174 million in 1999 to almost R3 billion in
2008 to R66 billion in 2014. The trade balance is significantly if favour of Nigeria, a main exporter of crude to Pretoria, with the value of exports to South Africa reaching R38.5 billion in 2015. (www.sancc.co.za of 01 March, 2017)

It will be equally instructive to note that attacks on businesses in Nigeria and South Africa will obviously bring about job losses, a development which might make the victims to be easy prey to terrorist organizations thereby aggravating the already worst security situations in both countries. Today in Nigeria and South Africa most of the crimes committed are usually perpetuated by the youths with the high rate of unemployment as a major factor.

**Socio-Cultural Implication**

Africa’s colonial heritage and the inhuman albeit regrettable apartheid system in South Africa did enough damage to the psyche of Africans. Suffering these ordeals from the Europeans, Africans believes after granting of independence and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa that they are brother with common history and descent and to that extent would respect the dignity of each other. Be that as it may, the xenophobic or call it afrophobic attacks by South Africans towards their fellow African brothers has a lot of socio-cultural implications.

- Identify crisis – identity conflict is one of the worst form of conflict as it affects the psychology of the victims thereby making them not to realize and achieve their self esteem and full potentials.
- Disunity – when Africans begin to see the fellow brothers and sisters as strangers and thereafter treat them as one, the by-product of this state of thing is obviously disunity in a continent that regards each other as being from the same parents. The implication of this is the obvious fear that Africans will have when in other African countries other than their own country of birth.
- Insecurity – when one socially and culturally humiliated, the bad thought arising from such alienation may lead them into joining bad gangs which might obviously lead to increase in security challenges within the African continent.

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The concept of brotherhood among Africans especially during the struggle for the dismantling of apartheid and restoration of black majority rule was thwarted as a consequence of frequent xenophobic attacks by South Africans on their fellow African brothers. The unimaginable damage this development has done is better imagined. The impact of this on the political, socio and economic spheres within the African continent. In that regard, it is recommended:

- That the South African government do needful to bring this ugly trend to a permanent halt.
- Government of South Africa should help individuals that have incurred losses rebuild their businesses.
- There should be the avoidance of reprisal attacks by other countries of Africa.
- The African Union should come up with a resolution to permanently solve this problem.
- There should high level diplomatic engagement between Nigeria and South Africa as a way out of mending their unbecoming relation.

**REFERENCES**


