

Not in our name-Xenophobia in South Africa-Nancy Msibi

South Africans have come out in numbers to provide support to victims of xenophobia violence which started in Durban. Peace marches were held in Durban and Johannesburg; diverse organizations and individuals have donated food and other necessities. Citizens of South Africa have taken to social media and TV and radio to add their voices to condemn the attacks. Perpetrators of xenophobic violence are a minority; the majority of South Africans are tolerant towards foreigners. Xenophobia in South Africa is targeted at Africans, Pakistanis, Ethiopians, Bangladeshi and Somalis only; white foreigners are immune from it.

Foreigners in South Africa

Foreigners from neighbouring African countries like Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zimbabwe etc have been working in South African mines dating back to the time of apartheid. Though the majority of them lived in the mine hostels they still interacted with the locals as a result other miners started relationships with locals. As time went on some even married locals and lived with them in the communities. Some miners would visit their homes from time to time others adopted South Africa as their home and lived here until they died. During the height of apartheid some African countries helped South Africa to fight against the apartheid government. Some South Africans were in exile in countries like Swaziland, Tanzania, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique and many other African countries. Such countries provided them with shelter, food, health care and education. However, in some of these countries South Africans did not live in the communities with locals they were designated places to live to discourage integration with locals. In South Africa, the situation is different; foreigners are free to live anywhere they wish if they can afford to pay for their accommodation. They are spread across all nine provinces. However they are found in large numbers in Johannesburg and Durban. In Johannesburg they are mostly concentrated in places like Hillbrow, Yeoville, the Johannesburg CBD, Soweto and Alexandra. In Durban they are concentrated in Chatsworth, Isipingo, Phoenix and the Durban CBD. The democracy which South Africa enjoys today is partly through the efforts of some African countries. It is indeed true that the number of South Africans who lived in those African countries is much fewer as compared to the number of foreigners who are in South Africa today.

Why so many foreigners in South Africa?

The majority of foreigners from African countries come to South Africa running away from war and poverty in their countries. Some of the foreigners who do menial jobs are well educated but because they struggle to get formal employment in South Africa they take any job just to put food on the table. The so-called economic migrants, they mostly do menial jobs like gardening, domestic work others are street hawkers, car mechanics, hairdressers or security guards. However others are professionals like doctors, nurses, teachers who are employed at different private facilities. Others are students whose studies are paid by their governments or they have private scholarships without which it is difficult to afford fees. South Africa doesn't offer free university education and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) grants funding to South African students only. Emmanuel Sithole, a Mozambican whose murder made front page

news was a street hawker selling cigarettes, sweets and chips in Alexandra¹. He was stabbed to death when some South African guys took his cigarettes and left without paying when he confronted them they stabbed him he later died after a couple of hours in hospital. There is no evidence to show that he was murdered because he is a foreigner however since the murder took place during the xenophobia attacks it is generally categorized as such. South Africa has a high crime rate it is common for criminals to steal from hawkers. The crime statistics released in September 2014 show that South Africa's murder rate is about five times higher than the 2013 global average of 6 murders per 100 000, incidents of murder increased from 16 259 murders in 2012/2013 to 17 068 in 2013/2014, street robberies increased from 105 888 cases in 2012/2013 to 119351 cases in 2013/2014².

Xenophobic violence

The first major incidence of xenophobic violence in South Africa took place in Johannesburg in May 2008, where 62 people were killed, 21 of those killed were South Africans mostly of Shangaan origin. Their crime was that they were too dark or they couldn't speak Zulu fluently thus according to their murderers they couldn't be South African. In January 2015, xenophobic violence erupted in Soweto, the targets were foreigners mainly Somali and Pakistanis who owned small shops which are commonly known as "*spazas*". In a number of townships in South Africa foreigners rent space in the yards of South Africans where they operate *spazas* some pay up to R3000 a month for rent. The money is a livelihood for some South Africans who may not have anyone employed in their home. The attacks were sparked by the killing of a 14 year old South African boy by a Somali who claimed the boy was part of a group which tried to rob his shop. Foreigners were killed and assaulted by the community their *spazas* were looted and some were burnt. Foreigners, especially Somalis help each other with capital and goods to start businesses including *spazas*. They therefore have an advantage because they are able to buy goods in bulk and sell at much lower rates as compared to locals. As a result of this model, South Africans who own *spazas* are unable to compete with them and they are ultimately forced to close their businesses. South Africans must learn and adopt the Somali model of helping each other to start *spazas* and be profitable. In the black community in South Africa there is a model widely known as 'stokvels' which are group saving schemes providing for mutual and financial well-being as well as social and entertainment needs. Prospective *spaza* owners may join the stokvel and use the money as startup capital³. There is a love/hate relationship between locals and foreigners who own *spazas*. Some locals say the *spazas* help them because they don't have to walk a long distances to get to the big retailers like Shoprite and their prizes are reasonable others just don't want them in their communities because they don't like foreigners.

