

---

# Hallmarks of irresponsible and unresponsive governance: Internal xenophobic attacks in South Africa's municipalities

*S MAKWEMBERE<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Municipalities face major pressures to demonstrate that they are responsible and responsive institutions. At present, different policies and institutions exist to guide local governance in pursuit of numerous ideals through various assigned roles and responsibilities. Broadly, the latter involve government's vision of participatory development, citizen engagement and innovative service delivery amongst other things. Xenophobia has been a particular challenge to the South African government's vision for local governance, especially due to its complex contributing factors. Using document analysis, this article discusses issues around citizenship and regionalism as suggested in policies and strategies on local governance in view of the realities of xenophobic attacks. The experiences of marginalised migrants as stakeholders of local governance reveal the paradoxes of xenophobic attacks as local governance agenda on responsibility and responsiveness this article suggests implications of the conceptualisation of citizenship and regionalism in municipal approaches to local governance. Political and economic restructuring associated with local governance goals are undoubtedly shape constructions of citizenship and regionalism. As sustainable solutions to the problem of xenophobia are yet to be achieved, this article concludes by offering possible routes to local governance that broaden what is conceptualised as responsible and responsive vision and action in addressing xenophobia.

Keywords: xenophobia, citizenship, regionalism, local governance, South Africa

## **Introduction**

The images of violent attacks on foreign nationals in 2008, which left 62 people dead and thousands of foreign nationals displaced from their homes, come to mind when issues of xenophobia in South Africa are raised. The widely publicised pictures of Mozambican national Ernesto Nhamuave, who was burned alive, highlighted a dark side of the experiences of foreigners from other African countries living in South Africa. The case itself was closed without any perpetrator being charged; and, it points to a worrying picture on the extent to which the already over-burdened justice system is able to handle crimes of this nature. Arguably, the extent of the problem goes far deeper than simple criminal acts; thus, the justice system alone cannot deal with the situation which is an apparent problem for almost all municipalities.

The causes of the kind of violence associated with xenophobia are undoubtedly complex, hence the solutions to address the problems call for multi-focal efforts. However, one can argue that it is the efforts by local government, the arm closest to the people, which reflect

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, Rhodes University, P.O. Box 94, Grahamstown, 6139 South Africa, E-mail: smakwembere@gmail.com or s.makwembere@ru.ac.za

the extent to which government policy-concern on the treatment of foreign nationals is prioritised and realised. In a study on xenophobia, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) investigated some of the main causes for the attacks witnessed in 2008 (HSRC, 2008). The study shed some light on issues that are particularly relevant for municipal councils' consideration and action. The causes identified included the influx of migrants into the country, government failings especially around service delivery, corruption as well as addressing violence, the poor pace and maladministration of housing, the impact of migrant numbers on gender dynamics and the pressures of economic livelihoods and competition over resources (HSRC, 2008). In the analysis and recommendations, the study highlighted the importance of policy and action targeted at the local level.

Different municipalities across South Africa have had to deal with xenophobic attacks to some extent over the years. While not always making headline news, xenophobic attacks notably continued since 2008. Recently, the attacks of April 2015 in Durban and Johannesburg have once again highlighted discrepancies in South Africa's response to and progress on addressing xenophobia. When soldiers drafted and sent to Johannesburg and Durban townships to support the police, this eerily resembled images of apartheid state of emergency. Many foreign shop owners were driven from their businesses, people were killed and others displaced. Once again, the 2015 incidents have brought to question government's capacity to deal with the attacks, predominantly on nationals of other African countries. In addition to the violence, controversial public statements were made by different leaders such as King Goodwill Zwelithini, the traditional leader of the Zulu people, who reportedly compared foreigners to lice and declared that they must pack and leave the country (Timeslive, 2015). The anti-foreigner sentiments made at the time were not new. Different public officials were cited in the press as publicly making anti-foreigner statements with no consequences. This conduct brings to question what and where progress had been made in the South African society, in regard to addressing xenophobia since 2008.

This paper seeks to interrogate issues of local governance in light of the experiences of xenophobia, using the case of the City of Johannesburg. Using document analysis, the article critically discusses the issues of citizenship and regionalism as suggested in policies and strategies on local governance, in view of the realities of xenophobic attacks. Prior to democratisation of South Africa in 1994, local government played a key role in implementing racist policies and maintaining the separatism status quo of apartheid. Post-apartheid, the evolving political situation has seen an ongoing evaluation of the role of local government in building a new South Africa which reflects the democratic values of diversity and multiculturalism of its people. The constitution and local government framework have entrenched a new local government with a broad mandate of creating "developmental local governments". The White Paper on Local Government of 1998 defines developmental local government as "local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs, and improve the quality of their lives". With this, the issues of citizenship, social inclusion as well as regionalism have grown in importance as considerations how developmental local governance could be framed, which players should be involved in processes as well as how participation should be governed.

