

“South Africa belongs to all who live in it”: Deconstructing media discourses of migrants during times of xenophobic attacks, from 2008 to 2017

ABSTRACT

A growing body of literature on media and xenophobia in South Africa has shown that the depiction of immigrants by the mainstream print media is overwhelmingly negative, and this in turn enforces negative stereotypes that contribute to further xenophobic attacks. This paper adds a dimension that is missing from existing research to focus on media representation of immigrants within questions around citizenship and identity. The arguments driving this paper are inspired by the proclamations in the South African Constitution preamble, which states that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity”. This paper analyses how selected print media in the country construct immigrants in the context of identity and belonging. We start from the premise that as a social institution, the media play an important role in shaping policies on immigration that have a bearing on these matters. Using theories of media and national identity, the paper examines thematic frames used by the selected newspapers to construct the image of immigrants during three periods of xenophobic violence, in 2008, 2015, and 2017. Our main argument is that while the media have played a significant role in creating awareness about the scourge of xenophobia, they have, wittingly or unwittingly, used narrative frames that justify the exclusion of foreigners, thereby entrenching a perception of insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens. In the process, they also reinforce fears of a national takeover by the foreign “other”. These arguments hold significance in the broader debates about the transformation of the print media and its role in the on-going process of nation-building.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, South Africa has experienced bouts of violent attacks against mainly black African foreign nationals in what has generally come to be described as xenophobic attacks. Despite numerous and sporadic incidents of this nature over the past decade, the May 2008, April 2015 and February/March 2017 attacks on foreign Africans living in the country stand out in terms of both scale and visibility of graphic images of violence on domestic and international media. While the media and members of the public have consistently labeled these attacks as xenophobic violence, the South African government has always been quick to dismiss the violence as “ordinary criminality,” choosing instead to preach the need for social cohesion and inclusive nation-building.

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These ideals are also buttressed by the country's Constitution that enshrines the promise that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, drawing from the ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter.¹ The Constitution asserts a new sense of belonging that is not based on racial or ethnic criteria, but on a collective belonging to the nation, regardless of one's legal status or origin (Haylem, 2013; Landau, 2010). This is clearly articulated in the preamble:

We, the people of South Africa, recognize the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to *all who live in it, united in our diversity* ... (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, no 108 of 1996, our emphasis).

This constitutional proclamation and other public pronouncements of inclusiveness and unity made by some of the country's leaders are contradicted by migration policy, pronouncements by politicians and xenophobic practice on the ground, as will be shown later in the paper. This paper therefore seeks to find out what role the print media have played in mediating notions of identity and belonging in stories on black African foreign nationals during xenophobic attacks. The media are powerful institutions which influence beliefs, values, social relations and social identities, through their power to represent things in a certain way through textual and visual discourses (Fairclough, 1995:2). The considerable research globally concerning immigrants and the media indicate that negative media representations of migrants over a sustained period are likely to shape or reinforce negative and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants among the public (e.g. Spoonley & Butcher, 2009; Cisneros, 2008; Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010). Such discourses also influence institutional attitudes and official policy responses to migration. This paper contributes to existing literature on media and xenophobia in South Africa, much of which has shown that coverage or depiction of immigrants and refugees by the mainstream print media is overwhelmingly negative. This in turn enforces negative stereotypes that contribute to further xenophobic attacks (e.g. Els, 2013; Bakare, 2013; Mawadza, 2012; Gomo, 2010; Harber, 2008; Fine & Bird, 2002; Danso & McDonald, 2001). While taking a deliberately cautious approach that steers away from the age-old debate on media effects, these studies also point in varying degrees to the implication of the media in influencing negativity towards black African foreign nationals by a large section of the South African population. Negative xenophobic discourses have also developed in other spaces, such as in narratives of the Department of Home Affairs and comments made by senior government officials as well as by ordinary people, as indicated in public opinion research conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (e.g. Pillay, Barolsky, Naidoo, Mohlakoana & Hadland, 2008; Roberts, Struwig & Gordon, 2016) and the Southern African Migration Project (e.g. Crush et al., 2008).

