Xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in Musina Town, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The majority of state-owned entities (SoEs) have experienced organizational cancer for nearly three decades without showing any signs of improvement. Academicians generally agree that organizational politics are to blame for the ongoing energy-generating dilemma that has plagued rising nations. Worldwide, economies rely heavily on electricity as an energy source, to the point where they would not function or even survive without it. To reduce unfavorable political behavior, this study examines organizational politics at the Zimbabwe Supply Authority, a SoE in charge of energy production. A sample of 1400 individuals were chosen at random from a population of 2210 staff who members participated in the study using a quantitative research approach to collect data. By the deadline, 358 completed questionnaires had been returned; however, 11 of them were rejected because they had been wrongly filled out. The data were analyzed using the statistical tool SPSS 21.0 for Windows. To ensure that the samples were adequate for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's Test of sphericity were applied to the data before exploratory factor analysis could be conducted on them (Field, 2007:619). The results of the study showed that bad political behavior and ineffective managerial leadership techniques had a detrimental impact on the power generation crisis. According to the report, managers should receive training on modern managerial leadership behavior, managerial methods for behavior modification, and improved communication.

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Introduction

Studies show that countries’ socio-economic difficulties result in people, particularly youths, migrating from one country to another seeking better livelihoods (Rapholo, 2020; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2020; Browne, 2017; Betts, 2010). It is crucial to note that upon their arrival into the host countries, illegal migrant youths face challenges such as xenophobia and exclusion from the welfare activities of the host country (Rapholo, Rapholo & Mamadi, 2021; Mathebula, 2015; Crush & Tawodzera, 2011). In the year 2015, South Africa experienced a wave of violence against foreigners which led to an outcry across the African continent. This is in line with Claassen (2017) who states that the violence that took place in 2008 and 2015, as well as the hate crimes that occurred in South Africa presented a pressing human rights concern both in South Africa and other countries. Xenophobia in South Africa is more prevalent amongst the African foreigners. This is supported by Everatt (2010) and Dodson (2010) who postulate that African nationals face everyday hostility and violence in other countries. In most cases when communities encounter a vast number of foreign nationals, particularly those who come from the African continent, such communities become defensive whenever social ills such as crime prevail and start to attack such foreign nationals. Claassen (2014) support this notion in that the widespread participation on xenophobic attacks is perpetuated by affected communities. Polzer (2008) states that most South African citizens are uncomfortable with foreign nationals, particularly those who migrated without legal documents for a plethora of reasons such as economic competition, increase in crime and loss of identity or acculturation. They often

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feel insecure because of the threat posed by outsiders. The level of fear usually varies based on the socio-economic, educational, and employment status of the residents (Landau, 2005).

South Africa encounters a vast number of illegal migrants, particularly, youths. Upon their arrival in the country, amongst challenges they face, is Xenophobia. Studies show that factors such as poverty and economic competition contribute to the rise of xenophobia (Everatt, 2010; Misago, Monson, Polzer and Landau, 2010). Misago, Monson, Polzer, and Landau (2010) postulate that xenophobic violence leaves people dead, wounded, and displaced. Xenophobia affects the international relations of countries negatively. In South Africa this was seen after the 2015 xenophobic attacks which resulted in the UN Security Council issuing a sharp criticism, as well as the leaders of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi, while Nigeria recalled its ambassador (Patel & Essa, 2015). Whilst xenophobia is habitual in South Africa, there is very limited scientific research, that specifically and contextually explored the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths, particularly in Musina which is located 18 KM away from Beit Bridge border post that divides South Africa and Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study sought to close this gap by exploring the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in Musina town of the Limpopo province of South Africa.in order to develop recommendations to mitigate this social ill.

In making meaning of the data, thematic content analysis technique was applied. This technique was used to find, analyse, and report patterns in a data set, enabling thematic arrangement of the data in a way that makes it easier to understand. The described introduction presented the general area of this study wherein xenophobia was discussed within the context of the study. The introduction also described the objective of the study which was to explore the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in Musina town of the Limpopo province of South Africa. The following sections are discussed in the article. Firstly, the reviewed relevant existing literature on xenophobia. Secondly, Narrative theory is also discussed as an underpinning theoretical framework, this was done to indicate how the theory offers a thorough analysis of xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths. Thirdly, the adopted methodology comprising a research paradigm and approach, research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods and data analysis is discussed. The paper also discusses the Findings of the study. Conclusion and recommendations of the study are provided.

**Literature Review**

**An overview of Xenophobia in South Africa**

Migration is an international problem propagated by various motives such as running away from conflicts or searching for better opportunities (Browne, 2017). Whilst migration as an international problem is alarming, young people are found to be migrating more than other population groups (Rapholo, 2020; UNDESA, 2016; Martiny, Froehlich, Soltanpanah & Haugen, 2020; McKenzie, 2008). The International Organization for Migration [IOM] (2019) reported that the scale of international migration increases with recent trends; and the number of international migrants is estimated to be almost 272 million globally. The report also indicates that the estimated number and proportion of international migrants surpasses projections made for the year 2050. This means that the number of international migrants is rapidly growing globally. McDonald (2000) argues that the youth make a large portion of migrants within Southern Africa. South Africa has accommodated a large number of migrant youths who came to the country due to various reasons. This is supported by UNDESA (2020), which reports that migration in countries that are in Southern Africa is influenced largely by economic opportunities, political instability and environmental hazards.

South Africa as one of the countries in Southern Africa had an estimation of 2.9 million migrants at mid-year 2020 (UNDESA, 2020). The results of a 2006 survey conducted in South Africa on migration found that many South Africans want immigrants to be deported irrespective of their legal status (Southern African Migration Project, 2008). In support, Everatt (2010) indicated that there was a wave of violence that occurred in April 2015 with both qualitative and quantitative evidence suggesting widespread participation of community members in support of xenophobic violence in the affected communities. The xenophobic attacks on immigrants paint a bad image for the Republic of South Africa and leave it with a reputation of being hostile towards immigrants. This is supported by Dodson (2010), who postulates that South Africa is known to be hostile and discriminative towards immigrants. The unfortunate part of xenophobic attacks in South Africa is that tourists can become less attracted to the country and the economy of the country can tremendously get affected. Ferreira and Perks (2016) support this assertion in that the unattractiveness of the country due to xenophobic attacks could lead to potential income loss and that when xenophobic attacks erupt, lives of immigrants are threatened. In the same breath, Claassen (2014) postulates that there were widespread attacks targeting foreigners in South Africa in May 2008, killing 62 people and making international headlines. The xenophobic attacks on immigrants include attacks even on those who provide services at a cheaper rate to immigrants such as Indians who own shops in the townships of the country. This is supported by Charman and Piper (2012), who postulate that migrant individuals such as shopkeepers are also victims of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. On the same wavelength, Gopal (2013) postulates that xenophobic attacks not only render foreigners and refugees socially excluded, but also increase their economic barriers by reducing their ability to pursue economic activities in the host country.

**Theoretical Framework**

The narrative theory which was developed by Michael White and David Epston in the 1970s was used to guide this study. The narrative theory is about how stories help people make sense of the world, and also how people make sense of the stories. According to Bal (2004), the narrative theory is adopted when one puts forward information about events that may or may not occur. This theory
was useful in this study as it gave an insight and an understanding of the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in South Africa. The narrative theory also helped shape the stories of xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in South Africa.

**Research and Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in Musina. This approach is suitable for understanding people’s behaviours and perceptions (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016). Qualitative approach allowed the researchers to obtain detailed information on the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths in Musina town. Following exploratory research design, Musina town was used as a case study to explore the xenophobic experiences of illegal migrant youths. A case study research design is the enquiry of one or more specific ‘occasions’ (Yin, 2009). The case study design enabled the researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context. Data was gathered from nine illegal migrant youths who were purposively and conveniently selected to participate in this study. To select illegal migrant youths, church leaders who provide shelters for immigrants in Musina were of help. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This was done through having direct contact with illegal migrant youths and arrangements were made for a suitable venue for the interview with the intention of maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Data was analysed thematically through the help of the Nvivo Software. To ensure the quality of the findings, credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability were followed. Credibility through prolonged engagement, member checking and peer examination was ensured, and field notes were written directly after each interview with each migrant youth.

**Findings and Discussions**

The researchers used the narrative theory as a theoretical framework to pursue the aim of this study. The data were analysed thematically as given below.

**Demographic Details of respondents**

This study involved nine illegal migrant youths who hailed from Zimbabwe. A possible reason for the participation of only Zimbabwean respondents in this study could be that Musina Town is close to the Beit Bridge border post which divides Zimbabwe and South Africa. However, it cannot be concluded that migrants from other African countries in South Africa do not have xenophobic experiences. However, the study purposefully focused on only those who were available at the shelter and willing to participate. The respondents ranged between the ages of 18-35 years of age. The following themes emerged after the interviews with the illegal migrant youths.

**Theme 1: Derogatory name calling**

Respondents have highlighted how often they were negatively treated by South African citizens on the basis of their nationality. Some respondents mentioned how they were called all sorts of shameful and derogatory names such as ‘Amakwerekwere’, making them feel like unwanted outsiders. This is slightly in line with the previous research findings in that local citizens consider migrants as “others” or “outsiders” who must be excluded and offered limited access to the welfare services of the host countries (Ramoshaba, Rapholo and Mamadi (2021); Rapholo (2020); Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2015; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Randolph, 2012; Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2010). In addition to these findings Hickel (2014) postulates that street level narratives about Africans and xenophobia are often framed around the metaphor of the makwerekwere, a derogatory term used to refer to “outsiders”. By framing their narratives around makwerekwere, local South Africans are laying claims of spatial ownership, and that African migrants do not belong in South Africa. In support of the above, one respondent echoed that:

“People in South Africa say to the Zimbabwean people “Makharanga ano boha” meaning the Shona people are boring and they often say they hate us Shonas. They call us names such as Kharanga.”

Additionally, another respondent said:

“Personally, I have been called names for being a Zimbabwean, especially because my name is the same as Zimbabwe’s first lady’s name, so the South African people hate it.”

One respondent also added that:

“You know what I saw, people calling us names, calling us Makwerekwere, magrigamba. Those names you know. You know what is grigamba, grigamba is an animal but they are calling us like that because we are foreigners. But we don’t have a choice, we are used to that because we are suffering.”

It can be noted from the above findings that illegal migrants are made to feel unwelcome in South Africa in their everyday lives. Incidences such as when they are called names make them have feelings of helplessness and being lost. South Africans do this purposely because they do not want foreigners in the country, and such bad names are said in the hope that they would leave and go back to their home countries. But because of their desperation for a better life, migrant youths are left with no choice but to endure and accept their circumstances. According to Sandwith (2010), these linguistic utterances of “Makwere-kwere” emerge in a form of
impassioned hatred concealing itself in the language of autochthony and alien nature, which gives meanings to a set of oppositional conceptions of Africans.

**Theme 2: Blame shifting**

Some respondents mentioned how South Africans always blamed them for every bad thing that happens in their country such as illnesses including Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and all sorts of criminal activities. One respondent indicated that they are often blamed whenever there has been a robbery or theft in that everyone points fingers at them. It appears that negative stereotypical views about immigrants are widespread, especially among South Africans who perceive them as threats in the job market (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2010; Landau, 2011). South Africans tend to ascribe many of the nation’s economic and social challenges to migrant youths. These stories create a bad image of African migrants who are blamed for all the societal ills of post-apartheid South Africa, ranging from crime, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, scams and witchcraft. Additionally, Neves and Du Toit (2012) note that in a country with growing unemployment, especially amongst the black majority, African migrants are somehow blamed for local South Africans’ joblessness and have also been made the scapegoat used to justify the shortcomings of elected leaders. One respondent echoed that:

“In some places when there was a robbery or someone does something bad, the police and community members will just say it was these foreigners and you’ll find that is not even true”

In support, another respondent added:

“But other South African people don’t want to see us, sometimes when I’m walking they don’t talk anything with me, sometimes they shout at us and even talk rubbish to us, telling us we are here to finish their jobs and bring diseases. They tell us we come to do crime and steal.”

Findings above suggest that as a result of the strong hatred of illegal migrant youths, South Africans blame all the social ills on them. In instances where something was stolen, the first suspect has to be the migrant. The researchers are of the view that this is done so that the police could arrest them and deport them back home. According to Hickel (2014), the idioms associated with African migrants in South Africa suggest that they participate in forms of material accumulation that are considered immoral and anti-social, and therefore enriching themselves at the expense of others.

**Theme 3: Violent attacks against migrants by South Africans**

Other respondents have shared how they were often attacked by South Africans while walking from the stores or elsewhere. Such attacks mainly come in the form of robbery, where their belongings such as cell phones, money, groceries are taken away from them. One respondent mentioned that they were robbed of their money by a South African merely because they are Zimbabwean. The rights of undocumented migrants “Makwerekwere” are particularly severely circumscribed as they are reduced to living clandestinely and exploited with impunity by locals enjoying the prerogatives of citizenship (Nyamnjoh, 2006). One respondent echoed that:

“Xenophobic treatment, what happens is they take people and they burn the people in a tyre. Others when you come from the shops with a plastic, they take it and go with it, then they push you, they take the things which you buy.”

Another respondent added that:

“…….that experience is painful because you know this people from South Africa, they use guns so even if you buy a nice phone for yourself, they just take out the gun or the knife and they say give me that phone you give them and you can’t go to the police, they just take everything for you.”

Additionally, one respondent said that:

“Someday I went to town and I was asking for a taxi to Pretoria, and a South African tell me I don’t help the Zimbabweans, you must know your country not South Africa and then he took the money that i had.”

From the above findings, it can be noted that being a migrant youth itself invites a lot of disrespect and harassment, particularly those without legal documents. Respondents in the study indicated how they were attacked by local South Africans. Such incidences themselves put their lives at risk, because it is far worse than being robbed or raped. According to Breen, Lynch, Nel and Matthews (2016), crimes against illegal African migrants can involve mixed motives, including criminal incentives, such as robbery, but incorporate a range of crimes where the victim’s actual or perceived identity such as race, nationality or sexual orientation was a factor. In the researchers’ view, local South African citizens attack these migrant youths mainly because of their nationality. They are aware that without legal documents, migrant youths would not report such matters to the police in fear of arrest and deportation.

**Theme 4: Discrimination in health care facilities**

Many participants stated that nurses in South African clinics and hospitals often abuse them verbally, shouting at them despite their medical conditions, making them feel inferior and unwanted. One participant added that nurses would often tell them in front of everyone that Zimbabweans are not welcome and that they should go back. In support of the above, Human Rights Watch [HRW] (2015) contends that migrants who seek healthcare are often mistreated and verbally abused by healthcare workers, denied care or
charged unlawful fees. Moreover, Sheaffer (2010) adds that in the healthcare setting, documented encounters of health workers’ xenophobia included incidents of insensitive comments, for example racial slurs, unfriendly attitudes, stereotyping and discrimination, and provision of inferior care (Stewart, Gagnon & Dougherty, 2008).

One participated said that:

“When you go to clinics, there the nurses will shout at you especially when you don’t have a passport. Sometimes we don’t go there, we just sleep when we are not feeling well, and we will be fine.”

Another participant added that:

“Ahh.... you see sometimes, especially when I go to the clinic, they don’t treat us nice because they said we are Zimbabweans and we don’t help you here you don’t have passport so it’s so difficult. For example, last month I was in pain, my tooth was aching and when I go to the clinic, they say we can’t help you. That time I was not even eating, and I was feeling so guilty, why are they doing this to us.”

In corroboration of the above, one participant added that:

“When I go to the clinic the other time, they didn’t take me because I don’t have a passport, they don’t want to treat the Zimbabweans here because Zimbabweans are boring, so I will come back to the shelter thinking too much, most of us the Zimbabweans we suffer with BP because of situation”

Findings show that female migrant youth go through rough treatment by health professionals in South Africa on their healthcare consultations. This is mostly due to their illegal status because local South Africans are not treated the same way when seeking medical care. The right to access healthcare services is constitutionally guaranteed for everyone living in South Africa, and by the National Health Care Act as well as the Refugee Act (HRW, 2015). The researchers have noted from findings that being an illegal foreign migrant invites a lot of negative and bad treatment from the host citizens, who feel that migrants are competing with them over their already scarce resources, hence the hatred and hostile treatment. The researchers are of the view that female migrant youth in South Africa are being ill-treated on the basis of their nationality and legal status. This kind of treatment itself exacerbates their conditions in that they are sometimes left unattended. In support of the above, Crush and Tawodzera (2014) contend that this problem of healthcare workers denying migrants access to proper healthcare services on the basis of documentation seems to be pervasive, as illegal migrants who crossed the border from Zimbabwe also reported that they find it difficult to access healthcare services because they have no documentation.

