Xenophobia in South Africa: Re-thinking the Nigeria foreign policy of Afrocentrism

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Abstract

The pervasive nature of xenophobia in South Africa interrogate the ethos of Africa Renaissance and provides alibi to the dysfunctional character of the Africa project. This paper interrogate the essence of Nigeria foreign policy of Afrocentrism against the backdrop of xenophobic manifestation in South Africa, it attempted to deconstruct the axiom that limit the anomie to street urchins by providing evidences for institutional implications. It created a platform of discourse of xenophobia in relation to enabling

international law. This work concludes that the continuous outburst of negative collective ideas, social stereotypes and prejudices especially to black immigrant is a share display of majority insecurity defined by the defensive internal identity, which is constructed on strong ethnic or national basis. The work therefore, recommends a re-evaluation of Nigeria foreign policy to pursue strict national interest while tending to domestic challenges.

Key Words: Xenophobia, Afrocentrism, foreign policy, violence, foreigners, discrimination.

Introduction

The post-apartheid South Africa which was inaugurated in 1994 presented a new state of a racially free and de-segregated society which was a fundamental departure from the highly constricted and polarized society dominated by white minority. This dramatic twist introduced a new dimension to the segregation, discrimination and prejudice that dominated the history of the past. This time the victim shifted to the foreigners living in South Africa. Regrettably, traces suggest institutional connivance in this crime (Isike and Isike, 2012). The new South Africa christened 'Rainbow Nation' (Durkheim, 1997; Hookand Harris, 2000) was erroneously believed to herald the birth of 'Africa Renaissance' which should underplay national boundaries and foster regional cohesion. In contrast, African Renaissance experienced definitional re-conceptualization and re-evaluation to depict South Africa nationalism instead of Pan-Africanism. This paper interrogates the outburst of xenophobia in South Africa in relation to Nigeria foreign policy of Afrocentrism, with special focus on the spate of both latent and manifest violence against immigrant especially African immigrants. This paper attempts to deconstruct South Africa institutional presentation that tend to extricate the government from the strings of xenophobic indices in South Africa by suggesting that xenophobia is implicit to the technologies of nation-building, implicit to the technologies that create South African nationalism, an institutionalized pathological manifestation of the prolong discrimination of yesteryears by white minority 'strangers' which has unconsciously injected the hormone of fear for strangers in the citizenry.

Conceptualization of Xenophobia

According to the oxford learners dictionary xenophobia is a strong feeling of dislike or fear of people from other countries (Hornby 2000). More commonly, the term is used to denote a 'dislike for foreigners'. In this understanding, xenophobia is characterized by a *negative attitude* towards foreigners, a *dislike*, a *fear*, or a *hatred*. It is an outburst of negative collective ideas, social stereotypes and prejudices often disguised with the phenomenon of nationalism. But there is no doubt that the radical aggressive manifestation of nationalism (chauvinism) is one of xenophobia types.

Often time the expression of xenophobia is characterize with violence and physical abuse (Misago, et al 2009; Kollapan1999; Tshitereke, 1999:4). Although the problems of xenophobia and other prejudice such as racism is particular radical expressions taking place in all social groups and communities. South Africa case presents with unique peculiarities especially the April attacked which was exclusively targeted at African immigrants, recaptured in some quarters as 'afrophobia' (Isike and Isike, 2012).

Xenophobia has also been defined as one among several possible forms of reaction generated by anomic situations in the societies of modern states (Sichone 2008, 257). In this conceptualization, fear, prejudice and violence are common denominators. Therefore, xenophobic disposition is social/psychological anomies that negate the principles of accommodation and tolerance, fragmenting society into 'we' and 'them', creating a model of social division upon which all forms of contestations are premised. The aggregated psychological discontents are often ventilated as outburst of nationalistic expression, it is upon this that sympathy is drawn from the collectivity of the 'we' against 'them'. In the aforementioned scenario, those who overtly disconnect with the expression harbour deep seated solidarity within, this is why the state had so far be implicated in this development (Isike and Isike, 2012).