¹ This Charter was adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, on 26 June 1955. It was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress (www.sahistory.org.za)

This paper seeks to add a dimension that is missing from existing research to focus on media representation of immigrants within broader debates on belonging, identity and social cohesion. Although matters of citizenship and identity in relation to migration and xenophobia are analysed by a number of scholars (e.g. Mosselton, 2010; Neocosmos, 2010; Matsinhe, 2011; Jearey-Graham & Böhmke, 2013), these issues have not been researched rigorously within existing studies on media and xenophobia. Much of the scholarly literature cited above limits its analysis to showing how the media has created negative stereotypes and the myth of the immigrant as the criminal or dangerous “other”. In his book *Insiders and outsiders: Citizenship and xenophobia in contemporary Southern Africa*, Nyamnjoh (2006) briefly introduces a conversation on media, xenophobia and the question of citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa, which he later develops in a follow-up analysis (Nyamnjoh, 2010). He argues that the media in South Africa contribute to the constitution of foreigners as strangers, outsiders and aliens of the nation state. We thus build on Nyamnjoh’s arguments above by providing empirical data drawn from news articles to show that the media use narrative frames that largely justify the exclusion of foreigners, thereby embedding a perception of foreign nationals in the country as outsiders and non-citizens.

This paper draws on key ideas on nationhood, belonging and citizenship to map out the construction of migrant discourses in the print media. Mosselton (2010) argues that one of the central aspects that the 2008 xenophobic attacks exposed is the shape that the politics of belonging has taken in post-apartheid South Africa. The contest over belonging and what it means to be South African has been a defining feature of discourses on identity and citizenship in the country. It is thus important to establish how the media articulate and formulate the politics of belonging with regard to the issue of migrants. This study further seeks to show the extent to which “South Africanness” as opposed to “Africanness” is flagged in the media during xenophobic attacks through two research questions:

1. In what ways do the print media construct exclusive and inclusive conceptions of South African identity?
2. To what extent do the print media inhibit or promote the assimilation of immigrants into South African society through language and discourse?

The paper is organised as follows: First, we provide a history and the context of migration and xenophobia in South Africa. We then discuss the methodology we used to collate and analyse data. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of the link between media representation and national identity. We then provide an analysis of the main themes and discourses of media representation of migrants in the context of nation, belonging and identity. The conclusion discusses some of the implications of our findings on citizenship, nation, and belonging in South Africa.

1. HISTORICISING AND CONTEXTUALISING MIGRATION AND XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

Migration to South Africa is not a recent phenomenon. The country has a long history of migration and has been receiving migrant labour from Southern Africa and beyond for many years. Labour

migration dominated the earlier movements of population in Southern Africa, and was mostly made up of unskilled or semi-skilled male workers recruited mainly by the South African mines from countries in the region (Tati 2008). There have been various changes in the patterns of migration in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of volume and diversity of human traffic into the country, which significantly increased after the introduction of majority rule. In the first decade following the end of apartheid in 1994 alone, legal migration increased ten-fold (Crush & McDonald, 2000, cited in Chereni, 2014). In addition, the settlement patterns of migrants have changed visibly since 1994. Whereas before the majority of foreign migrants lived in the urban peripheries, particularly in compounds on farms and mines, many foreigners now reside in cities, mainly in the inner-city districts (Chereni & Palmary, 2010). This urban phenomenon in migration patterns has triggered strong anti-migrant sentiments, which are prevalent in public discourse on radio talk shows, television debates and in newspaper columns (Landau & Freemantle, 2010, cited in Chereni, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2010). Invariably, Black foreign nationals are blamed for a range of things, including "stealing jobs", and crimes such as cash-in-transit heists, drug peddling and murder.

This anti-migrant intolerance flared up in May 2008, when 67 foreign nationals were killed, hundreds displaced and their property destroyed. In April 2015, violence against immigrants again broke out across South Africa. These attacks began in late March in Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal, and spread to Johannesburg, resulting in at least 15 people killed and hundreds displaced. In between the 2008 and 2015 attacks, it is believed that more than 360 immigrants lost their lives in isolated attacks across the country (Misago, 2016). All along, the site of these attacks was mainly the townships and informal settlements, where poverty and unemployment are most acutely experienced. The more recent attacks in 2017 took a new turn, marking a shift in the spatial location of xenophobia – this time starting not in a township but a middle-income suburb of Johannesburg – Rosettenville – and spreading out to other parts such as Atteridgeville, Lotus Gardens and Mamelodi in Pretoria. This raised new questions about the real triggers of xenophobia, beyond the competition over scarce resources that many had put forward as causal factors with regards to the township attacks.