A brief overview of decentralisation and democratisation in South Africa is provide hereunder as a prelude to the conceptualisation of citizenship and regionalism at a local government level using the City of Johannesburg. This is followed by a discussion of citizenship and social inclusion, then a discussion on regionalism given the aspirations of local economic

*Td*, 10(4), December 2015, Special edition, pp. 118-126.

development and finally some recommendations for focus areas that local governance can explore to overcome marginalising local economic development strategies.

### **Decentralisation and democratisation of the South African local government: towards inclusive local economic development**

Many countries have attempted decentralisation for various reasons and with varying degrees of success. In Africa, the decentralisation trend is evident and there is much evidence pointing to the complex realities of embarking on fiscal, institutional (or deconcentration) and political (or devolution) decentralisation (Crawford & Hartmann, 2008). Some key challenges include identifying the specific form of decentralisation should take to meaningfully benefit the country, coordinating as well as building links between various actors and identifying the elements of a good decentralisation implementation strategy (Stoke, 2003). A dominant argument in literature is that decentralisation strengthens the bonds between the state and citizenry through enhanced political participation, thus providing an avenue to promote democratisation. However, the implementation of decentralisation cannot absolutely be credited for positively changing the relationship between the state and citizenry.

After the institutionalisation of democracy in South Africa through the 1994 elections, government set in place institutions and legal frameworks to guide the formation of a developmental local government. With democracy by its nature observing the varied segments of society external to the political system, government anticipated that decentralised service delivery would facilitate increased citizen participation as well as enhance local government capacity to deliver its developmental mandate. The process of broadening the involvement of society meant that the relationship between the state and the individual had to change. Simultaneously, the conceptualisation of citizenship had to change. The former apartheid processes, structures and systems which excluded Black people, because they were not given full citizen rights, had to be restructured.

It is the Constitution of 1996, the Local Government Act No.27 of 1998 and the Decentralisation Policy that played a key role in promoting local government authorities that support citizen participation. The new constitution defines local government as a “sphere within a cooperative governance framework and not just a level or tier at the bottom of a vertical hierarchy” (Van Donk, 2008: vi). As such, attempts to strengthen the institutional capabilities to deal with xenophobia came to be situated in a complex framework with numerous variables. When it comes to internalising changes and achieving tangible results, many things remain unclear. Chapter 7 of the Constitution establishes and spells out the responsibilities of local government authorities. Section 151(1) specifically states that local policy matters are to be resolved at local levels under the supervision of local government authorities. Section 4 of the Local Government Act assigns to local government a mandate to promote accountability, transparency, democratic principles as well as participation in development and decision making processes. The role of local government is however broad, dealing with social development and local economic development.

In terms of economic development, the decentralisation process is perceived as fundamental to encouraging self-sustaining small-scale projects, thereby facilitating a distribution of resources to grassroot levels. This distribution is consequently meant to reduce regional inequalities (Sharma, 2000). Economic development by its nature is generally an uneven and inequitable process; therefore, the need for a local economic development (LED) agenda

emanates out of this challenge. The application of LED strategies involves a broad spectrum of techniques and tools to frame interventions that respond to developmental challenges of particular locales with individual characteristics in terms of geography, demography, business, social groups and so on. Any growth of the local economies is dependent on stakeholders, amongst other things, collectively harnessing their competitive and comparative advantages to stimulate growth, establish revenue-generating value chains as well as effective service value chains to ultimately improve citizens' quality of life.

At present, South Africa is posed with numerous challenges such as lack of shared understanding of the role of LED and LED processes, ineffective working relationships between provincial, district and local authorities as well as failure of local authorities to clearly define a LED strategy in the wider IDP process (SALGA, 2015). The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 legislates for the IDP and a number of LED functions. The Act aims to enable "municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of local communities" (RSA, 2000). As a planning tool, the IDP is meant to guide municipalities to achieve their responsibilities.

A shortcoming of IDP processes has been their failure to make reference to migrants. In his analysis of the major policy documents of eThekweni municipality, Maharaj (2009) found that they made no reference to migrants. Migrants were not identified amongst the vulnerable groups; thus, it was not clear how they were being catered for if at all, especially in light of xenophobia being identified as a major challenge for the municipality (Maharaj, 2009). The use of aggregated demographic profiles and information has shortcomings because planning is not entirely based on a picture of local economies evolving due to regionalisation and globalisation trends.