Evolution of Xenophobia in South Africa

The demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa in April 1994 triggered increased migration of foreign nationals from across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asian countries (Chimbga and Meier, 2014; Munshi, 2013). The reason was an obvious availability of economic opportunities especially in the informal sector. This influx of foreign national was not without resentment from the very beginning. There were obvious traces of discrimination developing like a tumor within the people. According to South African Migration Project (SAMP) survey conducted in 2001, South Africans demonstrated their 'will' in a restrictive vote of 21 per cent wanting a complete ban on the entry of foreigners and 64 per cent wanting strict limits on the numbers allowed entry. South African respondents on all issues of immigrant show that perception was at the heart of xenophobic discourse (Crush and Pendleton 2004) with the coinage of a local vocabulary, Makwerekwere (a derogatory term used for a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages and who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa) to buttress their deep seated resentment for foreigners (Nyamnjoh 2006).

This tumour of resentment stated to find expression in 1998 following the lunch of a campaign called "Buyelekhaya" (go back home). According to a Human Rights Watch (1998), immigrants especially from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique living in the Alexandra town were physically assaulted over a considerable period of time in January 1995.

May 2008, witnessed a considerable progress in the degree of resentment leading to a burst of violent riots in the township of Alexandra, just northeast of Johannesburg. Local residents attacked foreign immigrants irrespective of their nationalities shouting slogans of mass eviction of foreigners.

April 2015 episode of xenophobia in South Africa took a worse dimension. There was an outburst of attacks throughout the country. The attacks started in Durban and spread to Johannesburg following the incisive statement of "go back to your countries" by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini.

The pervasiveness of this phenomenon confront the existing axiom that tend to limit the manifestation of xenophobia to street urchins in urban cities and the micro politics dominant within urban metropolises (Bekker, 2010; Crush and Ramachandran, 2014; Hickel, 2014; Konanani and Odeku, 2013; Schwikkard, 2013; Vahed, 2013; Zondi and Ukpere, 2014). The preponderance of xenophobic violence and stereotyping touches on both the formal and informal sectors although it is common within the informal sector where foreign nationals easily find footage.

Theoretical Discourse

Basically, the investigation of xenophobia is grounded on the following sociological concepts and theoretical explications: Other, Strange, identification, ethnocentrism, cultural compatibility, nation and nationalism, tolerance and racism (Adorno 1998, Freud, 1930). However, ethnocentrism and tolerance will form the frame-work of this analysis.

The term ethnocentrism was first used in 1906 by Sumner to describe a cultural Narrowness in which the "ethnically centred" individual rigidly accepted those who were culturally alike while just as rigidly rejecting who were culturally different (Sumner, 1906:13). A believe system that present the in-group as the centre of everything and is superior to all out-groups (Levine and Campbell, 1972: 8). The notion of "ethnocentrism" is a psychological creation which make every people believe that it occupies the highest place of superiority among their contemporary. An ethnocentric personality accept own group as a standard for the evaluation of others. In this case, own group occupy the position of the best while other groups are worse. This psychological conviction is usually accompanied by hostility, distrust and disrespect to the members of other groups. This is obligatory for xenophobic practices (Levine and Campbell, 1972). Ethnocentrism is usually contrasted with cosmopolitanism and cultural relativism (Forbes, 1985:22). It had "the general meaning of provincialism or cultural narrowness; it meant a tendency in the individual to be 'ethnically centred', to be rigid in his acceptance of the culturally 'alike' and in his rejection of the 'unlike'" (Rabbie, 1993: 102).

This condition classically defines the South Africa case who by reasons of self-imposed superiority has classified the 'others' as inferior. This is exemplified in the ascription of the local derogatory word "Makwerekwere" to African immigrants. Surprisingly, it appears South Africans are hasty to forget or perhaps surfer from gross social amnesia on the unprecedented commitments of the so called 'others', African brothers, especially Nigerians to the liberation struggles of south Africa.

Freud (1921,1922) described ethnocentrism as "the narcissism of minor differences", indicating that meaninglessly small differences such as predominate in South Africa may be exaggerated for the purpose of invidious comparison. Self-love of the individual is expressed as antipathies and aversions toward strangers. According to Freud (1921, 1922, 1930), the narcissism of minor differences is a convenient and relatively harmless way of satisfying the inclination to aggression, by means of which cohesion among members of the community is made easier.

