Responding to Xenophobic Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Barking Up the Wrong Tree?

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Abstract

This paper highlights the general failure to effectively respond to and prevent xenophobic violence in South Africa and offers critical reflections on reasons thereof. Drawing mainly on the evaluation of a number of anti-xenophobic programmes by government and civil society organisations, the paper argues that past and current interventions, instead of muzzling dogs that bite, have been rather barking up the wrong tree. National government and relevant local authorities have thus far either tended to ignore the problem or categorise violence against foreign nationals and other outsiders as normal crime with no need for more specific or more targeted interventions. Although well-intentioned, civil society efforts to foster peaceful cohabitation and tolerance through social dialogues and campaigns aimed at changing attitudes have also largely proven ineffective in reducing violence. There are many reasons why these interventions continue to fail. Chief among these reasons is the fact that interventions are not evidence-based and are not informed by a clear understanding of the drivers of the violence. Similarly, past and current responses and interventions are based on shaky foundations and untested theories of change. Indeed, by focussing almost exclusively on public attitudes, interventions neglect factors and motivations that trigger violent behaviour; perhaps ignoring that attitudes are not always a good predictor of behaviour. Without a clear understanding of the drivers of the violence and of what type of responses work or do not work, intervention strategies can only be ineffective at best, and counter-productive at worst.

Keywords Xenophobia, violent exclusion, foreign nationals.

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Introduction

Xenophobic violence generally refers to any acts of collective violence (by local communities, groups or crowds) targeted at foreign nationals or 'outsiders' because of their being foreign or strangers. Dodson (2010) reminds us that xenophobic violence is an explicit targeting of foreign nationals or outsiders for violent attacks despite other material, political, cultural or social forces that might be at play. Its main characteristics include murder, assaults causing grievous bodily harm, looting, robbery, arson attacks (burning of people and property), displacement, intimidation and threats, harassment, eviction notices, etc. This type of violence has become a longstanding feature in post-Apartheid South Africa (Landau 2011). Indeed, since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked or killed because of their status as outsiders or foreign nationals. Despite claims to the contrary, violence against foreign nationals in South Africa did not end in June 2008 when the massive outbreak that started a month earlier subsided (Misago 2011). Hostility towards foreign nationals is still pervasive and continues to result in rising cases of murder, injuries, threats of mob violence, looting and the destruction of residential property and businesses, as well as mass displacement (UNCHR ROSA 2015a).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the unprecedented nature of the May 2008 xenophobic violence triggered not only a frenzy of analyses and explanations as scholars, policy analysts and government officials attempted to make sense of what was happening in the multiracial 'rainbow' nation (Fauvelle-Aymar & Segatti 2011; Nieftagodien 2011), but also a wide range of government and civil society responses and interventions aimed at stopping on-going and/or preventing future violence. This paper offers critical reflections on the effectiveness of these interventions and argues that they have generally failed to prevent xenophobic violence in the country particularly because, by addressing the wrong sources of violence and using untested theories of changes, they have been barking up the wrong tree instead of muzzling dogs that bite. Indeed, the paper shows that, in addition to the lack of government political will, impunity and lack of civil society muscle to hold government

accountable for its failure to protect all countries' residents, interventions have failed particularly because of their critical ontological and etiological blind spots. More specifically, the paper argues that interventions have failed to address xenophobic violence in the country because i) they are not evidence-based and are not informed by a clear understanding of the drivers of the violence; and ii) they are based on shaky foundations and untested theories of change. Indeed, by focussing almost exclusively on public attitudes, interventions neglect factors and motivations that trigger violent behaviour; perhaps ignoring that attitudes are not always an accurate predictor of behaviour.

After a brief methodology outline, the remainder of the paper proceeds through three main sections. The first provides a brief overview of the history and nature of xenophobic violence in post-Apartheid South Africa. The second offers critical reflections on the effectiveness of responses and interventions by different actors including government, the police, civil society and communities. The third and concluding section summarises the paper's main points and arguments.