### **Not African enough: Citizenship and social inclusion in local governance**

Globalisation has resulted in accelerated flows of capital, goods and people. The migration of people has especially increased uncertainties and anxieties of locals and foreigners, creating major concerns around citizenship and belongingness (Nyamnjoh, 2006). The attacks against foreign nationals in Johannesburg were mainly targeted at Africans, bringing into sharp questioning the true nature of the situation at hand. Neocosmos (2010) argued that the causes of attacks should be situated in the "politics of fear" (Neocosmos, 2010:141). This "politics of fear" should take the "etymological roots of the term 'xenophobia' in order not to understand it simply as a psychological 'attitude', but as a political subjectivity and practice" (Neocosmos, 2010: 141). He further noted that the history of xenophobia in South Africa is closely connected to the way citizenship has been conceived and contested (Neocosmos, 2010). It could be asked: what are the borders of citizenship, in light of shared histories and struggles, both political as well as economic, as people participate in local economic development in a globalised arena?

Johannesburg or eGoli (the place of gold) has historically drawn people from various countries seeking better fortunes. From the time it was proclaimed a town in 1886, it drew many migrants to work in the mines and settle in the immediate geographic vicinity. Johannesburg was typically characterised by influx of migrants from within and outside South Africa. Under apartheid, government policies resulted in racialised communities in terms of income and access to resources. Further, the relocation of Black residents and the institutionalisation of racialised locations resulted in many being denied access to live in the increasingly well-developed city despite the city relying on their labour (Schmitz, 2013).

Today, Johannesburg is a very diverse city and a significant representation of migrants from different African countries are still a major feature of the labour force. Further, it has been characterised by increasing crime as “the issue of control over public spaces re-emerges in a quite different setting, revolving around crime and insecurity” (Benit-Gbaffou, 2009: 55). Before the attacks on foreigners in May 2008, concerns were raised about the general treatment of foreign national in Johannesburg. An article in *Daily Nation* captured the situation in January 2008. Nyathi wrote: “The burning down of shacks belonging to the refugees and even public lynchings have become a common occurrence, especially in poor neighbourhoods” and these attacks were mainly on Zimbabweans and Mozambicans (cited in Bordeau, 2010: 45) who were fleeing the harsh conditions of their countries. Wood (1994: 617) called this ecomigration whereby this migration “is propelled by economic decline and environmental degradation” in their home countries. However, while these migrants move to look for better opportunities, they have not always been positively received.

Accusations are made against migrants for taking business opportunities and jobs from South Africans, perpetuating negative sentiments. In Khayelitsha, Cape Town, a National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry leader was quoted as saying “We are the ones who fought for freedom and democracy and now these Somalis are here eating our democracy” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2008 cited in Neocosmos, 2010: 117). His sentiments suggested that the Somali foreign nationals were not legitimate citizens of the city to partake in development. The common use of the term ‘makwerekwere’ (denigrating term for African immigrant) reflects the social acceptance of the exclusion of immigrants from city citizenship. Labels with negative stereotypes and sentiments against different groups of foreigners further contribute to the exclusion with contempt wherein African foreign nationals are, for example, all described as illegal immigrants and Nigerians as drug dealers. There is a view that foreigners are not citizens and, therefore, that they are not legitimate partakers in economic development.

When locals blocked roads in Jeppestown and Cleveland in Johannesburg with rocks and burning tyres in April 2015, they ordered foreigners to close their shops and leave South Africa. The affected groups were from other African countries. Many shops were vandalised and some looted. Some business owners closed their shops while others returned to try to protect their goods. Many foreigners quoted in the media seemed perplexed at their treatment, given their commitment to the City as citizens through, for example, creating employment in their business enterprises (EWN, 2015). Despite many of these African nationals contributing to the local economy as residents, when attacks take place they are perceived as unwelcome outsiders. Should these business owners have had an obscure sense of belonging or citizenship, this would have become further subverted by the events.

The issues of social inclusion have been an ongoing concern for all levels of government since 1994 because of the deep-rooted divisions apartheid created. In 2009, the Department of Social Development produced a concept paper on social inclusion in local integrated development plans with the aim of interrogating how social cohesion should be promoted for inclusivity at municipal level in order to address issues such as xenophobia. The concept paper asserts that social cohesion needs to be seen as a project that requires management and clear assessment using key performance criteria and indicators within the IDP framework (Department of Social Development, 2009). However, the extent to which IDPs reflect a social cohesion agenda addressing factors contributing to xenophobia is yet to be determined. From a human rights perspective, there is room to interrogate this dimension. The challenge is that social cohesion is difficult to measure at an individual level (Hjerm & Schnabel, 2012).