Another very compelling framework of analysis is the theory of tolerance. According to Theodor W. Adorno (1998), intolerance is an element of authoritarian system, which depresses personality and makes people, seek for some objects to wreak their anger on. This is a kind of "authoritarian personality", who is intolerant to "others". In contemporary societies, primordial identity such as ethnicity predominates in people's identification which is predisposed to   intolerance towards representatives of other ethnic groups. Here we can see how xenophobia is born as a result of the "other's" deviation from the accepted majority cultural norm and the xenophobic person considers him/herself to be the standard of this cultural norm.

The point here is the ease with wish the South Africans created the in-group in a continent whose history has been marked by fluid boundaries and the continual integration of strangers premised on the tripod of pan-Africanism, "where economies have been structured over several centuries through extremely brutal forms of economic extraversion, and where radical, violent change has marked the past century and a half" (Marshall's 2009: 27). If south Africans have any sense of appreciation of history to recognize the brutal partitioning of the continent at the detriment of black brotherhood and communality perhaps, the exhibited deep sense of hatred for their African brothers will not find a place on the shores of Africa let alone this violent rampage of xenophobic riots which is savagery and animalistic. Indeed, senseless and irrational. This representation resonates with longstanding racial tropes that associate blackness with unrestrained passion and blind impulse (Sichone, 2008).

Institutional Connivance

The pervasive nature of the phenomenon suggest some level of institutional connivance that tend to grossly implicate the south Africa government in xenophobic tendencies, this is burn out of obvious institutional inertia and resistance to effectively

address   the problems of widespread institutionalized discrimination. Xenophobia is said to have been institutionalized across government agencies and structures including the private sector (Isike and Isike, 2012; Valji 2003). There are obvious manifestations of xenophobic tendencies amongst governments' agencies and institutions such as the immigration services and the South Africa police. The brutality of the South Africa police on foreign national has attracted scholarly attention in the past. Some have argued that the aggression is rooted in the historical challenges of Apartheid of the past where as there are positions of institutional stereotype rooted in the latent discontent of the average South African. South Africa police is believed to be the most militarized and brutal safety and security agency in the world (Zondi and Ukpere, 2014) with several cases of brutality fermented through unwarranted arrests, detentions and murders of foreign nationals regarded as "death as a result of state violence" (Schwikkard 2013).

The government of Jacob Zuma has been very economical with words concerning the incidents of xenophobia in South Africa. However, there have recurrence of press statements condemning xenophobic violence with the intent of extricating the government of the day, but within the tune of the statements lays some forms of institutional solidarity. There were also occasions were protester chanted Jacob Zuma's campaign slogan *"Umshiniwami"*, and it has also be alleged that bulk of the rioters hailed from the rank and file of the ANC Youth League (The guardian 20 April, 2015).

The recent wave of attack in April, 2015 was instigated by Xenophobic statements by King Goodwill Zwelithini, traditional leader of the Zulu ethnic group, saying African migrants should "take their things and go", as they supposedly take the jobs and public resources meant for locals. These few cases are examples of a highly pervasive and endemic institutionalized xenophobia in South Africa which purely negate the "white washing" presentation of the government on the determination to stamp out xenophobia by prosecuting those perpetrators of violence against foreigners. Those statements are purely polemical and fallacious.

Xenophobia and International Law

There are several international statute that the nation of South Africa are signatory to that criminalize the practice of all forms of discrimination, stereotype and prejudice such as has become pathological in south Africa. The South Africa government probably think their media condemnation of the crime of xenophobia can excuse them from the consequence of violation. This will amount to self-deception. The international community is more in tune with the government body language that demonstrate solidarity with the manifestation of stereotype and chauvinism in South Africa.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) guarantees migrants a number of basic rights, including: the right to life; to not be subjected to torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; to the liberty and security of person; to liberty of movement; to the freedom to choose ones residence for those lawfully within the territory of a state; and to the right to protection from arbitrary or unlawful interference with their right to privacy.

According to Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, the term refugee applies to any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The right of Refugee are so guaranteed by the refugee law and the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, Refugees are also protected by international humanitarian law. Refugees also receive special protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I. This additional protection recognizes the vulnerability of refugees as aliens in the hands of a party to the conflict and the absence of protection by their State of nationality (International Committee of the Red Cross 2015).