Methods

The paper draws on evaluation of past and current government and civil society responses to xenophobic violence in South Africa. In addition to smaller-scale evaluations and observations, the paper draws more specifically on primary and secondary data collected by the African Centre for Migration in Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2014 as part of a systematic evaluation of four anti-xenophobia programmes by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Office for Southern Africa (UNHCR ROSA 2014). The overall aim of UNHCR ROSA programmes and other interventions referred to in this paper was to stop on-going violent attacks on foreign nationals and to prevent the reoccurrence of such violence in the future.

In order to assess the effectiveness and impact of UNHCR ROSA programmes to address xenophobic violence in South Africa, as well as the reasons for their

relative success or failure, we (ACMS) simultaneously conducted two complementary types of evaluation: an impact evaluation and a process evaluation. The impact evaluation assessed the impact that programmes have had or are having in stopping and preventing xenophobic violence. The process evaluation assessed the programmes' theories of change and logical frameworks, such as the relevance of programmes and activities in addressing the targeted problem; whether programmes and activities were implemented as planned; the challenges encountered during implementation and how these may have affected the achievement of the programmes' goals and objectives. The combination of these two types of evaluation afforded us an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the entire programme process from its conceptualisation to its implementation and impact.

To capture all the necessary information, the evaluation used a combination of a variety of sources of information and data including document reviews, individual interviews and focus group discussions. In particular, we conducted individual interviews with a wide range of relevant stakeholders including UNHCR and implementing partner staff, key informants at national, provincial, municipal and research site levels, target populations and ordinary members of communities in selected sites. Altogether, the evaluation comprised of a total of 105 individual interviews. In addition to individual interviews, the research team conducted two focus group discussions with members of target populations and communities in the selected sites. Using the combination of these information sources allowed not only the acquisition of the necessary information but also quality control through triangulation of findings from those sources. We applied content analysis techniques to analyse the data collected.

Assessing the effectiveness of interventions to stop and prevent xenophobic violence requires a clear understanding of the conceptual and empirical distinctions between 'xenophobia' and xenophobic violence. There is indeed an epistemological necessity – and practical utility – to understand the conceptual differences between xenophobia and xenophobic violence. With the reminder that xenophobia denotes negative attitudes towards the 'other'

while xenophobic violence is just one of many forms of manifestation of those attitudes, there is a need to recognise that, while causally linked, xenophobia and xenophobic violence are two conceptually and empirically distinct concepts and phenomena. This conceptual distinction is epistemologically and practically important because understanding and addressing xenophobia (attitudes) requires methodological and intervention approaches that are different from those required for xenophobic violence (behaviour). Indeed, interventions designed to address attitudinal challenges are not necessarily suitable for, nor should they be assumed capable of, effecting behavioural change, even if the behaviour in question is rooted in those attitudes (Misago et al. 2015). In other words, interventions to change attitudes may and should be different from those aimed at stopping and preventing those attitudes from taking on violent forms of expression. Indeed, as Brubaker & Laitin (1998: 426) remind us, "violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics." They argue, and I agree, that "even where violence is clearly rooted in pre-existing conflict, it should not be treated as a natural, self-explanatory outgrowth of such conflict, something that occurs automatically when the conflict reaches certain intensity, a certain temperature" (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 426).

Unfortunately, as this paper shows, most interventions lack this conceptual clarity and are loaded with the unfounded assumption that programmes targeting xenophobic attitudes will eventually stop xenophobic violence. The paper offers critical reflections on the effectiveness of past and current interventions in stopping/preventing xenophobic violence and not in changing xenophobic attitudes. Naturally, the paper also discusses the effect of this and other conceptual and methodological blind spots on the ineffectiveness of these interventions.

History and Morphology of Xenophobic Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Xenophobic violence has become a longstanding feature in post-Apartheid South Africa. Since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked or killed because of their status as outsiders or foreign nationals

(Misago 2011). During this period, xenophobic violence has increased across townships and informal settlements (Landau 2011) and the situation has become alarming to the degree that the African Peer Review Mechanism's country report on South Africa warned that xenophobia against other Africans was on the rise and needed to be nipped in the bud (Johwa 2008).