The South African state has played a significant role over the years in creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, mainly "through the entrenchment of extra-legal and, in some cases, overtly illegal ways of dealing with foreign nationals" (Mosselton, 2010:641). In this process, it has adopted a Janus-faced approach to migrants. On one hand, it pushes a Pan-African rhetoric, while on the other it clearly sees non-South Africans living in the country as not belonging to the territorial space called "South Africa", as evidenced by the use of "its brutal and violent legal machinery" (Gqola, 2008:213). The government has framed immigration policy reform primarily as an issue of control and exclusion, rather than as a management and development opportunity, hampering its efforts to move beyond the structure inherited from the apartheid era (Crush et al., 2008).

One of the most conspicuous strategies adopted by the South African government is to be silent whenever these xenophobic attacks erupt. Haylem (2013) argues that the silence or absence of decisions by the government over xenophobic attacks can be seen as a tacit approval that

migrants should leave the country. As argued elsewhere, the government's reaction to foreigners in some ways mirrors apartheid practices of displacement and exclusion that were part and parcel of the migrant labour system which subalternised Blacks from both within the country and from neighbouring countries, and relegated them to the position of "bare life" (Agamben, 1998, cited in Mosselton, 2009). This is when human subjects are reduced to a life without official status and juridical rights and marked by violence and death. In line with the above, Neocosmos makes a cogent argument when he states that:

Xenophobic discourse today, is a direct outcome of state practices as structured by both the practices of the apartheid state, as well as by the discourses developed by the nationalist movement, and systematically reproduced by the legislative and daily practices by the post-apartheid state (2006:7).

Therefore, it can be argued that the politics of exclusion and disposability of "non-nationals" which persists today and defines the different xenophobic attacks, is in part traceable to apartheid policies and practice.

2. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The data set for the analysis was drawn from four selected English language newspapers available on the SABINET South African Media database. Newspaper articles were gathered from 1 to 31 May 2008; 1 April to 31 May 2015; and 1 February to 31 March 2017 – the three periods that witnessed extensive and heightened xenophobic attacks. These were complemented by articles randomly selected from SABINET during the years of less significant xenophobic attacks between 2009 and 2016. Although South Africa has over 20 daily and weekly major English language newspapers, we decided to select newspapers that have a national footprint and arguably play an important role in agenda-setting and public opinion-making. The four newspapers selected – *The Sunday Times*, *City Press*, *Sowetan* and *Mail & Guardian* – are known to have authoritative status. National newspapers also play a role in creating a sense of nationhood, and they "share a cultural agenda which is assumed to be national" (Brookes, 1999, cited in Petersoo, 2007:421). We are mindful, however, that there is no uniform, homogeneous national audience. We agree with Mirca Madianou (2005) that "audiences cannot simply be seen as either coherent or 'empty vessels' that uncritically absorb the media messages that they encounter" (cited in Skey, 2009:336).

The search terms used to find articles in the database for 2008, 2015 and 2017 were "xenophobic attacks" and "migrant attacks," and for 2009 to 2016 the search terms were "migrants" and "xenophobia." The reason we decided to use different search terms and remove the word "attacks" in the complementary data, was that we wanted to ascertain how the media represent and construct migrants in other stories that are not necessarily related to "xenophobic attacks". The year 2008 generated 68 articles from the four newspapers, which was the largest sample, implying that the year had more coverage of xenophobic attacks than in either 2015 or 2017, which generated only 10 and 2 articles respectively. In total, the number of stories on xenophobia from these selected newspapers was 80. For the period of less significant xenophobic attacks

between 2009 and 2016, SABINET generated 48 stories. From this corpus we randomly selected 20 stories and combined them with the 80 stories from the period 2008, 2015 and 2017 periods. In total we thus had 100 articles. We then used a simple random sampling method to select stories for analysis. A simple random sample is a sample in which every member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen (Krippendorff, 2004). We arranged all the articles in a table, assigning a number to each article in accordance with the date of the publication. We then selected the odd numbers from the random number table. In total, 49 articles were read and analysed. We are aware of the weaknesses of simple random sampling, the major limitation being that it tends to have more sampling errors and less precision than stratified samples of the same sample size. We also take note that our sample size is not big enough to make generalised conclusions. In addition, because we relied on only four newspapers, our findings cannot be generalised to other newspapers in the country. However, our findings do contribute to existing literature and theory on media, migrants and citizenship. In addition, our arguments indicate the need for further investigation in this area.