On 15 March 2015, King Goodwill Zwelithini, the King of the Zulu nation, addressed a moral regeneration event in Pongola, Kwa-Zulu Natal where he stated that government is not protecting citizens from the influx of foreigners. He also said foreigners must please go back to their countries. It seems that his speech was misconstrued by some as an order to take the law

¹ Sunday Times, 19 April 2015, p1.

² <http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/ISS-crime-statistics-factsheet-2013-2014.pdf>.

³ <http://www.africanresponse.co.za/PressReleases/Documents/2012StokvelHiddenEconomy.pdf>

into their own hands and chase foreigners out of South Africa. The Zulu king is respected by his people; if he gives an instruction the majority is likely to obey. The xenophobic violence started in Durban, foreign shop owners were the first targets and then followed foreigners in general. The violence spread to Gauteng, where foreigners in townships and informal settlements were killed and assaulted. However Jeremy Cronin, the Deputy Minister of Transport stated that “one of the triggers for the latest flare-up was the employment of desperate foreigners as strike breakers in an industrial dispute in Isipingo just days before the violence”⁴. There is a tendency to employ part-time workers if there is a strike and usually this creates hostility.

Political leaders called for calm but government was criticized that it was slow to intervene. King Zwelithini refused to apologize instead he blamed the media for misrepresenting his comments. On Monday 20 April, he called an *‘imbizo’* (community gathering) where he called for calm and asked that locals must protect foreigners, it was a little late because the xenophobia violence had already spread to Gauteng and the death toll as a result of the violence stood at 7 and many foreigners were displaced in tents. Three hundred South Africans were arrested for the violence. A complaint was laid against King Zwelithini at the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). A Nigerian human rights group also asked the International Criminal Court at The Hague to investigate a complaint of hate speech against him.⁵

Government intervention

The South African government was criticized by locals and most African countries for not responding speedily when the attacks started. President Jacob Zuma appointed an inter-ministerial task team which is led by Minister Jeff Radebe to deal with the xenophobia problem, which includes documenting the foreigners who want to be repatriated, providing tents for refugee centres; assisting with medical care and provision of food. The police and army have also been deployed to deal with the perpetrators and to protect foreigners and start the reintegration into communities.

South African’s response

There are quite a number of South Africans who are married to foreigners; unfortunately the figures are not available. Most of such families live in South Africa. Most South Africans families welcome foreigners as part of their extended family. However there are some families who are not pleased when their children marry foreigners. Some ANC members who married foreigners when they were in exile brought them home. South Africans from all walks of life across the racial divide organized peace marches and provided food and other needs. A South African Lucas Mathato stated “I live with many foreigners in my grandfather’s yard. We live peacefully and I was worried about their safety when they were ordered to leave their homes. I do not have

⁴ The Star, 23 April 2015, p12.

⁵ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Nigerian-group-goes-to-ICC-over-Zwelithini-hate-speech-20150429>

a problem with them, however, they must be documented and have the relevant papers to be in the country”⁶.

Way forward

Foreigners will be in South Africa for a long time to come. South Africans must learn to accept them. South African children, as leaders of tomorrow must be socialized to tolerate foreigners. Though some foreigners are in South Africa in search of a better life others are here because of war in their countries therefore returning home is not an option for them. The South African government must ensure that all foreigners are documented. Government and the private sector must work together to create more employment opportunities. South Africans must also devise others ways of creating own employment opportunities. Equally so, African countries whose citizens are in South Africa in large numbers seeking employment must also take responsibility and create opportunities for employment in their countries so that the citizens do not need to flee to South Africa.

⁶ Sowetan, 23 April 2015, p2.