Social Media and Xenophobic Solidarity in Post-colonial Africa

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In recent times, there is a resurgence of aggressive consciousness by citizens of most African countries, firmly fashioned and sustained through social media. Social media in this way effectively play roles of mobilizing and (re)constructing national identities and solidarities in ways that citizens regularly enter into violent confrontations with foreign nationals, often stereotyped as threats to the prosperity of citizens. In some African countries, executive orders have been given by heads of government that saw the vicious expulsion of millions of foreign nationals. With the advent of distance-and-time-shrinking information and communication technologies, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp are relied upon in rousing support for national interests and in-group solidarity. Through a systematic review of national immigration policies and content analysis of Facebook newsfeeds in selected countries of East/Central, West and Southern Africa (Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa), this paper examines how social media strengthen in-group solidarities with the attendant consequences of loss of lives, properties, and inter-state diplomatic relations in post-colonial Africa. The paper concludes that while encouraging freedom of expression within the continent, social media also bolster freedom to hate as both citizens and foreign nationals become more distrustful of one another, thereby exacerbating competition, rivalry and xenophobia. As citizens exercise their right to voice their opinions, they also actively dehumanize foreign nationals. The paper recommends that kin and friendship networks should become the sphere within which interventions for anti-xenophobia campaigns occur in post-colonial Africa, as these hold the social capital to bridge the divide between citizens and foreign nationals in attempts to achieve peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Social cohesion, xenophobia, social capital, coloniality, social media, nationalism

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how social media leverage on the social structures of post-independence Africa to fuel nationalistic sentiments in ways that unremittingly affect visions of Pan-Africanism and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In recent times, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, BlackBerry Messenger, YouTube and WhatsApp, have become powerful platforms to broadcast messages, photos and video clips to a global audience (Gillespie, 2010). Aker and Mbiti (2010) and the African Union (AU, 2015) argue that both nationals and foreign nationals of African countries engage with social media to disseminate misleading narratives that generate negative perceptions of themselves. Landau (2010) show that this is generating an aggressive and restless consciousness among nationals and foreign nationals, frequently leading to conflict and confrontation – including the use of violence against themselves – as foreign nationals are often seen as threats to the prosperity of nationals.

In Nigeria for instance, during the President Shehu Shagari administration in 1983, an executive order was given for undocumented foreign nationals and those with improper documents to leave the country within two weeks (17 to 31 January 1983). Almost all of those foreign nationals were West Africans, of whom over a million were Ghanaians, and the remaining one million were a mix of other West African countries (Aremu and Ajayi, 2014). During that period, foreign nationals had been attracted to Nigeria because of the oil boom of the 1970s, when the Nigerian economy thrived (Eker, 1981). However, in 1983 when the 'Ghana must go' revolution began, the Nigerian economy had become weak and was fast falling apart (Umaru and Zubairu, 2012). About two decades earlier, in 1969, the Ghanaian Government had banished Nigerians and other immigrants in an expulsion order, commonly known as the 'Alien's Compliance Order' (Aremu and Ajayi, 2014:176). This order saw the expulsion of a large number of African migrants from Ghana. The order required all foreign nationals in Ghana to be in possession of a residence permit within two weeks. It earned Ghana the displeasure of most West African governments, especially Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso whose nationals were affected (Aremu and Ajayi, 2014). In the same fashion, in 1981 President Mobutu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which he had renamed Zaire in 1971) repealed his 1971 presidential decree granting citizenship to Rwandan and Burundian immigrants in reaction to national resentment against foreign nationals. Likewise, immigrants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were brutally expelled and chased away by the Angolan state agencies in 2008 (Betts, 2010). Kersting (2009) documents the September 1977 decision of the DRC government to deport about 6,000 West Africans, whose shops and businesses were confiscated and distributed to Congolese. These West Africans were described by Congolese as *ndingari,* which refers to a "tick sucking blood from a cow to which it is attached" (Kersting, 2009:14). The West Africans were also stereotyped as being corrupt, liars, violent, criminal and unclean (Kersting, 2009). In a similar vein, the

DRC government in a 2005 national legislation completely barred foreign nationals from owning small transport businesses, side walk stalls, and bakeries. These are all disquieting accounts of how Africans have been dehumanizing each other. In recent times, mostly public individuals and institutions in Africa tend to take advantage of social media to continue the dehumanization of fellow Africans by spreading and promoting ideologies that find scapegoats in foreign nationals, who are often blamed for underdevelopment and poor social services, thereby winning and retaining the trust of nationals for non-performance (Landau, 2010).