Xenophobic violence was most intense and widely scrutinised in May 2008 when attacks across the country left at least 62 dead, 670 wounded, dozens raped and more than 100,000 displaced. Millions of Rands worth of property was also looted, destroyed and appropriated by local residents in just over two weeks (CORMSA 2009). Although the majority of those attacked were foreign migrants, a third of those killed were South African citizens "who had married foreigners, refused to participate in the violent orgy, or had the misfortune of belonging to groups that were evidently not South African enough to claim their patch of urban space" (Landau 2011: 1).

Despite official claims that the government and South African society has "moved on" (Black Sash 2009), the violence did not end in June 2008 when the massive outbreak that had started a month earlier finally subsided. Although the country has not since witnessed violence of the intensity seen in May 2008, the incidence of violence has not decreased. Rather, there is a growing recognition, even among some government officials, that violent attacks on foreign nationals "have taken on disturbing proportions" (DAC 2012). Indeed, violence continued post May and the media reported at least 10 violent incidents during June 2008. In the following months and years, attacks on non-nationals continued, resulting in rising cases of murder, injuries, threats of mob violence, looting and the destruction of residential property and businesses, as well as mass displacement. In every individual year since 2008, violence has claimed more lives than it did during the May 2008 attacks.

Indeed, CoRMSA (2011) reports that in almost every month since mid - 2008, there has been at least one attack on groups of foreign nationals in the country; and that between mid-2009 and late 2010, there were at least 20 deaths, over 40 serious injuries, at least 200 foreign - run shops looted and more than 4,000 persons displaced due to violence targeting foreign nationals. In 2011,

at least 120 foreign nationals were killed (five of them burnt alive), 100 were seriously injured, at least 1,000 displaced, and 120 shops/businesses permanently or temporarily closed through violence or selective enforcement of by-laws (UNHCR ROSA 2014). In 2012, the number of violence incidents increased: the UNHCR ROSA reported at least 250 incidents resulting in 140 deaths and 250 serious injuries. In 2013, UNHCR ROSA recorded an average of three major violent incidents per week, with attacks regularly reported in many areas across the country during 2014. There were an estimated 300 incidents of violence against foreign nationals, an estimated 200 shops looted and 900 persons displaced between January and March 2014 (UNCHR ROSA 2014). The South African Police Service (SAPS) was overwhelmed by the increase in violence against foreigners and required support and assistance from all relevant government departments. In 2015, violence continued in many parts of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces. Information from the police indicates that 16 people (nine in Gauteng and seven in KwaZulu Natal) were killed, more than 6,000 people displaced and hundreds of businesses looted and destroyed (UNHCR ROSA 2015b). In March 2016, xenophobic violence erupted in Katlehong Township in Gauteng (Mkhize, 2016)

While violence once seemed concentrated in the townships around the country's big cities, it is now increasingly spreading across the country's nine provinces and into rural areas. The most affected provinces remain the Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape, where some locations and sub places have become scenes of repeated violent attacks. In all provinces, this violence occurs mostly (but not exclusively) in poor and economically marginalised informal settlements where citizens (many of whom are themselves internal migrants) and immigrants meet amidst poor living conditions and a general scarcity of public services, employment and business opportunities.

In sum, the above brief discussion shows that xenophobic violence in South Africa is a reality that continues to threaten lives and livelihoods of many foreign nationals living in the country. As the next sections shows, continued

and increasing violence is clear evidence that no effective preventive mechanisms have been put in place.

Responses to Xenophobic Violence and their Shortcomings

As alluded to above, although it is impossible to say what would have happened in the absence of past and current initiatives, levels of continued (and in some areas repeated) xenophobic violence is clear evidence that responses and interventions designed to address the problem have largely been ineffective. 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. 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. This section discusses the reasons behind these failures and shows that in some cases, despite their good intentions, interventions risk doing more harm than good.

Early efforts by the government included its commitment to uphold the 'Declaration' adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) held in Durban in 2001. The conference recognised the urgent need to translate the objectives of the Durban Declaration into a practical and workable plan. Unfortunately more than a decade later no such a plan exists although a 'National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance' spearheaded by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development has been under discussion for many years.