We used a combination of thematic and discourse analysis to analyse the selected stories. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying patterned meanings across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process required us to familiarise ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the articles, after which we identified important broader patterns of meaning or potential themes. We were also interested in how certain words and phrases are used by the media to convey particular meanings, so discourse analysis was used. Discourse analysis involves the systematic study of texts to find out how the meaning and presentation of words create social reality (Hardey, Harley & Phillip, 2004).

3. THEORETICAL DEPARTURE: MEDIA, REPRESENTATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Although sentiments of nationhood and national identity are evoked through daily reproduction of "ideological habits" (Billing, 1995:6) and symbolic practices such as the national flag, celebrations, national anthems and style of dress, discursive practices also play a role in reminding people of the idea of nationhood and in creating a sense of identity and belonging. Discourse becomes a site where identities are produced and reproduced, contested and negotiated. The mass media specifically, play an important role in helping people to imagine their sense of self and identity. Benedict Anderson argues that notions of identity and community are imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991:6). The media, in this regard, play the significant role of enabling that imagining. In this context, print media give people a sense of community and enable them to see themselves as citizens united in a certain time and place.

Bhabha (1990) contends that nations are "narrative constructions" that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies. Print media, in particular, are one of the most important sites in which and through which the national agenda is articulated and disseminated. The media, symbols and other cultural artefacts play major roles in the daily reproduction of

nationhood. Billing (1995) calls this reproduction “banal nationalism”. At the core of his thesis lies the argument that politicians and the mass media flag nationhood daily in the eyes of citizens:

In routine practices and everyday discourses, especially those in the mass media, the idea of nationhood is regularly flagged. Even the daily weather forecast can do this. Through such flagging, established nations are reproduced as nations, with their citizenry being unmindfully reminded of their national identity (Billing, 1995:154).

Billing goes on to say that the flagging of national identity in the mass media usually takes place through *deixis*, defined as “little words” – *we, our, this, here* – that continually point to nationhood (Billing, 1995:11). But these “little words” can also be used to create exclusionary discourses between “us” and “them”. Too often, the construction of nationhood or sameness goes hand in hand with the construction of difference, where nationals are contrasted with non-nationals in discourses. This takes the form of negative stereotypes, othering and labeling, particularly in media discourse. As such, the hidden power of media discourses should not be taken for granted. Discourse produced by powerful institutions such as the media is often persuasive and repeatedly reproduced in society on many levels to a point where it becomes normalised.

3.1 Themes and discourses of media representation of migrants

Overall, we established that the representation of xenophobic attacks varies across the articles. In many respects the construction of “foreigners” and xenophobia corroborates previous studies that show the media depicting African migrants as masses flooding into South Africa illegally. Thus terms such as “foreigner”; “illegal migrants” and “illegal aliens” are used liberally and unproblematically across the sampled articles. In their paper on media and xenophobia, Danso and McDonald (2001:115) also found that the press tended to reproduce “problematic research and anti-immigration terminology uncritically”. As in previous research, migrants are also connected with criminality, poverty and violence. At the same time, we established that quite a number of articles denounce xenophobia by presenting it as something negative and a cause of worry and concern – and as something that is un-African.

3.2 Deictic expressions: polarisation between “us and them”

What is particularly striking about the articles analysed is the neutral tone used, which eschews deep analysis of xenophobia and its causes. Although neutrality of tone is standard practice in news writing, it is important to highlight that neutrality of tone in newspaper articles can sometimes be used to delegitimise or silence certain views. As Nyamnjoh (2010:70) points out, by conveying information to the public as “a neutral vehicle reflecting the workings of society”, the media “reproduce certain ideologies and discourses that support specific relations of power in relation to hierarchies of race, nationality, culture, class and gender”. A recurring theme in the articles was the “foreigner” repertoire. Although the term “foreigner” can be viewed as neutral in the sense that it is used to refer to non-South Africans, its constant flagging in media texts can also reveal deeper meanings. Ideologically and discursively this

term conjures images of otherness, distance and difference. Almost every article juxtaposed "foreigner" with "South Africans", the latter variously also referred to as "locals" "residents" and "national" – hence belonging. This constant distinction, even in well-meaning and sympathetic articles, reinforces the perception of migrants as "outsiders" and not part of South Africa. The following excerpts from four different newspapers illustrate this point:

The battles began at night. Langa says he and his friends have not slept since last Friday when the war began ... he explains that on May 6 it was discovered that two women residents have been killed by *foreigners* (Inside the mob, *Mail & Guardian*, 29 May 2008, our emphasis).