Xenophobia has been used to measure ethnic social cohesion; however, there are limitations as exclusion, rather than inclusion, of groups tends to be the primary emphasis (Hjerm & Schnabel, 2012).

The City of Johannesburg's (COJ) vision is to be "a world class African city of the future – a vibrant equitable African city, strengthened through its diversity; a city that provides real quality of life; a city that provides sustainability for all its citizens; a resilient and adaptive society" (COJ IDP 2014/15). It notes that the population of Gauteng is 78% African. However, an analysis of the COJ strategy documents reveals an omission of other nationals as residents from the demographics. It is therefore not clear what the municipality understands about this excluded segment of its demographics. In using the term African, the statistics do not at all disaggregate foreign African nationals. COJ IDPs consistently categorise citizens as African or Black or African Black but no clear reference is made to foreign nationals from African countries. The use of the terms Black and African, sometimes interchangeably, is problematic especially as government needs to be concerned with its performance towards addressing the challenges of xenophobia. The measurement of performance is made difficult when the definitions and demographic information is unclear. The term African is used to refer to South African nationals rather than to all African immigrants. That is, nationals of other African countries in South Africa are not African enough to be classified as African. Ironically, the COJ speaks of having an African agenda. The Joburg 2040 strategic vision is for Johannesburg to become "World Class African City of the Future" (City of Johannesburg IDP, 2012/16: 5). However, the rest of the IDP does not recognise the diverse African identities of its citizens.

The fact that race is a social construct and identities are constructed in several ways, compounds the issues of social cohesion and belongingness. Labels are necessary to identify people, but these labels are not always appropriate. Yet, government cannot do away with labels to demonstrate progress in governance. One could argue that classification labels need to be interrogated; and, in light of issues of xenophobia, alternatives to the legal view of citizenship should be explored. For the COJ to build a "World Class African City", citizenship to Africans needs to be specified. This move is necessary not only to try to deal with building citizenship identity, but reinforcing a view that local governance includes individuals from other countries.

### **Building South Africa on Africa: Matters of regionalism in local economic development**

There are various theories of regionalism. These can be grouped as market integration, development integration, regional cooperation and regional integration. This article is concerned with regional integration because of its closer connection to the movement of migrants in trade-related issues. Regional integration occurs when countries come together and develop formal agreements to enhance cooperation with each other around trade. In Southern Africa, the regional integration agenda is guided by the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) (2005-2020). The Revised RISDP (2015-2020) is currently being implemented with four priority areas: industrial development and market integration, peace and security cooperation, infrastructure in support of regional integration as well as special programmes of a regional dimension. In a speech, President Zuma stated that regional integration and industrialisation must benefit all citizens of SADC.

The economic strength of South Africa has meant that it is the strongest economy in Southern Africa and one of the strongest economies in Africa. Over the last twenty years, South African companies have expanded their trade on the African continent. Shoprite, for example, has almost 150 stores in about 20 countries. Other big companies include Woolworths, Pick 'n Pay. While the rest of the African continent has been a viable trade terrain for many South African companies, South Africa has been an attractive destination for foreign nationals seeking better economic opportunities. The influx of immigrant groups of people from different countries has changed the demographic profile of municipalities. The City of Johannesburg's demographic profiles tend to aggregate the population. The main socio-economic indicators take into account the population size, number and size of households, age, gender and race. Concerning race, African Black is often cited. What is missing is information on the migration into and out of the municipal area. Records do not indicate foreign nationals living in the area or indicate their socio-economic profile. Migration trends are important for municipality to understand how to respond. Migration has an impact on the spatial development patterns. Equally, foreign migrants are "excluded from developmental plans of the local state and can therefore be marginalised" (Vawda, 2004: 218). Embracing the African immigrants in the development processes of Johannesburg as citizens would enhance the prospects of regional economic development for a promising future.