Adopting the social capital theory, this paper discusses the origin of xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa, which is traced to the strong bonding in-group social capital or social ties among nationals of African countries. This strong-bonding social capital among nationals results in weak ties with foreign nationals who are often considered as 'out-group' members. The paper engages Pierre Bourdieu's (2011) social capital theory to explain the role of kin and friendship networks in maintaining strong bonding in-group social capital among nationals and foreign nationals. In explaining social capital, Kelly and Lusis (2006) support Bourdieu (2011), arguing that although social capital may be typically acquired through immersion in kin networks, to them, state interventions for peaceful co-existence between nationals and foreign nationals do not often take into consideration the pivotal role of kin and friendship networks. They argue that immigrants or foreign nationals who maintain strong ties exclusively with their kin men and women or people with whom they share the same nationality, may be socially and economically disadvantaged, as these strong ties may prevent them from accessing material, informational, instrumental and emotional support from wider networks. Putnam (2007:143) also reaffirms the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital by illustrating how people who have many friends with whom they share the same kinship or ethnicity, also tend not to have many friends who do not share the same kinship or ethnicity.

In explaining why some foreign nationals and nationals remain strongly bonded to their kin or nationalistic ties, Bourdieu (2008) provides a useful analysis. Rather than taking networks for granted, Bourdieu argues that networking requires effort and the investment of time and resources. Thus, depending on the available time and resources, people have different opportunities to access and participate in networks. He identifies three forms of capital that individuals may possess: economic, cultural and social. Economic capital refers to material assets and income, while cultural capital refers to the symbolic assets that a person possesses, such as language and behavior – this can also be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. Social capital refers to the size and type of social networks a person can access and draw upon (Bourdieu, 2008). In this era of digital technologies where social media reign, the ability of both nationals and foreign nationals to mobilize social capital and successfully engage in bridging with kin and friendship networks outside their nationality is mostly dependent on the cultural capital (which include language, social

media skills and educational qualifications) at their disposal. Morris (2003) argues that in post-colonial Africa, this ability is further conditioned by wider social processes such as national immigration policies.

The new pan-Africanist initiative envisions a united, integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena (AU, 2015:11). By this aspiration, it therefore means that the global economic order with its new information and communication technologies as well as its new digital technologies greatly offer opportunities for the integration of the African continent in terms of ease of the mobility of labor and capital (Kersting, 2009). To the contrary, opportunities of digital technologies have rather triggered transnational migration on an unprecedented scale within the continent and have also reinvigorated national identities and local cultures where there is a fort of nationalism that strives for in-group solidarity and out-group hostility (Guarnizo and Smith, 2017). This form of nationalism declares national boundaries sacrosanct, with the suppression of ethnic and cultural diversity (Kersting, 2009). According to Kersting (2009), citizens under this form of nationalism are made to incontestably accept the concept of state in ways that they develop a feeling of national solidarity and identity based on an imagined shared history and a common destiny. In this way, national symbols such as anthems, holidays, currency, passports, postage stamps, flags and football or 'rugby' teams are depended upon to foster nationalism. Nationalism here only represents a doctrine in which the citizens' culture, history, institutions, and religion are distinct and the aspiration for self-rule and politics is to preserve and protect their distinctiveness (Kersting, 2009:8). In this way, nationalism is ethnocentric (Mamdani, 2005; Ihonvbere, 1994; Yeros, 2016). In ethnocentric nationalism, the inclusion of foreign nationals into the destination society is based on criteria such as language, religion, or a myth of shared kinship (Kersting, 2009:8). In the context of post-colonial Africa, the new social media serve as important tools that nationals rely on to remind themselves daily of their place in the world of nations (Guarnizo and Smith, 2017). Claude Ake (1996) calls nationalism in Africa 'internal xenophobia'. To Ake, the first wave of nationalism during colonial Africa mobilized nationalistic solidarity against colonial powers, while post-colonial nationalism in the continent mobilizes solidarity among nationals against denizens (non-citizens) (Kersting, 2009:8). In this nationalism, citizenship is key, it gives right to access social services, employment, land, and identity. Hence, foreign nationals or 'strangers' are violently excluded even when they have been long-term denizens of a given country. They are excluded because they are not "sons of the soil" (Kersting, 2009:11). In this way, migration is not recognized as a veritable cause that has the ability to contribute to inclusive growth and development at destination countries (De Haas, 2010). Instead, I argue in this paper that the accordances and offerings of social media have made it easier for xenophobia and xenophobic violence to be transmitted in post-colonial Africa. Misago (2016:446) has noted conceptual and empirical distinctions between 'xenophobia' and 'xenophobic violence'. In his definitions, Misago (2016:446) refers

to 'xenophobia' as negative attitudes towards the 'other'; while 'xenophobic violence' is a manifestation of xenophobia towards the 'other'. According to Misago (2016:447), the methodologies and interventions required to tackle xenophobia (attitudes) are different from those required for tackling xenophobic violence (behavior).

In an attempt to understand how social media maintain social bonds among nationals and foreign nationals in manners that exacerbate xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa, this paper systematically reviews national immigration policies and Facebook newsfeeds in selected countries of East/Central, West and Southern Africa. These include Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, the DRC, Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa. The paper consists of three sections. The first section provides a global overview of migration as a defining feature of the 21st century. This section stresses that people will continue to cross borders in search of a decent life. It also provides the origins of the term 'xenophobia', which emerged from the Greek words *xenos* meaning a 'stranger' or a 'foreigner' and *phobo* meaning 'phobia', referring to an irrational fear of persons or groups regarded as 'outsiders' (Kang'ethe and Duma, 2013:157). Discussions in this section coalesce to advocate that foreign nationals need to be entitled to the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms which must be respected, protected and fulfilled at all times. The second section of the paper explains the methodological approach and under-scores the emancipatory and oppressive power of social media, highlighting how social media influence xenophobia and xenophobic violence in Africa.