During a meeting *residents* threatened to take matters into their own hands and removed *foreigners* from the area ... ("They must leave or die...", *Mail & Guardian*, 22 May 2008, our emphasis).

Men who once drank together at the local tavern have turned into the hunter and hunted. Spaza shops that served *locals* and *foreigners* have been razed to the ground (Weapons of hatred reign, *City Press*, 25 May 2008, our emphasis).

The Ramaphosa informal settlement in Reiger Park, Boksburg, appeared quiet but tense yesterday with sporadic fighting between *locals* and *foreigners* (Uneasy calm returns to Reiger Park, *Sowetan*, 22 May 2008, our emphasis).

The media also often failed to distinguish between asylum seekers, refugees and documented migrants, as everyone not originally from South Africa is grouped under the category of "foreigner", and therefore an outsider. The use of the term "foreigner" is reinforced by the use of deictic expressions of "us" and "them" and the possessive pronouns of "our" versus "theirs". In this way, the media is inadvertently asserting the birth right of South African citizens while simultaneously denying entitlements to the "outsiders" who "do not belong". This is amply illustrated even in well-meaning constructions as in the following excerpts:

But *our* achievement will become even more difficult with the eruption of horrifying violence against people from *other* African countries (Where is Ubuntu in xenophobic attacks? *Sowetan*, 21 May 2008, our emphasis).

Ignoring the foreigners in *our* country has come back to haunt us (Strangers in strange land at the mercy of our government, *Sunday Times*, 18 May 2008, our emphasis).

... and *our* hostility to immigrants – particularly *other* Africans – is not confined to the poor (No one hates foreigners like we do, *Sunday Times*, 25 May 2008, our emphasis).

While the tone and usage of these possessive pronouns sound neutral, they inadvertently entrench and emphasise distinctions between insiders and outsiders. In some of the articles, the "other" and "outsider" is often seen through the lens of criminality and illegality.

3.3 Politics of place and belonging

Closely related to the deictic expressions of “us” and “them” is the issue of place and belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) states that the “politics of belonging” is basically about demarcations of who is “in” and who is “out” of communities in terms of the national community (cited in Christensen, 2009:24–25). Across many of the articles, there is the emphasis that “foreigners” do not belong to South Africa. For instance, the constant use of the term “displaced” in relation to migrants connotes a suspended state of existence, as the following quotes from newspapers show:

Mayors from throughout Gauteng have been instructed to identify land on which temporary shelters will be erected to house *displaced* people. About 25,000 people, mainly foreigners, have been *displaced* (State to house victims of xenophobic attacks, *Sowetan*, 23 May 2008, our emphasis).

Police had to now and then stop *residents* who tried to loot some of the goods left by the *displaced* foreigners (Uneasy calm returns to Reiger Park, *Sowetan*, 22 May 2008, our emphasis).

Residents open their homes and hearts to those *displaced* by violence (Gauteng embraces victims, *City Press*, 25 May 2008).

Although the term “displaced” in the literal sense refers to people who have lost their homes due to violence, conflict, persecution or natural disasters, it can also take a different meaning when used in conjunction with other exclusionary terms such as “non-national”, “foreigner” and “non-local” – which was the case in most articles. There was also a sense in much of the reporting that the communities where most migrants stay belong to South Africans and that the migrants’ “home” is back in “their” countries. The following excerpts are instructional:

What began as a discussion about crime ended two hours later with townfolk seething at how foreigners were stealing their jobs and houses. They decided to return that night to evict the *foreigners* from *their* neighbourhood (Terror on the home front, *Sunday Times*, 18 May 2008, our emphasis).

“...the Mozambican national was attacked by a group of angry *community members* who were on a mission to get rid of *foreigners* ... In Vosloorus, more than 500 community members took to the streets demanding foreign nationals leave *their township* (Xenophobic attacks flare up in Ekurhuleni, *City Press*, 18 May 2008, our emphasis).

As found in previous research on xenophobia, the term “alien” was uncritically used in a number of newspaper articles, especially in the *Daily Sun*. Peberdy (2001, cited in Nyamnjoh, 2006:38–39) states that that term “suggests migrants do not belong, that they are ‘extra-terrestrial’ – not of this earth” (let alone this country), but it also implies difference, strangeness and otherness. Indeed, this term is powerful in creating notions of “unbelonging”

and exclusion. The constant use of the term "alien" by the mainstream media has the effect of creating an "other" who does not belong and who is not welcome.

3.4 "They are taking our jobs and women": reinforcing the foreigner as a threat to citizenship

Xenophobic violence in South Africa has mainly been explained from a socio-economic dimension, with many scholars and commentators arguing that the violent attacks are linked to struggles over resources (e.g. Pillay et al.). The fact that it was South Africans in poor communities who were at the forefront of such attacks in the first two waves of 2008 and 2015 seems to favour this point. Similarly a number of studies on the 2008 xenophobic attacks adopt a structural approach rooted in political economy paradigm (e.g. Bond, Ngwane & Amisi 2010). This approach foregrounds issues such as unemployment, the housing market, high crime rates and regional geopolitical tensions as main drivers of xenophobia. While these material and structural explanations of xenophobia are plausible, we agree with Mosselton (2009, 2010) that the xenophobic violence was also rooted in "the politics of belonging and contestation for citizenship", in which immigrants have been constructed as threats to the nation and citizenship, as they are depriving deserving citizens and residents of services to which they are entitled (Mosselton 2010:641). In reference to Western nation states, Anderson (2008) points to significant changes, namely that the old fear of the nation state being invaded by a neighbouring country has today been replaced by the fear that someone will take your nation away "from within" (Anderson, 2008, cited in Christiansen 2009:29). In South Africa, the fear that immigrants are "taking the nation from within" is manifested in the oft-repeated narratives of "they are taking our jobs and women". The statement by Deputy Police Minister Bongani Mkongi is illustrative:

How can a city in South Africa be 80% foreign nationals? That is dangerous. *South Africans have surrendered their own city to foreigners* ... If we do not debate that, that necessarily means the whole of South Africa could be 80% dominated by foreign nationals, and the future President of South Africa could be a foreign national ... The hijacking of buildings here in Hillbrow is a sign of *taking over power*. The question of dominance of foreign nationals in illegal trading and also businesses that are here in Hillbrow is economic sabotage that is taking place against our people that are supposed to be ... running those businesses (Transcribed from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k8JVTtohtml>. Our emphasis).

This followed similar sentiments expressed by then Home Affairs Minister Hlengiwe Mkhize that South Africa needed to tighten its immigration policies and strictly protect its borders:

The policy has to be tightened and set limits as to what people can do. Especially during this phase of high rates of unemployment, high levels of poverty [and] inequities that people are complaining about (*Mail & Guardian* online, 1 June 2017).²

² See: <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-06-01-home-affairs-talks-tough-on-borders> Accessed 17/09/2017.

This corroborates findings in previous studies on media representation of xenophobic attacks, which highlight that the media reporting of immigrants tends to create moral panic and a fear that numbers of immigrants are on the rise and may result in their “taking over our country” (e.g. Gomo 2010, Madziwa 2012). In the articles analysed for this paper, the majority of stories captured sentiments from people in the xenophobic hotspots who cited the “taking of our resources” as the reasons for attacking immigrants, as shown in the following:

These people own RDP houses, which some of us don't even have (Inside the Mob, Mail & Guardian, 29 May 2008, our emphasis).

What we are seeing is an outcome of the frustration of *people* who are looking for jobs and they believe that they are not getting jobs because jobs are taken by *foreigners*” (Alexandra – a slow-burning fuse set to explode, *Sowetan*, 15 May 2008, our emphasis).

Taxi drivers were unhappy about the growing number of foreigners working in the industry. They said foreigners were taking away their jobs and were willing to work for lower wages (“They must leave or die...”, *Mail & Guardian*, 22 May 2008).

The villagers accused the foreigners of stealing their jobs at the mine and of being behind criminal activities ... the incensed villagers allegedly accused the school management of enrolling the children of foreigners who stole their jobs in the mine (Foreigner stoned to death, *Sowetan*, 27 July 2011).