The first and most significant of civil society's response to xenophobia in post-apartheid Africa was the Roll Back Xenophobia (RBX) Campaign. In a partnership between the South African Human Rights Commission, the National Consortium on Refugee Affairs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the RBX Campaign was launched in December

1998 in response to the rising levels of xenophobia particularly targeted at African migrants and refugees in South Africa. The campaign aimed to combat xenophobia through public education in the media, communities, schools and work places. Its funding ended and it was formally terminated in 2002 with "the promise of the initiative […] never realised" (Crush & Ramachandran 2009: 84). Whatever its potential benefits, it did little to prevent the most acute manifestation of xenophobia in South Africa's history, that was the unprecedented wave of xenophobic violence in May 2008.

Responses and interventions to counter xenophobia and its different manifestations proliferated after May 2008. Indeed, following the outbreak of violence, numerous state and non-state actors at different levels of government and society got involved in various interventions to stop the violence, mitigate its effects and prevent future occurrences.

Post-May 2008 Government Response

During the May 2008 violence, the government called on specialised units, created ad-hoc committees and designated task teams in parliament, ministries, the police and provincial and local governments. However, once the acute violence subsided, so too did government's commitment to counter xenophobia. Both before and after the 2008 attacks, it is fair to say that the overall government response to xenophobia and related violence in South Africa has been characterised by denialism. In many cases, this denialism is rooted in a discourse which labels all xenophobic violence as 'just crime and not xenophobia,' a categorisation that demands few specific interventions or policy changes. As Crush & Ramachandran (2009: 19) note:

Despite the overwhelming research evidence of a powder-keg of xenophobic sentiment, the issue was largely ignored in public political discourse, until it was too late. Even then, the response of those in government to May 2008 was largely denialist in character. Several prominent politicians initially voiced surprise and concern and acknowledged that xenophobia was a significant problem. They were quickly silenced by an official 'party line' from the President's office. The attacks were criminal, not xenophobically motivated,

said President Mbeki at an official day of mourning for the victims. South Africans were not xenophobic and anyone who said so was themselves being xenophobic.

Similarly, in its 2011 report, the African Peer Review Mechanism Monitoring Project gave South Africa a 'red rating' for its failure to address, and indeed its denial of, xenophobia (SAIIA, CPS & AGMA 2011). The denialism characterising government response in 2008 continues to date. Such positions and the lack of sustained political will to address xenophobia led efforts initiated in 2008 to be abandoned or allowed to wither. Task teams and units have been dissolved or are no longer functional and – somewhat ironically – 'xenophobia' has been almost entirely excised from the country's 'national action plan to combat racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance'. The unwillingness to recognise xenophobia coupled with a general weak judicial system has also led to an alarming culture of impunity and lack of accountability for perpetrators and mandated institutions: foreign nationals and others have been repeatedly attacked in South Africa since 2004 but few perpetrators, some of them government representatives at local level, have been charged. Even fewer have been convicted. In some instances, state agents have actively protected those accused of anti-foreigner violence (Misago 2011). Similarly, there have been no efforts to hold mandated institutions, such as the police and the intelligence, accountable for their failure to prevent and stop violence despite visible warning signs.

In explaining government denialism in the face of overwhelming evidence, Polzer & Takabvirwa (2010: 7) argue that admitting the existence of a xenophobic citizenry is both "ideologically and politically uncomfortable" for the ANC which "understands itself as heir to a long non-discriminatory, pan-African tradition." Admitting that various forms of violence against outsiders even within the black population remain a striking feature of the 'rainbow nation' is likely to be a similarly uncomfortable truth to acknowledge as it sits uneasily with long-standing ANC visions of 'unity in diversity' and poses serious challenges to the state's legitimacy and sovereignty. That said, it is worth noting that there are on-going small scale initiatives to counter

xenophobia and promote social cohesion within various departments. These include Home Affairs' (DHA) programme aimed at 'Strengthening Communities of Peace and Diversity,' the Justice and Constitutional Development's (DoJ) 'National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance,' and the Arts and Culture's (DAC) 'National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society.' While the last two initiatives are still under discussion, the success of these strategies is uncertain given the consistent lack of coordination and complementarity among different government departments in addressing xenophobia and related violence since 2008.

It should also be noted that some senior officials within the national and provincial governments acknowledge the problem's severity and have appealed for tolerance. For example, in her keynote speech on World Refugee Day on 20 June 2013, the Minister of Home Affairs publicly condemned xenophobia and acknowledged that much needs to be done to combat the violence and educate the community. Similarly, the Deputy President and Gauteng Premier recently spoke out against xenophobia and again stressed that more needs to be done to address it. In addressing a Gauteng social cohesion summit in Johannesburg in August 2014, the Deputy President stated:

As the province with the largest number of immigrants, Gauteng must lead the way in combating xenophobia in all its manifestations. The people of this province must, through their actions, underscore the fact that foreign nationals pose no threat to our desire for social cohesion nor do they present any impediment to the achievement of a common South African nationhood (Gabara 2015).

Similarly, the Gauteng Premier stated that "South Africans should self-reflect before blaming all their problems on foreigners and urged the country to unite against xenophobia" (Kubheka 2014). While these pronouncements (like the ones in the past) have not translated into concrete action, they contrast starkly with the national government's populist turn over the last few years. A sign of this is a series of current policy proposals intended to restrict immigration and

the socio-economic rights of non-nationals in South Africa. So while government has tentatively accepted the need to fight xenophobia, it has left this largely in the realm of rhetorical appeal while actively working to restrict immigration and opportunities for non-nationals in South Africa. As Landau & Freemantle (2014: 1) note, it is somewhat ironic that efforts to promote social cohesion in the country are "premised on separating groups and denying some segments of the population rights guaranteed to others." It is important to note that even this general acceptance of xenophobia again reinforces the position that this is fundamentally an issue of immigration and not one rooted in potentially violent divisions within South Africa's population.

Police Responses to Xenophobic Violence in South Africa

Although the police are charged with protecting all residents of South Africa from physical harm, they have often expressed ambivalence towards the rights and welfare of outsiders or been actively hostile and complicit in violence against them (Amnesty International 2014; Landau & Haithar 2007). In line with government reactions, rather than grapple with the issue as distinct from high levels of 'ordinary' crime, police officials have resisted pressure to approach xenophobic violence as anything rooted in attitudes, political instrumentalism or economic ambition. Instead, they argue, the language of xenophobia is merely a cover for criminality or even a conscious effort to bring South Africa's reputation into disrepute. According to a police spokesperson quoted in Bauer (2013):

Holistically speaking, South Africans are not xenophobic and many cases are merely crime. [...] We cannot conflate this issue and we commonly see this as Afrophobia that is underpinned by criminality. When we see children looting shops and people robbing people of their goods it is to us a blatant sign of crime that is being excused as xenophobia.

CORMSA (2011) argues that because the "police are very quick to dismiss attacks on foreign nationals as simply 'criminal' rather than xenophobic," they have limited ability to detect prejudice motives in criminal incidents. This has serious implications on their ability to counter violence: when the police arrest

or bring perpetrators to justice (which they rarely do), the focus is almost exclusively on those caught in the act rather than on instigators behind the scenes. While the instigators are often well known to the community, they have de facto impunity and may – as they have in many cases – act again. Indeed, by eliminating economic competition, seizing housing or winning political favour through their actions, their incentives are further strengthened.

In explaining their insufficient response, the police often point to lack of capacity and fear of victimisation at the hands of a hostile community. This may be true in many instances, but one must not overlook their own anti-foreigner sentiments and support (or at least passive condoning) of the violence and their unwillingness to draw attention to a politically sensitive topic (Misago et al. 2009). In the run up to the 2010 FIFA world cup, the police minister labelled those raising concerns about overt threats of xenophobic violence as "prophets of doom" (TV footage showed interviews with township dwellers preparing to "finish the war" they started in May 2008).

The 'evacuation strategy' has become a characteristic feature of police responses to xenophobic violence. In almost all cases, the police have limited their role to escorting victims to places of safety rather than protecting them and their property in situ. Even where well-intentioned, such activities may inadvertently abet perpetrators trying to remove 'unwanted' foreigners from their midst. In some instances, the police have been accused of actively collaborating with such campaigns (Landau & Haithar 2007). While appreciating the police efforts to save their lives, some victims of the attacks believe that effort should also be made to protect their property. For them, saving livelihoods is as important as saving lives. A Somali shop-owner in Orange Farm states:

Well, the problem... helpers, the police, they are coming. And they come to save our life, but not our property. They say "leave the shop; let us take you to the police station." And they take us to the police station. Tomorrow, how can we survive? Yes, okay... they save my life... tomorrow, what can I...I eat and drink?

Yes, they have to protect us with our property. Even last time, they robbed our shops. Now even I don't have a shop.

Post May 2008 Civil Society Response

The widespread anti-outsider violence in May 2008 elicited a range of responses from local and international civil society and international organisations. Many have been involved in providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the violence. Others have launched interventions aimed at preventing the reoccurrence of such a violent conflict by promoting social cohesion. These have had mixed effects. While some have undoubtedly provided needed succour and others have had little impact, some have risked exacerbating tensions by reinforcing notions that foreigners are a privileged group or promoting conflict resolution strategies that bolster inter-group boundaries.

Although characterised by much chaos due to a lack of coordination and communication among different stakeholders, the immediate humanitarian response to the May 2008 crisis was generally laudable: NGOs (local and international), UN agencies, faith-based organisations (FBOs) and individuals proffered volumes of donated food, clothes and other goods and services to the displaced populations (Polzer et al. 2009). Beyond the humanitarian crisis, various civil society organisations initiated programmes aimed at preventing the occurrence of violence and promoting social cohesion. The Nelson Mandela Foundation, for example, organised social cohesion community dialogues in violence affected communities across the country. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) initiated the 'ONE' Movement, a social change campaign that seeks to reverse attitudes that result in discrimination, xenophobia, racism and tribalism. This was intended to use media campaigns, community conversations, youth mobilisation, curriculum interventions and human rights training with a wide range of civil society partners to promote a culture of tolerance, human dignity and unity in diversity across South and Southern Africa (IOM 2009).

Together with many other initiatives organised by interested parties and organisations, these interventions may have increased awareness of xenophobia as a social problem. They have, however, done little to address social and institutional xenophobia and its various manifestations. Indeed, official and public xenophobic pronouncements and attitudes are as pervasive as ever and violence against foreign nationals is on the rise (Misago et al. 2015). The following discussion highlights at least six reasons why these civil society interventions have failed or have not yielded desired outcomes.

First, there is a lack of consistency and political muscle to hold government accountable for its failures to protect people's fundamental rights or to influence strong and sustained official response to xenophobia and related violence. Pugh (2014: 1) rightly notes that "much civil society response tended to be humanitarian in nature, rather than presenting any sustained political challenge that would address the underlying structural causes of such violence." In trying to address xenophobia and its different manifestations in South Africa, civil society has almost exclusively targeted affected communities with awareness campaigns and moral appeals for tolerance but has largely failed to mobilise government responses to address the institutional xenophobia that fuels anti-foreigner attitudes and behaviour among the public. It has also failed to generate official, policy level response aimed specifically at building a society inclusive of foreign nationals and other outsiders (or at least obtain government's official support and sustained involvement in on-going initiatives). As Pugh (2014: 232) further notes, there appears to be no, "space available for CSO actors to effectively advocate for structural and political change in the management of migration, refugee, and asylum seeker issues, let alone for addressing the root causes of violence." With a focus on communities, interventions often overlook the broader institutional structures that help reinforce perceptions and practices that disadvantage and threaten lives and livelihoods of many foreign nationals living in the country. As Misago et al. (2015) note, the root causes of intolerance and discrimination in South Africa are located in mutually reinforcing social and institutional configurations at local and national levels.

Indeed, reflecting on UHNCR anti-xenophobia programmes, many civil society organisations acknowledged that one of their collective failures in addressing xenophobic violence in South Africa has been their inability to secure a government buy-in. For example, a CORMSA official observed "[…] one of the things which continue to be missing is the issue of getting government buy-in and commitment…. So for me I think one of the shortcomings would have been that relationship with government in terms of getting the buy-in of the programme." The official believes that not having government on board is a major challenge to addressing xenophobia and related violence. In a similar vein, Amnesty International (2014) stated that they "remain concerned that in the six years since the large-scale violence and displacements of 2008, the South African authorities have not put in place any systematic measures of prevention and protection."

Second, civil society organisations often base their interventions on shaky foundations and untested theories of change. For one, they have focused almost exclusively on attitudes, neglecting factors and motivations that trigger violent behaviour towards foreigners. This shifts attention from factors critical to combatting the immediate effects of xenophobia (law enforcement, accountability and the like) to ones with (only potential) long-term consequences. Although promoting tolerant attitudes is an important objective in any fragmented society, the psychological research is inconclusive regarding relationships between attitudes and behaviour. Attitudes are not necessarily a good predictor of behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1977). As research evidence shows, anti-foreign attitudes are consistently high across different sections of the country's population, but manifestations of violence and acts of discrimination differ significantly across locations (Crush 2008). People may value an inclusive society in general but are nonetheless willing and able to alienate particular, demonised sub-groups. Hence, attitudes alone cannot explain why certain forms of violence tend to happen in certain types of communities and not in others. Apart from questionable efficiency, the emphasis on attitudes overlooks the importance of political mobilisation of xenophobic discourses or institutional configurations – formal or informal – that help to differentiate and divide populations based on race, ethnicity,

nationality, legal status or any other factor that might become fulcra for xenophobic discrimination (Landau 2011). Political entrepreneurs and local leaders often deliberately capitalise on distrustful climates and make political or economic gains from discrimination against and violent exclusion of those deemed to be outsiders (Misago 2011). By overlooking these instigators and their motivations, interventions are unlikely to succeed because they are 'barking up the wrong tree.'

Indeed, to be effective, the theories of change and other assumptions informing most of civil society's xenophobia related programming need to be evidence-based and, particularly, be broadened beyond changing public opinions and attitudes and shift towards programmes and interventions targeting political and behavioural change. For example, apart from the Militia/Displaced and Migrant Persons Support Programme (Militia/DMPSP) and, to an extent, the Agency for Refugee Education, Skills, Training & Advocacy (ARESTA) programme, the UNHCR ROSA programmes evaluated were oriented towards public attitudes, not xenophobic behaviour or practices, politics on the ground and national policy. For example, ARESTA identified poor service delivery, poverty, unemployment and political infighting as sources of violence but, nevertheless, designed a public awareness programme instead of programmes to address these sources of conflict. Public awareness programmes have value as long as they are complemented by other approaches targeting the political and economic incentives and configurations driving violence and discrimination.

Third, civil society interventions and programmes are immigrant-orientated and run the risk of exacerbating rather than eliminating bias and violent exclusion. Overt pro-migrant, pro-minority rights programmes may further isolate migrants or minorities by reinforcing existing boundaries and fuelling tensions. Such programmes risk reinforcing the categories by (a) drawing attention to them; (b) requiring people to seek remedy as membership in said groups; and (c) bolstering popular conceptions that foreigners receive special aid and attention. By demonstrating that foreign nationals (or other minorities) have international allies (UNHCR, AI, etc…), well-meaning agencies

and their interventions may unwittingly build resentment among the disadvantaged citizenry who feels forgotten and angry. Some of this may be unavoidable, but campaigns organised around more transversal or universal themes like law enforcement, rule of law, administrative restructuring or the like may help diminish, rather than reinforce, difference. This may require a different set of partners and expertise beyond the normal human rights and migrant protection collaborators. Such a 'stealth' approach may be more politically palatable and sustainable and less visibly pro-migrant/minority.

One of the UHNCR ROSA initiatives (the Militia/DMPSP) could serve as an example in this regard. Called 'Promotion of Social Cohesion among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Nationals', the programme's objective was to prevent and mitigate violent attacks on foreign nationals, particularly UNHCR's people of concern. Although activities and implementation approach varies depending on the situation at hand, Militia/DMPSP indicated that their general modus operandi consisted of i) intelligence gathering to have a clear understanding of the situation; ii) dispersing crowds of perpetrators using force and dogs when necessary (working with the police or on their own); iii) evacuating victims of attack to safe places; iv) searching for and retrieving stolen goods; v) arresting perpetrators and handing them over to the police; and vi) negotiating with communities and their leaders for reintegration of displaced foreign nationals (see more details on this programme in Misago et al. 2015). Visibly, while these activities may provide foreign nationals with short term relief, they may actually exacerbate their long term vulnerability. Indeed, these are law enforcement duties which,h when performed by civil society organisations (like in this case), have questionable legality, to say the least, and create unsustainable parallel systems of protection or reinforce divisions between foreign nationals and other community members. Interventions that create parallel systems of protection and/or prioritise the wellbeing of foreign nationals over the general welfare of other community members risk exacerbating tensions and resentment and may end up doing more harm than good in terms of protecting outsiders from violent exclusion.

Fourth, many civil society interventions target the wrong sources of conflict. For example, assumptions that events like community dialogues and cultural and sport festivals that bring different groups together will help achieve peaceful coexistence among groups, ignore the fact that these initiatives are unlikely to reach those behind the violence. While there is potential value in bringing people together who otherwise might not engage, they do little to address the political economy of violence within South African communities. Indeed, ample research evidence indicates that the micro-politics and the political economy of violence are the key drivers of violent attacks on foreign nationals in affected areas (Misago 2011). Moreover, when managed poorly, even supposedly 'non-political' events such as soccer tournaments, intercultural dialogues or cultural events easily become politically charged and divisive. Such events require very careful management and a clearly structured framework for establishing dialogue around issues of mutual concern to avoid the worsening of existing tensions.

Fifth and lastly, many civil society organisations use 'one size fits all' approaches that fail to recognise the specific sources of violence in particular sites. While there are commonalities across many sites, initiatives that fail to recognise the triggers, targets and forms of discrimination as practiced in a specific place are unlikely to succeed. Thus, it is important that interventions are adapted to the specific dynamics of a locality, carefully considering which local institutions to target, which residents and actors to work with, and which specific tensions to address.

Community Responses

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, local communities have resisted violence mobilisation and have actively protected foreign nationals and other groups living in their midst (BBC 2011) However, much of this '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 business in a given locality and setting minimum prices on basic goods. Segatti (2011: 3) 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). There are also growing concerns that foreign nationals are making efforts to acquire fire arms (even if illegally) for self-protection (Amnesty International 2014), and there are already examples where this practice has led to more tensions and violence. For example the January 2015 violence in Soweto started after a foreign shop owner shot and killed a local boy during an alleged robbery (Sapa 2015) These community initiatives are evidently unsustainable coping mechanisms that are already causing more chaos, exacerbating existing tensions and leading to more violence.

Conclusion

This paper argues that government and civil society responses and interventions to address xenophobic violence in South Africa have largely been ineffective as evidenced by on-going and increasing levels of such violence. The paper further argues that, in addition to the lack of government political will, impunity and lack of civil society muscle to hold government accountable for its failure to protect all country's residents, interventions have failed particularly because of their critical ontological and etiological blind spots. Indeed, most of past and current interventions by civil society a) fail to address the presence of institutional roots of xenophobia and related violence and neglect the importance of political mobilisation of xenophobic discourses or institutional configurations, and b) are based on untested theories of change such as unfounded assumptions that changing attitudes, even if successful, will necessarily prevent violence. As such, interventions are not informed by a clear understanding of violence dynamics, motives and triggers. Without a clear appreciation of the dynamics, instrumental motives and organisational triggers of the violence as well as of what type of responses

work or do not work, intervention strategies can only be ineffective at best, and counter-productive at worst.

If nothing else, this paper demonstrates that addressing xenophobic violence or at least minimizing its effects requires more than moral appeals and awareness campaigns. Rather it requires, (a) sustained, and coordinated and broad-based efforts; (b) greater support from public programmes and politicians; (c) a more nuanced understanding of the space specific drivers of violence; and (d) efforts to counter the culture of impunity, promote the rule of law and enhance community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that respect the constitutional principles of universal rights and due process. To reiterate the third point, this means shifting from one size fits all approaches towards strategies that consider the localised political and social variations and area specific histories of conflict in order to respond appropriately and in a more sustainable manner.

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