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees Chapter 111 article 17 guarantee the right to engage in wage-earning employment; "The Contracting States shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment" (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015).

I hope South Africans come to terms with the realities of their gross violation of these rights. If for nothing, integrity demands that they subject themselves to moral evaluation not forgetting the roles played by African nations in the creation of a supposedly new South Africa, the "rainbow nation" which ought to signify the dawn of a new Africa "African Renaissance". I do also hope that South Africa comes to terms with the ethical consequence of their actions against the backdrop of gross violations of international statutes that they themselves have appended their signature. If there remain yet iota of conscience in the South Africa national consciousness they should apologies to all nations affected by their inhuman treatment especially their black brothers from other Africa states and subject themselves to social/psychological therapy.

Nigeria Policy of Afrocentrism

One of the fabrics of Nigeria foreign policy is the adoption of Africa as the centre piece of her foreign policy. Upon gaining independence in 1960 Nigeria quickly committed herself to the decolonization process in Africa particularly the eradication of apartheid and racism from the continent of Africa. Arising from this commitment, Nigeria organized and hosted the first United Nations conference for action against apartheid in Lagos in 1977, and subsequently chaired the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Committee from 1970 until that Committee was dissolved in 1994 (Idehen 2014).

Nigeria is a founding member of and an acknowledged powerhouse inside the Organization of Africa Unity, and was in the forefront of its recent transformation to the African Union. The formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the decolonization of countries like Angola, Namibia South Africa and Zimbabwe and anti-apartheid activism; peace-making, peacekeeping and conflict mediation in Africa; continental economic development and integration, to mention a few, corroborates earlier assertion and further lends credence to the centrality of Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy and distinguishes her in international relations as the champion of African causes. Accordingly, in recognition and appreciation of her unparalleled commitments towards the eradication of the insidious settler-colonialism and racism in Africa, Nigeria was, in the mid-1970s, conferred with the prestigious status of a "Frontline State".

Nigeria was also invited to mediate and mount a unilateral peacekeeping operation in Chad in 1982. She is also credited with being the brain behind the formation of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and its operations to restore peace and normalcy in the West African sub-region. She is equally credited with actively negotiating the return of peace to war-torn Sudan in the early 1990s. Nigeria has been in the forefront of current international efforts to bring peace to Sudan's Darfur region. Similarly, Nigeria also successfully mediated the restoration of democratic rule in Sao Tome and Principe after a military coup against the country's elected civilian government, and took a firm stand against Faure Gnasigngbe's undemocratic seizure of power in Togo after his father's sudden death in February 2005 (Idehen 2014).

Indeed, Nigeria's championing of African causes gave it the distinction as the key that opened the African door diplomatically. When she supported the MPLA of Angola in their independence struggle, the rest of Africa followed suit. When we recognized the SADR in Western Sahara, the issue ceased to be a stumbling-bloc to African unity. Even beyond the African sub-region, when Nigeria boycotted the 1986 Edinburgh Games, so did the rest of the Commonwealth countries. Nigeria also

championed the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth, which was successful and held until the end of apartheid and Nigeria established the big brother project of the Southern African Relief Fund (SARF) (Aremu, 2013). This was specially funded with deductions from the salary of every Nigerian worker, irrespective of rank, both in the public and private sectors as well as donations from ordinary Nigerians in all walks of life, including students (see Aremu, 2013).

Rethinking Nigeria Foreign Policy of Afrocentrism

Nigeria commitment to the development and unity of Africa has been unprecedented. If the world is not loudly praising and applauding Nigeria despite her glowing and ground-breaking contributions to Africa peace, security and prosperity, it is not for lack of a track record of achievements and capacity. It could be rather due to her hard luck of always having her many virtues written on water and its few vices carved on marble (Idehen 2014). Most worrisome is the continuous humiliation of Nigeria especially from those whom she has made incredible contribution to, despite her domestic challenges such as South Africa. South Africa is one of those countries that had refused to come to terms with the leadership role of Nigeria in Africa, perhaps, because of unhealthy competition over regional hegemony.