**Theme 5: Sexual harassment by employers**

Participants highlighted that they were often victims of harassment and exploitation in their places of work. One participant mentioned that being a female migrant youth looking for work in South Africa is very risky as opposed to when you are a man. Unlike men, migrant women are not able to protect themselves from employers who take advantage of them. Another participant mentioned that some male employers ask for sexual favours before they could give them a job, and they believe this is because employers are aware of their desperation for employment. In support, HSRC (2015) asserts that employment amongst migrant women is limited. The few who manage to secure employment usually work as domestic servants in the homes of South Africans, where wages are low and sexual abuse is also rampant. In support of the above, one participant echoed:

“There are many risks if you’re a woman like me looking for a job, if you want a job they say first you must sleep with me then I will give you a job and sometimes take money and all your belongings, so it’s tough for a female.”

Additionally, another participant said that:

“If you’re a female migrant and looking for a job. There is some of the things they are going to make you feel down and cheap, like here in South Africa is that men take advantage especially if you’re suffering or if you don’t have anything to eat.”

In corroboration of the above, one participant added:

“Like some other time, I had an incident, a man came here and said she wants me to wash for his clothes but when we went to his place, he just said no I want you to entertain me, that they want to use you, have sex with you.”

It can be noted from findings that illegal female migrant youth feel unsafe in as far as seeking employment is concerned. They experience harassment in that they are sometimes asked for sexual favours in order to get employment. Findings also reveal that seeking employment for female migrant youth is risky as compared to their male counterparts as they could get raped while trying to secure jobs. In support, Hiralal (2017) notes that migrant women have difficulty in securing formal employment, and are subject to harassment, sexual abuse and patriarchal oppression. Collectively, these factors have, to some extent, exacerbated violence against some women immigrants.
Conclusions

It can be deduced that South Africa experience the scourge of xenophobia from time to time. The prevalence of xenophobic violence towards illegal migrant youths in South Africa result in loss of lives, displaced and wounded illegal migrant youth. It can also be noted that illegal migrant youths experience xenophobic challenges from the health facilities wherein they receive rough treatment by the health professionals. Illegal migrant youths also face xenophobic challenges in the communities wherein they are robbed and violently attacked. In some employment areas illegal migrant youth live in fear and discomfort as they are harassed and asked for sexual favours by their employers. Thus, the following recommendations are provided:

i. The government of South Africa should develop programmes that will address the cause of the xenophobic attacks.

ii. Educative and awareness campaigns should be carried out in South African communities to help mitigate this challenge.

iii. It was revealed that fear of competition, increased crime levels by local citizens lead to xenophobic attacks. Therefore, the government must address the issue of influx of illegal immigrants which pose a threat to the local citizens. This can be done by ensuring that security at the border posts is tightened and strictly monitored to fight illegal entry into the country.

iv. The South African government should also develop deportation programmes to assist in deporting immigrants who are in the country without permits so as to minimise this social ill that the country battles with from time to time.

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Informed Consent Statement: The researchers took the following into account to ensure ethicality: University of Limpopo research ethics policies and exercising honesty in terms of acknowledging ‘all’ sources used in this study, aided by the list of references, and avoiding plagiarism. Ethical clearance was acquired from Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) of the University of Limpopo with project number TREC/74/2019: IR. The aim of this study as well as the voluntary nature of respondent’s participation was clearly explained to the respondents and consent was obtained from them. After the respondents verbally agreed to participate in the study, they were presented with a consent form to attach their signatures. Confidentiality in the study was assured by keeping private the names and identities of the respondents. The respondents were also protected from any kind of harm.

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References


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