While the media would claim objectivity, and to be reporting issues objectively, it is important to highlight that they wield enormous power to select who to interview, what to report out of the interview, and how to report it. As Fine and Bird (2002:10) have argued, the media “shapes and influences social issues in the ways in which news is chosen, highlighted and covered.” In most of the cases analysed, the media did not provide context to the narratives of “resource theft” emanating from members of the public who were interviewed for the articles, making them complicit in the images they help to create. This complicity in reinforcing African “foreigners” as a threat to “nationals” is also illustrated in alarmist headings such as the following:

- Illegal aliens cost us dearly, *The Sunday Times*, 1 September 2009
- They come here to compete with our people for jobs, *The Sunday Times*, 8 June 2009
- Foreigners stripping us of our livelihood, *City Press*, 22 May 2011
- They're taking over our country, *City Press*, 31 May 2011.

The narratives of “foreigners are taking our jobs and houses” have been captured in other media genres as well. The films depicting xenophobic violence such as *Affectionately known as Alex* (2008) by Danny Turken, and *Man on Ground* (2011) by Akin Omotoso, for example, include harrowing scenes where South Africans during community meetings are threatening to kill “foreigners” who are taking over resources belonging to “nationals”.

3.5 The trope of criminality

The frame of criminality comes out strongly in a number of the articles. A review of previous literature on media and representation of xenophobia also shows that most newspapers perpetuated a perception of most African migrants as criminals (e.g. Harber, 2008, Mawadza, 2012, Els, 2013). Mosselton argues that alleged "crimes" and offences committed by foreigners are seen as overstepping or infringing the citizen/outsider divide, and the consequent attacks are therefore attempts to reaffirm this divide (Mosselton, 2009:133). The 2017 attacks, in particular, confirm this view, as the perpetrators focused on alleged foreigner criminality as the reason for their violence. These attacks were believed to have been largely triggered by Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba's remarks about illegal foreigners and criminality. The linking of "foreigners" to criminality is recurrent in the selected stories, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Criminals don't need a reason to do crime. All that's happening now is because people are complaining about Nigerians and drugs, they [criminals] have an excuse. That's why you see them break into shops" (Goerge Ramokele – a South African spaza shop owner blaming criminality) (DA's Mashaba under a cloud as attacks flare, *Mail & Guardian*, 24 February 2017).

The escalating resentment towards Nigerians followed three weeks of intense standoffs between locals and foreigners in Rosettenville in the south of Johannesburg, where at least a dozen houses were torched in a rampage, allegedly against drugs and prostitution (DA's Mashaba under a cloud as attacks flare, *Mail & Guardian*, 24 February 2017).

This persistent association of migrants with criminality and other ills helps create negative stereotypes about them, which build resentment and therefore makes them fair targets for attacks. The 2017 attacks included the involvement of an organised march specifically against foreigners by a group called Mamelodi Concerned Residents. That very little in-depth analysis of this group and its actions was made in the columns of the press highlights some of the shortcomings which promote the argument that the press was, to some degree, complicit in the building of anti-immigrant sentiments.

3.6 Construction of "south africaness" vs "africaness"

South Africa is a deeply divided and heterogeneous society, characterised by wide-ranging racial, linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic differences. Apartheid South Africa created a strong state without an inclusive nation to go with it. As previously stated, the post-apartheid state has thus placed the creation of national identity and social cohesion at the centre of building a new South Africa. One way of creating a sense of nationhood and national identity has been through the trope of the "Rainbow Nation" – a concept coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to denote the unity of the many cultures, identities and nations in the country. Rainbow Nationism, manifested in many symbolic and discursive interventions,

is designed to encourage a sense of belonging and national identity. Despite efforts to create a collective identity, however, levels of poverty, increasing inequality, racial and class hierarchies continue to divide the country, thus making the task of nation-building difficult.

However, a reading of the articles on xenophobia and immigrants gives a sense that through the symbolic constructions of similarity of an idealised national “us”, and negative and exclusionary stereotypes of the “other,” the media are complicit in the attempt to create a notion of “South Africanness” that moves away from the rainbow construct. One narrative that comes up often in the articles is of the “upright South Africans” who are appalled by the madness of the xenophobic attacks (*Sowetan*, 21 May 2008). Often, these “upright South Africans” have strong sentiments about South Africa’s indebtedness to the rest of the African continent for its contribution towards the defeat of apartheid. Based on this, the attacks are attributed to “criminal” and “marginal” elements in society:

Mbeki said it was humiliating to witness a minority of South Africans committing crime against fellow Africans (Mbeki calls violent attacks blight on SA, *City Press*, 25 May 2008).