### **"Responsive" and "responsible" local governance against xenophobia**

As Reitzes (1994: 9) argued that migrants are a "marginalised underclass who are easily open to abuse". The presence of xenophobia as with other social ills, points to the need for reflection on the model of local economic development being implemented. Local governance methods have the potential to correct negative attitudes where the general public policy has been ineffective. Responsiveness and responsibility to xenophobia requires changes in urban cultures. Breaking negative cultural patterns within governance discourse is an important aspect. Also, it is important to consider consistent communication about the inclusive citizenship of the locales. While literature widely covers the effects of political restructuring on citizenship generally as well as in relation to decentralisation specifically, more research is needed on the effects in this domain, especially in respect of association with decentralisation on citizenship and xenophobia in South Africa. A discussion on decentralisation brings to light the trajectory of reconceptualisation of local governance in public administration as well as that for citizenship. Johannesburg townships are sites of various social problems and migrants are open to "become tempting scapegoats for alienated citizens" (Wood, 1994: 625). The need for deconstruction of the language of "Black" or "Black African" that excludes African immigrants in South Africa cannot be overemphasised. For this reason, South Africa's racialised history cannot be ignored because race is a social construct (Ntombela, 2015). Government needs to find an approach to xenophobia that is human rights-sensitive and "takes cognisance of the creative ways in which migrants contribute to the local economy" (Maharaj, 2009: 56).

### **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that addressing xenophobia is by no means a straight forward affair. As the South African government continues to invest resources towards resolving the local development challenges, it needs to continue to seek innovative and informed ways of addressing xenophobia. Indeed, more conceptual and empirical work is needed around this

issue of xenophobia so that relevant, sustainable and pragmatic strategies are crafted and implemented. Building the capacity to deal with the issues connected to constructed identities such as citizenship may provide some solutions. Therefore, the article has argued that reconceptualisation holds the key to finding pragmatic strategies that could shape the conduct of life that is inclusive and free of xenophobic attitudes.

## References

- Benit-Gbaffou, C. 2009. Who control the streets? Crime, “communities” and the state in post-apartheid Johannesburg. In Locatelli, F. & Nugent, P. (eds.), *African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Spaces*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill.
- Bordeau, J. 2010. *Xenophobia: The Violence of Fear and Hate*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc.
- Cloete, P. & Kotze, F. 2009. *Concept Paper on Social Cohesion/Inclusion in Local Integrated Development Plans*. Pretoria: Department of Social Development.
- Crawford, G. & Hartmann, C. 2008. Introduction: Decentralisation as a pathway out of poverty and conflict? In Crawford, G. & Hartmann, C. *Decentralisation in Africa: Pathway out of Poverty and Conflict?* Amsterdam: Gordon Crawford and Christof Hartmann/Amsterdam University Press.
- Crook, R.C. 2003. Decentralisation and poverty reduction in Africa: The politics of local-central relations. *Public Administration & Development*, 23(1): 77-88.
- De Visser, J.W. 2005. *Developmental Local Government*. Oxford: Intersentia Antwerpen.
- EWN 2015. Overnight xenophobic violence rocks Joburg. <http://ewn.co.za/2015/04/17/Overnight-xenophobic-violence-in-Johannesburg> [Accessed: 18 October 2015].
- Hjerm, M. & Schnabel, A. 2012. Social cohesion and the welfare state: how heterogeneity influences welfare state attitudes. In Ervasti, H., Andersen, J.G., Fridberg, T. & Ringdal, K. (eds.), *The Future of the Welfare State: Social Policy Attitudes and Social Capital in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 2008. *Violence and xenophobia in South Africa: Developing Consensus, Moving to Action*. <http://policytransfer.metropolis.org/case-studies/integrated-development-planning> [Accessed: 18 October 2015].
- Maharaj, B. 2009. Migrants and urban rights: politics of xenophobia in South African cities <https://espacepolitique.revues.org/1402> [Accessed: 18 October 2015].
- Mkandawire, P., Nyantakyi-Frimpong, Armah, F. & Arku, G. 2014. Regionalism, food security and economic development. Occasional paper No. 23. The African Capacity Building Foundation, London.
- Neocosmos, M. 2010. *From “Foreign Natives” to Native Foreigners: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa, Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2006. Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Td*, 10(4), December 2015, Special edition, pp. 118-126.

- Reitzes, M. 1994. Alien issues, *Indicator SA*, 12(Summer): 7-11.
- SALGA, 2015. *LED in South Africa*. <http://led.co.za/led-in-south-africa> [Accessed: 18 October 2015].
- Schmitz, C. 2013. Johannesburg. In Shillington, K. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African History*. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Smoke, P. 2003. Decentralisation in Africa: Goals, dimensions, myths and challenges. *Public Administration and Development*, 23: 7-16.
- Timeslive*, 2015. *Listen to Exactly What King Goodwill Zwelithini said about Foreigners on 16 April 2015*. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/04/16/listen-to-exactly-what-king-goodwill-zwelithini-said-about-foreigners> [Accessed: 11 October 2015].
- Vawda, M.S.E. 2004. Hidden migration: Livelihoods, identities and citizenship – Malawians in the City of Durban. Unpublished Doctorate Thesis submitted to the Department of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal.