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Beyond Fear: How Everyday Interactions Defuse Xenophobia in South African Townships

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Abstract

Scholarship and research following the onset of the widespread 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa have largely been negative, presenting a picture of perpetual hatred, communities falling into abysmal fear, livelihoods and lives being lost, and the relative peace and harmony enjoyed by locals and foreigners since South Africa gained its independence in 1994 being lost forever. Such rhetoric has been entrenched by the continued rise in cases of civil unrest, perpetuated by individuals and groups who champion selfish interests at the expense of foreigners. Yet, naturally, society has shown the ability to transform negative experiences into positive outcomes, characterized by deeper social ties, co-existence, and mutually beneficial oneness in diversity. Based on ethnographic research conducted to examine everyday social interaction among migrants from the Great Lakes Region and South Africans in Cape Town, this paper calls for a re-examination of the roots and results of xenophobia, showing, through the examples of Joe Slovo and Phoenix Townships in Cape Town, how positive social movements can be borne out of negative situations. The paper argues, with evidence from the two townships, that what may have changed since 2008 is the nature of the social fabric that is interaction-based, that which holds a people either together or asunder, and not their economic outlook. The paper delves into the controversy surrounding the social menace of xenophobia, which, although widely written about, none have been wholesomely able to account for. Perhaps the answer to why there has been this ugly scar on South Africa lies in the examination not of what has been, but in areas seemingly unimportant. The question is: why has xenophobia been continuously experienced in some areas more than others, yet poverty is as endemic and perpetual an element in South African townships? Part of the answer lies in the examination of social relations between African migrants and locals in areas least hit by the social cancer. Based on evidence, xenophobia in South Africa is argued to be more a social than an economic consequence, whose trajectory is changeable once the right social tools are employed. These positive

results can also serve as models for social reconstruction if a sustainable solution to social ills such as xenophobia can be found.

Keywords

Xenophobia, Diversity, Social Interaction, Everyday Conviviality, Cosmopolitanism, South Africa

1. Introduction

Despite the transition to democracy, xenophobia has remained an entrenched and deeply ingrained issue in South African society, influencing both public opinion and behaviour. In essence, xenophobia involves an intense aversion to or prejudice against individuals or groups perceived as foreign, giving rise to discriminatory attitudes, violent acts, and widespread human rights abuses (Mogekwu, 2005). Data from the 1995 World Values Survey showed that South Africans were the most xenophobic nation of the 18 included in the sample (Mattes et al., 1999). In South Africa, African migrants are the group most likely to experience the behavioral consequences of xenophobia. Everyday discrimination is frequently encountered, especially by nationals of other Southern African countries, together with Central and West African nationals. Vigilante attacks on immigrant individuals, particularly shopkeepers, are disturbingly common (Harris, 2001; Charman & Piper, 2012). Post-Apartheid xenophobia in South Africa became apparent when widespread attacks targeting foreigners took place in May 2008, killing 62 people and making international headlines. Another wave of violence occurred in April 2015, leading to an outcry across Africa and the recall of the Nigerian ambassador (Claassen, 2017).

Most studies on African migration in South Africa have documented the social and economic tensions that have existed among transnational migrants and South Africans, characterized by social exclusion, hatred, discrimination, and, to some extent, xenophobic attacks on African migrants, particularly in South African townships (Misago et al., 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Landau et al., 2013; Crush, 2000, 2008; Amisi, 2006; Gordon, 2015; Kerr et al., 2019; Claassen, 2017; Hamilton & Bax, 2018; Mlambo et al., 2023). Although individuals, policymakers, and civic organizations have proffered solutions to this social menace, recent developments have shown that the problem has continued to date unabated. The periods before and after the May 2024 elections in South Africa were marked by threats against foreigners, with pressure groups and political parties taking advantage of perceived public sentiments to gain popularity at the expense of foreigners. One such movement is "Operation Dudula," a vigilante group later turned political party, which has been at the forefront of xenophobic-related raids on foreigners and the closure of foreign businesses.

The aim of the paper is to juxtapose the over-emphasis on conflict, xenophobic

violence, social exclusion, and discrimination that have dominated the African migration discourse in contemporary South Africa, and to reveal how people—transnational and internal migrants—relate to each other as they live together. The case studies of Joe Slovo and Phoenix in Cape Town, South Africa, were selected on the basis of their multiplicity of migrants from Burundi, the DRC, and Rwanda, who are diverse among themselves and also South Africans, as well as on the basis of their diverse informal activities, which are significant in attempting to show the positive effects of diversity, difference, and belonging. As Forrest & Kearns (2001) put it, residents of poor neighborhoods spend more time in their local areas than do residents of wealthier neighborhoods. The community members of Phoenix and Joe Slovo townships thus engage in socio-economic activities that make their diversities visible and their daily interactions feasible, providing a plausible social solution to the detrimental social menace of xenophobia.

2. Theories behind Xenophobia

Xenophobia in South Africa has been attributed to a number of factors, with many theories emerging as a result. One such theory is the Structural Causes theory propounded by Bond et al. (2009), who, in a synthesis report following the 2008 xenophobic attacks countrywide, point to a number of economic and social structural defects which may have led to xenophobia. Among these, they indicate that the labour market is one important source of conflict between locals and immigrants, as corporates take advantage of cheap labour offered by immigrants at the expense of the former. Bond et al. cite Jara and Perbedy (2009), who conducted research in places like Du Noon, Masiphumelele, Gugs, and Khayelitsha in Cape Town, observing that xenophobia is often articulated by township business associations who actively organise against black African-owned (usually Somali) businesses operating in townships and informal settlements.

In other areas such as Durban, other structural problems were observed, centered on, among other things: extremely high unemployment, which exacerbates traditional and new migrancy patterns; a tight housing market with residential stratification, exacerbating service delivery problems (water/sanitation, electricity, and other municipal services); extreme retail business competition; world-leading crime rates; corruption in the Home Affairs Department and other state agencies in a manner detrimental to perceptions regarding immigrants; cultural conflicts; and severe regional geopolitical stresses, particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region of Central Africa (Bond et al., 2009). The argument is that civil society organisations did not tackle these root problems, thus could not nip xenophobic attacks in the bud, but rather allowed for a bad sore to fester, manifesting in xenophobic attacks.

Many observations on xenophobia tend to agree with the structural approach, emphasizing economic aspects thereof. In the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), Crush (2008) discusses the levels of hostility among South Africans, questioning whether they are all equally xenophobic. He finds that xenophobia

among employed South Africans is less virulent compared to the unemployed (Crush, 2008: 35) populations. This is in line with what other scholars have noted about the root causes of xenophobia; namely, that African migrants are stereotyped as stealing jobs and other opportunities from local nationals (Sichone, 2008; Harris, 2002; Misago et al. 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2006). Therefore, the blame for social ills is based on the deprivation and poverty that exist among locals, particularly black South Africans, most of whom, especially in informal settlements and townships, are unemployed (Crush, 2008).

Closely attached to the structural theory is the competition theory. As noted by Mlambo et al. (2023), the competition theory of xenophobia emphasizes economic factors; competing for scarce resources among the locals and immigrants is the root cause of frustrations, leading to xenophobic violence. It is argued that resource scarcity is not the sole source of xenophobia but is a genuine concern (Mlambo et al., 2023). As with the distribution of wealth, the competition theory of xenophobia notes that conflict and competition increase because of increased economic deterioration. Competition over scarce resources results in tensions, violence, and intergroup conflict, a function of inter-group competition. Many scholars have used the competition theory to explain xenophobia, looking at government housing and jobs. Thus, the hypothesis states that competition for housing or employment with African foreigners increases xenophobia (Claasen, 2017).

Crush (2008) notes that xenophobia in South Africa has historical, material, political, and managerial derivatives. The latter means that the massive income gap, poverty, and inequality have resulted from apartheid policies and from the government's failure to redistribute the post-apartheid economic boom to the poor. These developments have caused frustration, which has resulted in xenophobic attitudes towards so-called "others" (Ibid). In the informal settlements and townships of South Africa, we find many cases of xenophobic attacks due to the competition for resources and the high rate of poverty, and these are the same areas where crime is high due to the lack of necessities such as houses and employment (Harris, 2001; Yakushko, 2009). Xenophobia is therefore explained in relation to limited resources such as housing, education, employment, and health care, coupled with high expectations during transition. Xenophobia in South Africa has therefore been viewed as a consequence of socio-economic inequality (Masikane et al., 2020). Foreigners who are perceived as a threat to jobs, housing, and education become scapegoats once nationals become frustrated due to ongoing deprivation and poverty (Harris, 2002: 2). Xenophobia also arises from a subjective feeling of discontent based on the belief that one is getting less than one feels entitled to. This embraces what De la Rey (1991) notes when he states that when there is a gap between ambitions and reality, social discontent is likely to result.

A different theory focuses on a general lack of knowledge and social interaction. It is arguable that another trigger of xenophobia among South Africans towards African migrants is lack of knowledge, due to a lack of interaction and contact

between migrants and locals. In this sense, hatred towards African transnational migrants is a result of the isolation that black South Africans experienced during the apartheid era in South Africa. Under this regime, black South Africans were isolated from the international community (Harris, 2002), and due to this international isolation, nationals became hostile and unwelcoming to non-nationals. Isolation from the international and local communities affected the majority; it caused ignorance about other countries and about their neighbours, causing fear and hostility towards them, regarding them as total strangers and "unknown." According to Harris (2002), when a group has no history of incorporating strangers, it may find it difficult to be welcoming.

This paper subscribes to the arguments by migration researchers Jean Pierre Misago, Loren Landau, and Tamlyn Monon, who contend that violence against [black] immigrants to South Africa has been a permanent attribute across the apartheid and post-apartheid divide, where otherness/outsiderness, stereotypes, and structural exclusion prevent immigrants from exercising political rights and rights to residence in the cities. Among other root causes of xenophobia, it is argued that social exclusion is rooted in the history of racial segregation, where South Africans were segregated according to their skin colour, language group, ethnicity, and age (Kgatle, 2019; Masikane et al., 2020). Consequently, the history of exclusion in South Africa has negatively impacted how black South Africans relate with those who are perceived as different (Harris, 2002; Sichone, 2008), the African migrants who do not belong (Nyamnjoh, 2006).

The exclusionary political system affected people's social lives as it determined where people would live and whom they should interact with (Landau, 2009; Landau, 2014; Kgatle, 2019). This exclusionary system exacerbated deprivation and poverty among Black South Africans, most of whom continue to live in informal settlements and townships and are highly unemployed (Crush, 2008).

Argument is made that the combination of immigrant rightlessness and structural exclusion, amidst a perceived invasion of "foreigners", resulted in organized social activism against individuals perceived as dangerous to the socio-cultural and moral fabric, and as threatening the economic opportunities of poor South Africans. Bond et al. (2009) explain that, behind xenophobia for some scholars, is the problem of "isolation", which situates "foreignness" at the heart of hostility toward foreigners. The isolation hypothesis understands xenophobia as a consequence of apartheid South Africa's seclusion from the international community. "There is little doubt that the brutal environment created by apartheid, with its enormous emphasis on boundary maintenance, has impacted on people's ability to be tolerant of difference." This theory suggests that South Africans are unable to tolerate and accommodate difference, and indeed, find difference challenging.

The issues of isolation and social exclusion amidst diversity are at the core of this paper's argument, which focuses on the ways in which South African intra-migrants and Great Lakes Region migrants in a Cape Town township relate to each other, how they have managed to forge relations despite their differences,

and, more importantly, how encounters with such diversity are mediated in everyday life. It answers the following questions: What are the situations that make conviviality possible where conflicts are also possible in a fragmented migrant community in South Africa? Is there hope for foreigners through transformed social interactions, despite ever-deteriorating economic conditions? In order to answer these questions, there is a need to take a closer look at socio-economic relations in Joe Slovo and Phoenix Townships in Cape Town and consider the lessons they offer.

3. The Case Studies of Phoenix and Joe Slovo Townships, Cape Town

The paper is based on ethnographic evidence gathered over a period of twelve months in two interconnected townships, namely Joe Slovo and Phoenix, in the city of Cape Town, South Africa. Although these locations are dominated by South African residents such as black intra-migrants in Joe Slovo and mostly coloureds in Phoenix, these locations have also attracted a number of transnational African migrants, particularly young families and single adults from the Great Lakes region, to work in the nearby mall as security and car guards, while others run informal businesses in the locality as barbers, hairdressers, tailors, and restaurant owners (Murara, 2020). Data were collected through participant observations, semistructured interviews, and informal conversations with residents, both South African intramigrants and transnational migrants from Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Observations focused on everyday social interactions in public spaces like streets, informal businesses, and the local Pentecostal church, and interviews with key informants were conducted to supplement the observations. Field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts were systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns of social relations. This methodological approach ensured that the claims made in this paper are grounded in lived experiences and sustained engagement with the communities under study.

The day-to-day interactions in these two townships are important in understanding the ensuing social interactions and relations. In Joe Slovo, there are more shops, bus terminals, and movement since residents intensely move up and down the streets from one shop to another. This movement starts very early in the morning as residents rush to catch public transport to work and children go off to school, and ends very late, not only as the residents come back from work shifts but also as they enter and exit shops in the locality. All shops in Joe Slovo, including barbershops, restaurants, and hair salons, are made in shipping containers and are positioned on the main street. On this same main street, one can hardly escape the barbeque smell of meat, sausages, and chickens, especially over the weekends, as Xhosa women position their braai stands as a means of making a living. On the Phoenix side, there are fewer shops compared with Joe Slovo, and the shops are within a small complex that could be regarded as a shopping hub in the area, though the available businesses in this complex are limited to restaurants, a tai-

loring shop, an internet café, and hair salons.

Most of the above informal businesses in the area are run by migrant refugees from the Great Lakes region, except for a few, such as a driving school in Joe Slovo that is owned by a South African, and a small grocery store owned by a Somali refugee migrant. Joe Slovo, as compared to Phoenix in general, seemed busier and noisier due to the high movement of people and their sounds, and minibuses on street corners hooting in search of passengers, to mention a few.

The Phoenix and Joe Slovo townships consist of mixed populations, the majority of which are black South Africans (in Joe Slovo), and coloureds (on the Phoenix side), plus migrants from the Great Lakes Region and southern African regions such as Zimbabwe. Most of the migrants live side by side with their South African landlords in shacks and/or RDP[1] houses. From observations and information gathered from South Africans and their migrant tenants in Joe Slovo, South Africans who have acquired houses through the RDP programme create spaces for shacks in their backyards and rent them out as an additional source of income (Murara, 2020). Most of the migrants interviewed, who reside in Joe Slovo, mentioned that they found the rentals affordable and favourable as they were close to their places of work. Through the analysis of space and embodied performances, these everyday experiences and interactions between migrants from the Great Lakes Region (who form the majority among other transnational migrants on the site and yet are diverse among themselves) and South Africans were investigated, in order to unsettle the common belief that there could be no everyday conviviality between these two groups.

Joe Slovo, therefore, is a township that was established to replace an informal settlement and is overpopulated because both intra- and transnational migrants continue to make it their residential home. According to the 2011 census, for instance, Joe Slovo Park had a population of 12,629 and was inhabited by 95% black Africans, 66% of whom were Xhosa, while the neighbouring Phoenix had a population of 4219 and was inhabited by few black Africans, with the majority consisting of coloureds. In Phoenix, it is estimated that 83% of the labour force (aged 15 to 64) is employed, while at least 28% of households have a monthly income of R3200 or less (SSA, 2011 census). This figure is higher than the employment and income demographic representations found among shack dwellers in Joe Slovo, where only 32.7% were permanently employed. Robins also conducted a study in Joe Slovo Park in 2002 and found that about 47% of the population at that time was unemployed (Robins, 2002). This high unemployment rate is found in most black South African communities and townships, and inhabitants mostly depend on short-contract jobs from nearby industries and shopping centres, while a few South Africans and the majority of transnational migrant residents run informal businesses to cope with their socio-economic challenges. In Phoenix, as men-

[1]The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is a South African socio-economic policy framework aimed at very poor and property-less citizens. The programme ensures the replacement of shack dwellings with the construction of formal houses, and the government-funded low-income houses are known as "RDP housing".

tioned earlier, there is a small complex of formal houses, and migrants rent rooms in the complex to run their businesses, whether tailoring, restaurants, hair salons or barbershops, while in Joe Slovo they rent or own shipping container shops positioned on the main street.

It is on the basis of this diversity and migration in a contemporary South African township that a Murara (2020) study produced knowledge that contributes to the existing literature in the overall study of migration in Africa and to the anthropological literature on the performance of diversity in South Africa. The study focused on everyday performances of diversity and conviviality, and the ways in which transnational migrants and South Africans rebuild or disconnect from existing social relations in a natural and social setting. This provided a platform to understand "new forms of cosmopolitanism" (Vertovec, 2007: 1046), where empathy, toleration, and respect for other cultures and values are realised both through "living together with difference" (Werbner, 2008: 2). Unlike elite or global forms of cosmopolitanism, vernacular cosmopolitanism emerges from grassroots interactions, often in marginalized or resource-constrained communities, where people learn to live together across cultural boundaries.

In the case studies of Joe Slovo and Phoenix, this concept is evident in the ways South African intramigrants and transnational migrants from the Great Lakes Region engage in shared practices of daily life. Renting backyard shacks, running container shops, participating in communal braai culture, and exchanging services such as hairdressing or tailoring all represent forms of vernacular cosmopolitanism. These practices transform difference into familiarity, creating bonds of reciprocity and mutual benefit.

The findings of the Murara (2020) study make it clear that what makes conviviality possible in Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships, as it may be elsewhere in the city or country, is the repeated contact that intra-migrants who are black South Africans have with transnational migrants in their neighbourhood; contact through which they have managed to learn about, appreciate, and appropriate the cultural practices that these non-South Africans confer. Their differences are negotiated through ordinary practices in everyday life; a process similar to what Sichone (2008) has termed xenophilia in his study conducted in Cape Town. Sichone notes the shift from xenophobic treatment of non-nationals to love of foreigners by some South African women whom he referred to as "Xhosa Mamas". For him, the Xhosa Mamas practiced their cosmopolitanism by welcoming and hosting strangers, offering them food, providing new arrivals with accommodation, and engaging with foreigners as their fellows.

Findings from Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships (Murara, 2020), in line with Sichone's findings, are in deep contrast to xenophobic encounters. The regular contact with people from elsewhere outside South Africa helps intra-migrant South Africans to learn about others, engage with them, and appreciate their diversities. This contests and outweighs some xenophobic triggers, including lack of knowledge about migrants from elsewhere in Africa (Misago et al., 2009), and lack

of contact (Crush, 2008), among other factors. Through regular social interactions with migrants from the Great Lakes Region in Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships, South Africans changed their minds. They learnt that African migrants are not there to steal jobs, but are innovative and self-reliant individuals who run informal businesses to make a living, which also benefits South Africans who no longer have to commute to get a haircut but benefit from getting services rendered in their neighbourhood63 and at discounted, cheaper rates. There were evident practices of assimilation and appropriation as residents embraced the idea of cosmopolitanism, which emphasises that nothing is innate in cultural belonging; rather, one's sense of culture and belonging can be transformed in the process of meeting with others (Baban, 2006).

4. Xenophobia in South Africa: More Social Than Economic?

Whilst it would be folly to either turn a blind eye to the economic triggers of xenophobia or completely separate economic and socio-political factors, the study of Joe Slovo and Phoenix in Cape Town indicates that xenophobia is more social than economic in nature. Whilst in other areas in South Africa, more apparent in the Gauteng province, xenophobic attacks have continued to rear their ugly head since 2008, there have been marked improvements in the Cape Town townships. Interestingly, the levels of poverty in South Africa, Cape Town included, over the years, have not improved, but rather have actually worsened.

As revealed by Bassier et al. (2023), the Covid-19 pandemic and other factors such as the Global Financial Crisis have led to deeper cuts to social welfare and support services, increasing levels of poverty among Black South Africans since 2020. The situation has been so dire that, for instance, between February and April 2020, there was a 40% decline in active employment in South Africa, with vulnerable groups disproportionately affected, a situation that did not improve much post-Covid-19 (Bassier et al., 2023). According to Statista (2024), as of 2024, around 13.2 million people in South Africa are living in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at USD$2.15 daily. This means that 139,563 people were pushed into poverty compared to 2023 (Statista, 2024). The World Bank (2024) reveals that about 63% of the population is estimated to live below the USD$6.85 upper-middle-income threshold in 2024, corresponding to 2.2 million more poor people than in 2008. The key question arising is: why then have economic conditions continued to deteriorate, yet xenophobic tendencies in some areas, although significant in 2008, have made a turnaround to reflect harmony in diversity?

Research revealed that the answer lies not in the economic conditions of the locals, but in the transforming social interactions, which resulted in greater social cohesion and inclusion. What has long existed as an economic factor should be understood more as a social factor to better understand the transformation that has occurred. Economic spaces have been transformed into social forces, skillfully employed, through the advantage of history and background, to better position the self and reverse the negative effects of xenophobia. This can best be under-

stood first from understanding the nature of immigrants found in Joe Slovo and Phoenix, and an appreciation of the differing social conditions in which both South Africans and immigrants find themselves.

There are no refugee camps in South Africa, as compared to other southern African countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi that host migrants from war-torn countries. Consequently, the majority of Great Lakes Region migrants who are refugees live in the same neighbourhoods as local South Africans, whose history of social exclusion (Coplan, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Posel, 1987) has resulted in negative attitudes towards the "other"; an attitude that is re-enacted in everyday life, more particularly towards African migrants. As a result, African migrants' social relations with South African internal migrants have been negative, ranging from everyday social exclusion to assaults, for instance, the xenophobic attack of May 2008, which left some migrants dead, injured, and others displaced (Misago et al., 2009: 2).

Previous studies on migrants from the Great Lakes Region in South Africa have pointed out that this category of migrants runs informal businesses to make a living (Amisi & Ballard, 2005; Steinberg, 2005). While many, like other migrants, face difficulties in securing formal employment, they find their own ways to negotiate challenges of socio-economic livelihood. Following this, Congolese, Rwandese, and Burundian refugees, for instance, have been reported to survive on unskilled work, mainly as car and security guards, taxi drivers, or by working in hairdressing and other informal businesses (Owen, 2011; Steinberg, 2005; Vigouroux, 2008) and street vending (Steinberg, 2005; Vigouroux, 2008).

Nevertheless, engagement in informal businesses by people from the Great Lakes Region is not something new. While one may argue that Great Lakes Region migrants in their migrant neighbourhoods run informal businesses as the only way to make a living, one should also ask why all these informal activities are done mostly by transnational migrants and not intra-national South Africans who also live in townships and experience socio-economic hardships due to poverty and unemployment. Rather, the ability to establish social spaces like shops in a township of Cape Town reflects the socio-economic life lived in their home countries, which is re-enacted throughout their trajectories and in South Africa today. As De Boeck (2015: 148) notes, in the mid-1990s about ten percent of the population in Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC, was estimated to participate in the formal economy. This implied that the rest of the population (ninety percent) had no other choice but to engage in the informal economy to make a living.

Given the above, it is important to note that the positive outcomes observed in Joe Slovo and Phoenix are closely tied to the demographic and economic profile of the transnational migrants under study. They have engaged in informal businesses such as hairdressing, tailoring, and food vending, and these activities placed migrants in daily, visible contact with South African residents, creating opportunities for reciprocity and conviviality. The entrepreneurial orientation of these groups, shaped by experiences of informality in their home countries, may have

facilitated smoother integration into township economies and social networks. As residents mingle in these spaces, whether as clients or passersby, the interaction outcomes should be understood as contingent on everyone around, regardless of their national, ethnic, or other different identities.

Migrants from the Great Lakes Region and South Africans residing in Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships have managed to live beyond fear of the other, particularly after the incidents of xenophobic attacks in 2008, as one informant narrated. They have continued to engage in informal businesses, rent South Africans' shacks in backyards, rooms inside landlords' homes, pray together, and participate in the various programmes of and at church, to mention a few encounters. They have presented themselves in local public spaces, including streets, instead of hiding or excluding themselves.

This presents another understanding that needs to be interrogated. While South African townships in general are considered the most unsafe, unsecure places for migrants to live or mix with locals, the migrant and South African residents in Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships present themselves in social spaces as people who belong. Both migrants and locals have chosen to focus on improved lifestyles as business owners, shop owners, clients, landlords, tenants, and also ordinary neighbours who need each other, rather than focusing on the possible negative impacts of their otherness and differences. It is arguable that both transnational and intra-migrants have embraced their diversities as valuable to their progressive lives together.

The central argument of this paper is that although social relations between South Africans and African migrants have been marked by xenophobic attitudes, and to some extent migrants have experienced xenophobic attacks, particularly in townships, in Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships where South Africans and migrants live together as neighbours, they have managed to mediate their differences through everyday interactions because South Africans appreciate and appropriate practices and cultural forms that migrants from the Great Lakes Region confer to their locality. There is a sense of acceptance, tolerance, recognition, and belonging experienced through everyday practices of cosmopolitanism and conviviality at every space of interaction.

As shown by research, local migrant-created spaces in Joe Slovo and Phoenix, such as restaurants, barbershops, and salons, serve not only as business or income-generating spaces but also as social contact points where people can pass by to check on others, meet and socialise, and leave their parcels for short, free, safe keeping (Murara, 2020). The relations between South Africans and transnational migrants can therefore be understood through mechanisms explained by contact theory (Allport, 1954), which posits that sustained, meaningful interaction between groups under conditions of equality and cooperation reduces prejudice and hostility. In these townships, repeated encounters in shared economic and social spaces such as renting backyard shacks, running informal businesses, encounters on the streets in the neighborhood, and participating in local migrant-led churches

created opportunities for familiarity, trust, and mutual benefit. These interactions generated bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), where ties across diverse groups fostered networks of reciprocity and solidarity that transcended economic competition. Thus, rather than exacerbating xenophobic tensions, the social fabric of daily life enabled residents to reframe difference as a resource for conviviality.

Engaging with ethnographic work on spaces and places, Fischer (1982) describes urban spaces as points of diversity, tolerance, sophistication, sociation, public participation, cosmopolitanism, and personal network formation. With interest in the spatial and social compositions of urban regions, an urbanist, AbdouMaliq Simone, provides another meaning to urban spaces. Simone (2004) finds, for instance, that in the inner city of Johannesburg in South Africa, the spatial parameters compel uncertain interactions and cooperation among long-term residents and new arrivals, South Africans and Africans from elsewhere. Both of these writers stress the importance of space as a contact point where people of differences ordinarily meet, intermingle, and interact. The divergence between these Cape Town townships and Johannesburg, perhaps, is in their social dynamics, where the persistence of xenophobia in Gauteng can be explained by differences in local social dynamics. In Gauteng, xenophobic violence has often been linked to large-scale competition over scarce resources in densely populated informal settlements, where migrants are perceived as direct economic rivals in housing and employment markets. By contrast, the Cape Town case studies reveal a more integrated everyday life shaped by repeated social contact and shared spaces. Migrants in Phoenix and Joe Slovo are embedded in the daily rhythms of township life—renting backyard shacks from South African landlords, running container shops that serve local residents, and participating in communal practices such as street markets and braai culture. These interactions foster familiarity and reciprocity, reducing the sense of "otherness" that fuels hostility.

This diversity contrasts with Gauteng's more polarized settings, where migrants are often concentrated in enclaves and framed as outsiders competing for limited resources. The Cape Town examples therefore demonstrate how everyday conviviality, rooted in sustained contact and shared practices, can override economic triggers of xenophobia, while Gauteng illustrates how the absence of such integrative dynamics allows hostility to persist.

Landau and Madhavan (2011: 480) assert that in the absence of social associations that provide bridging and bonding opportunities, the state or other government bodies should intervene to foster community and to negotiate patterns of inclusion and exclusion. As an alternative to negotiations of inclusion and exclusion facilitated by top-down mechanisms, this paper emphasises the notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism—cosmopolitanism from below—that governs the practices of localised individuals (Kahn, 2008) through everyday interactions between individuals and groups, and practices of popular cultural activities. The notion of conviviality states that where people live, being different is not a problem, but the denial that people are different is (Gilroy, 2004).

It is conceivable that, despite different nationalities, ethnicities, opinions, and other identities that denote residents' diversity, the spaces created within their local migrant neighbourhoods such as Joe Slovo and Phoenix townships allow for regular and yet ordinary interactions through which they build relationships and a sense of belonging. Black South Africans in Joe Slovo, it is arguable, have seen the diversity around them as an opportunity to learn more about migrants and appreciate what these migrants contribute rather than seeing them as a threat. Such social conviviality and cosmopolitanism are born out of the locals' willingness to learn from migrants, and to a great extent, the migrants also make efforts to encourage inclusive practices and representations in their locality in a natural setting. Through local spaces, therefore, internal migrants and transnational migrants from the Great Lakes Region have managed to (re)build and maintain social relations through repetitive interactions.

5. Implications for Xenophobia in South Africa

It has been widely accepted that, in most cases, attempts by different stakeholders to address xenophobia have not been successful over the years. Misago et al. (2015) affirm that systemic and deeply entrenched xenophobic attitudes and behaviour in South Africa are clear evidence that responses and interventions designed to address the problem have been largely ineffective. To address South African xenophobia, there is a need to understand it. Calls have been made for the government to address economic challenges, including access to financial and non-financial capital such as land, increased income, increased employment opportunities, addressing challenges in accessing education, widening the scope for social grants, and improving public health access, among others, through policy revision. However, there is no guarantee that addressing economic challenges will eliminate or lessen xenophobic tendencies among locals. Arguably, economic attempts at addressing xenophobia would be more of treating symptoms of the society's problem, and not the root cause. Any attempt at resolving the problem of xenophobia, therefore, has to be more social than economic.

Some non-economic solutions have also been suggested. Amongst them is the idea by Misago et al. (2015) that there is a need to acknowledge, at the government level, the problem that society is facing and take steps to correct the anomaly. There is conviction that the national government and relevant local authorities have thus far either tended to ignore the problem or to categorise violence against foreign nationals and other forms of xenophobic behaviour as part of "normal" crime, with no need for additional targeted interventions (Misago et al., 2015). This paper argues that anything top-down and not stemming from the people affected will not necessarily work. Even with the earlier suggestion, Misago et al. (2015) acknowledge that civil society efforts to foster peaceful coexistence and tolerance through social dialogues and awareness campaigns have also largely proven unsuccessful in changing attitudes and reducing violence and other forms of outsider exclusion (Misago et al., 2015). What is needed is a community-driven

process of regeneration, aiming at recreating social interaction to foster social inclusion, where diversity is celebrated through mutual respect. It takes the affected to bring positive influence and change to situations affecting them, showing a measure of agency.

The state, through different arms, has established strategies to enhance social cohesion as a way of fighting xenophobia. Hamilton and Bax (2018) note that South Africa's national cohesion strategy focuses overwhelmingly on racial relations and post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa, as opposed to intercultural relations and xenophobic violence. It is observed that the strategy, published in 2012, is based on the concept of Ubuntu and its principles of social humanism, interpersonal care, and commitment to the greater social good (Hamilton & Bax, 2018). The Department of Arts and Culture's recommendations for strengthening social cohesion at the community level focus largely on strengthening inclusive citizenship through civic education programs. Community conversations around social cohesion and active citizenship create awareness of issues and can successfully deliver information regarding Constitutional rights; however, they do not create opportunities for sustained dialogue between locals and foreign nationals to address xenophobia as a barrier to social cohesion (Hamilton & Bax, 2018).

The proposition of creating social cohesion can largely work. However, as shown by the Joe Slovo and Phoenix example, only the active participation and initiative of the communities in question will produce sustainable results. This paper argues that although the government can support community initiatives through civic education and policies that enable immigrants to live freely among locals, with unrestricted activities, it takes the direct involvement of locals, both perpetrators and victims, to achieve sustainable results. It is arguably correct, however, that creating an enabling environment allows immigrants to engage in activities and spaces that encourage social interaction between themselves and locals, eliminating social exclusion, and therefore helping to eliminate xenophobic tendencies.

There have been attempts at the community level to address xenophobia, but none have been as effective as the strategies used in Joe Slovo and Phoenix, because attempts have either been made to address the issue using economically inclined means, yet the problem is more socially inclined, or solutions have emanated from the top and are expected to cascade to the grassroots. It is even arguable that in the absence of effective government and civil society responses, foreign nationals and local communities and their leaders are forging new ways to deal with discrimination and violent exclusion. In a few instances, as shown by the Joe Slovo and Phoenix examples, local communities have resisted violent mobilisation and have actively protected foreign nationals and other groups living in their midst. Such shows that human beings, including foreigners, are not passive recipients of tragedy, but through agency can take initiatives, even socially, to change situations.

However, this is not to negate the fact that any reduction in xenophobic tenden-

cies involves the locals buying into the social change as well. It is evident from the Joe Slovo and Phoenix case studies that much of the "protection" or "welcoming" of foreigners in the community is motivated by self-interest too, rather than a principled stance of tolerance and hospitality. In some places, foreign nationals and local communities have resorted to unlawful compromises such as limiting the number of foreign-owned businesses in a given locality and setting minimum prices on basic goods. Segatti (2011) notes that these agreements are problematic because they set precedents akin to market division and price fixing. In other instances, foreign nationals pay protection fees to local leaders or gangsters or are forced to drop criminal charges against their assailants to appease communities or in response to threats of further attacks (Misago et al., 2009). The only sustainable solutions to xenophobia not only involve, therefore, a "meeting of the minds" between the perpetrator and the victim, but, far from materialistic arrangements, more integration and co-existence, characterised by inclusion and a sense of belonging. There is a need for deeper understanding between and amongst citizens and immigrants, to allow for the growth of social integration, from tolerance through inclusion to acceptance. Such is affirmed by Mogekwu (2005), who states that xenophobes presumably do not have adequate information about the people they hate and, since they do not know how to deal with such people, they see them as a threat.

The case studies of Joe Slovo and Phoenix hence demonstrate that community-driven solutions to xenophobia are most effective when rooted in everyday, replicable practices. Below is a summary of these grassroots practices that created daily contact and social cohesion among residents.

Shared housing arrangements: They did not only provide affordable housing but also fostered trust and reciprocity, as landlords and tenants relied on one another for income and stability.

Informal Business Integration: Transnational migrant-run container shops such as hair salons, barbershops, tailoring services, and food stalls became embedded in township life. By meeting local needs at affordable rates, these businesses reduced perceptions of migrants as economic competitors.

Communal Food Practices: The weekend braai stands operated by South African women often drew in migrant customers and neighbors, creating informal spaces of conviviality where cultural exchange occurred naturally.

Everyday Service Exchange: Migrants offering services such as haircuts, tailoring, and hairdressing within walking distance of residents' homes reduced barriers to access and encouraged repeated, positive interactions.

Visible Participation in Local Rhythms: Migrants' involvement in township routines—commuting alongside locals and participating in street markets—helped normalize their presence and integrate them into the social fabric.

6. Conclusion

Solutions for xenophobia and xenophobic tendencies, therefore, can arguably be

found within transforming social interactions between locals and immigrants. Social integration and inclusion, regardless of how they may be fostered, whether through immigrant initiatives or government and other stakeholders, have the power to eliminate the social menace that has denied townships in South Africa peace and stability. The recent campaigns by some local organisations and political movements, such as Operation Dudula, can be countered through fostering social inclusion and improved social engagements and interactions, for the benefit of both locals and immigrants, regardless of the pace of local economic developments. An understanding of the issues at the core of xenophobia in South Africa, building from the examples of Joe Slovo and Phoenix Townships in Cape Town, South Africa, can map the way forward for xenophobia-affected communities.

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