‘It is not South Africans who do not love you, these are just criminals who can be found anywhere in the world’, said Madikizela-Mandela (Winnie says sorry, *Sowetan*, 15 May 2008).

The trigger for recent attacks has absolutely nothing to do with the moral character of SA’s poor; the poorest are the best of us (Strangers in a strange land at the mercy of our government, *Sunday Times*, 18 May 2008).

Although not pervasive across the articles, the trope of African Renaissance was also used to create a sense of an inclusive “South Africanness”.³ This narrative was used in conjunction with one on South African exceptionalism, where South Africa is perceived as superior to the rest of the continent (the latter often referred to in South African discourse without country differentiation as “Africa”). Migrants, in this respect, are seen as hailing from “Africa” – in other words, countries that are economically and socially backward compared to South Africa. Through the use of both opinion pieces by external experts and internal journalistic pieces, “foreign” Africans are seen as “hapless victims”, “poor” and “vulnerable”, and it is the duty of South Africa to assist “these people”:

Locals frustrated by poverty and poor services blamed equally desperate immigrants who have sought a haven among them, lured by Africa’s richest economy (Place for all in our sun, *Sowetan*, 12 May 2008).

³ The “African Renaissance” was a hegemonic political project pursued by the African National Congress of South Africa under the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki.

South Africa is viewed by many people around the world, and especially on the continent, as a country that must lead the charge in countering Afro-pessimism that has made the continent lag behind in development ... It is why when we made the appeal for Africa to be given the opportunity to host the World Cup, South Africa became the preferred choice. We said "South Africa is the stage and Africa is the theatre" and the world listened (Where is Ubuntu in xenophobic attacks? *Sowetan*, 21 May 2008).

It is evident in most media reports that there is a growing awareness that the x-word, "xenophobia" is a label of shame – a swearword, as it were – so much that even those that make xenophobic statements prefix those statements by saying they are not being xenophobic. The Mamelodi Concerned Residents, for instance, distanced themselves from xenophobic behaviour when they organised and marched against foreign nationals in February 2017, making a loud disclaimer that they are against xenophobic attacks.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP, NATION, AND BELONGING: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The discussion above illustrates several things in terms of the way xenophobia has been reported in the selected newspapers. Notably, while these news media have played a significant role in disseminating information and creating awareness about the scourge of xenophobia, they have also been central to the building and perpetuation of stereotypes about foreign nationals as not belonging to the South African nation through persistent juxtaposition and polarisation of "locals" or "residents" versus "foreigners", deictic expressions of "us" and "them" and a range of other labels that justify their exclusion. Despite their explicit good intentions, the media often unthinkingly reproduce what Smith (2011:119) has referred to as "hegemonic language" about foreign nationals, thereby entrenching a perception of insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens. This study corroborates findings by other researchers that the media in South Africa has "mishandled the issue of xenophobia", and "uncritically reproduced xenophobic language and sentiments, time and time again" and are "complicit in (often unwittingly) encouraging xenophobic attitudes among the population" (Crush et al., 2008:8). This, we argue, brings to the fore central questions of citizenship, national identity and belonging in ways that begin to interrogate "rainbow nationalism" and the South Africa constitutional provision about inclusivity. At the same time, the construction of "South Africanness" in the media is projected in contradistinction to the African "other", even in stories that attempt to sympathise with the foreign nationals and treat them as part of a "brotherhood". Social cohesion and nation building are high on the list of South Africa's priorities as a way of moving from the divisive and exclusionary legacy of apartheid. Mediated forms of communication have a critical role to play in this process as they set agendas, frame debates and provide the information which citizens use to make sense of the world and their place within it. While the media could claim that they merely reproduce or represent the views of members of society, we argue that they have the power to select and make responsible decisions on how to represent those views.

In conclusion, a number of limitations to our research need to be considered. Firstly, the study included only four publications and these are not sufficient to make conclusive arguments.

Secondly, the paper examined a small sample of articles from each newspaper and the findings may not be representative of the whole publication. Thus, further comprehensive work needs to be done with more newspapers and the broadcast media which have a bigger audience reach and influence to establish how the media construct the image of immigrants in relation to national identity, belonging and social cohesion in South Africa.

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