The Realities

As a relatively new nation in the 1960s, Nigeria's foreign policy elite viewed foreign policy in largely emblematic terms. Such indeed was the euphoria that for very long time the nation's diplomacy was characterized by historical dynamics and sheer visibility. Current realities interrogate the purpose of Nigeria's humanitarian and selfless foreign policy especially towards Africa nations. One undisputable reality is that it has failed in its entirety to give the country and its people the modicum of respect and fear she deserved and used to be known for. This obviously is not unconnected with the serious systemic problem within the domestic arena, which has culminated into this palpable situation where we have become a nation which has moved from the sublime to the ridiculous in the way we relate with dignity and respect with the world, yet in return relate with us in a manner unbefitting of our 'Giant of Africa' status. From Malaysia, India, Libya, Egypt, The Gambia, the United States, to Commonwealth countries like the United Kingdom, South Africa, Singapore, Ghana to mention a few, Nigerians are hounded, maimed, gagged, robbed, shot at and worse of all killed extra-judiciously on flimsy excuses or at the slightest provocation (Oluwafunminiyi 2015).

However, the reality is that the nation is faced with some novel challenges, which include insecurity, corruption, and an economic downturn that has essentially been spawned by the global oil crisis. Efforts to fix most of these problems have been a difficult task, unfortunately the international community had responded to most of these challenges with mockery.

In the area of insecurity, northern Nigeria is currently under siege by Boko haram terrorist group and when the need arises for Nigeria to solicit for international support, Washington declined to sell the necessary arms which would have been used to contain the insurgency. However, this is not completely strange as this stance is consistent with Washington behavior on issues of Nigeria/US relations. This is because, all along and despite the chloroformed mentality of our foreign policy elite, Nigeria has never really occupied a prime place in Washington's foreign policy calculations.

As regards the economic downturn, there is the need to redefine the way we relate to the rest of the world. Given the causes of the tremors in the economy, it is evident that we need to re-evaluate our relationships with certain nations in the international system. The "father charismas" posture of the Nigeria state especially towards Africa nations in the name of foreign policy should stop in view of our economic challenges and global realities.

Taken together, therefore, it is evident that in view of the numerous problems facing this country, and the challenges of current global realities Nigeria cannot continue on this path. It is possible to actually contain some of these problems through a hard-headed pursuit of our national interests in the domain of foreign policy, however, urgent need of rethink of our Afrocentric foreign policy into embarking on selective engagement is necessary, as that will be consistent with the immutable axioms of international relations which states that "there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests".

Conclusion

The alienation of foreign nationals especially black immigrant in South Africa had successfully created a thick line of partition between the "we" and the "them" in South Africa, undermining the ethos of black brotherhood rooted in Africa socialism and communalism. This partition might be with us for a very long time unless urgent steps are taken by the Africa Union. The criminalization of the "others" in other to get rid of them cannot be substantiated by South Africans, in fact, it is what Freud called "the narcissism of minor differences", and it is a psychological way of ventilating one's emotion in the face of suppressed tension. The most painful aspect of this scenario is the injury that has been inflicted on the Pan African project (African Renaissance) Which is a radical departure from the struggles and spirit of our for fathers, those who championed the struggle of liberation in Africa.

According to the paper, xenophobia in South Africa is senseless and irrational. It is morally injurious to the collectivity of South Africans and the international community, it is a gross violation of international statutes that carry the signature of South Africa themselves. It is unacceptable and will not be accommodated.

Nigeria is a country that has invested so much on the Africa project through the robust foreign policy of Afrocentrism despite the compelling challenges of domestic imperatives. Unfortunately, these gestures had been undermined by the wanton destructions of the lives and properties of Nigerians living in South Africa and the constant humiliation of Nigerians across the globe. Consequently, it has become imperative for a re-think of this policy which to me had outlived its usefulness.

It is therefore recommend that Nigeria re-focus its foreign policy away from the Africa project to areas that can galvanize substantial national interest. Nigeria should appreciate the enormity of her challenges and look inward towards confronting these challenges instead of this flagrant policy of Africa Renaissance that is not being appreciated by even the most benefactor.

The international community must stand up to its biding by sanctioning south Africa for gross violation of international law in other to serve as a deterrent to other country contemplating such heinous crime.

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