The paper concludes that as nationals feel stronger bonds to seek national development, there is a correlate heightening of opposing relations and interests against foreign nationals in the form of violent actions, including xenophobia. This frustrates efforts for an integrated African continent, politically united, based on ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance. The paper therefore recommends that kin and friendship networks – which broadly include extended family, biological relationships, genealogy, marriage, and other self-ascribed associations, beyond the nuclear family – have a critical role to play in catalyzing action and facilitating anti-xenophobic interventions in post-colonial Africa. Digital technologies, which include social media platforms, can serve to encourage pro-social behaviors that build bridging rather than only bonding social capital among nationals and foreign nationals of African countries.

HUMAN MOBILITY, XENOPHOBIA AND STATE CAPABILITY IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

A key defining feature of the 21st century is believed to be human mobility characterized by the trends of fragility and mobility (Betts, 2015). In this era, people will continue to move and cross national borders in search of a decent life (Betts, 2015). With advances of globalization, opportunities to move have increased (Castles et al., 2013; Czaika and De Haas, 2014). Regrettably, most nation-states, especially within the African continent, are fragile with weak governance structures and capability that

complicate their ability and willingness to ensure the protection of the most fundamental human rights of citizens and immigrants. Pointedly, the 2018 Fragile States Index for instance, placed both countries that are poor (such as Zimbabwe, Mali, Congo, DRC), and rich countries (such as the United Kingdom, United States and Qatar) towards the top of its list as the most-worsened countries (Messner, 2018:1). This clearly demonstrates that the world has fewer answers to challenges of fragility and mobility.

Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl (2017) and Hanna (2017) argue that the world is witnessing the greatest human mobility throughout all human history as tens of millions of people are daily forced to cross national borders. According to Betts (2015), there were 70 million international migrants worldwide in 1970. However, this number has risen to over 200 million international migrants across the world in 2018 (Mella, 2018). According to the World Migration Report 2020, "current estimates are that there are 272 million international migrants globally (or 3.5% of the world's population)" (IOM, 2020). Even though most nation-states are pursuing the politically expedient fiction that they can unilaterally assert sovereign control over immigration, the reality shows that control over immigration is becoming a more complex matter in the 21st century (Mella, 2018). A common position has emerged that affirms the global migration crisis, even though there are debates whether it is either a 'migrant' or a 'refugee' crisis (Geddes and Scholten, 2016:85). Specifically, most human migratory movements have been from refugee-producing countries (Czaika and De Haas, 2014; Reuveny, 2007). Feller (2005), Koser (2010), Zetter (2007) and Morris (2003) differentiate between migrants and refugees. They are in consonance with Anderson and Blinder (2011:2), who assert that migrants are persons who make a conscious choice to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere. On their part, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) policy on migration describe migrants as people who leave or flee their places of habitual residence to go to a new place across international borders or within their own state, to seek better or safer prospects (Moretti and Bonzon, 2017:165). Moretti and Bonzon (2017) argue that before migrants decide to leave their home country, they usually seek information about their destination country, study the language and explore employment opportunities. This means that they have the time and privilege to plan their travel, take their belongings, and to say 'goodbye' to the important people in their lives (Betts, 2015). They are also free to return home at any time if things do not work out as they had hoped, or if they get homesick or if they wish to visit family members and friends left behind (Betts, 2015). On the other hand, refugees are forced to leave their home country because they are at risk, or because they experience persecution (Moretti and Bonzon, 2017:165). This therefore means that the basic concern for refugees is the protection of their human rights and safety. Regrettably, Betts (2015) argues that a significant proportion of foreign nationals across the world today fall into the category of survival migrants whose governments cannot support or provide some kind of remedy or reliefs to people affected by environmen-

tal change, food insecurity, and generalized violence.

On his part, Ragaven (2008) reveals that cultural, genocidal and hegemonic racism and ethnicity remain primary social evils of our times globally. Accordingly, these de-socialize and pathologize whole generations of foreign nationals, depriving them of fundamental human rights and fabricating them as 'outcasts' in countries of destination. This has resulted in the fragmentation of populations, thereby indelibly etching identities and solidarities that accentuate 'otherness' (Christou and Spyrou, 2012), with new forms of xenophobia, racial and ethnic segregation, prejudice and rationalities becoming the norm globally (Mendelberg, 2017). Xenophobia is used here in a more general sense to describe hostilities based on prejudice and stereotypes toward foreign nationals (Harris, 2002; Neocosmos, 2010). This therefore means that xenophobia constitutes stereotypical thinking or prejudiced attitudes toward groups and members of groups that can be distinguished on national or ethnic terms (Crush and Ramachandran, 2010). The term 'xenophobia', as indicated earlier in this paper, is believed to have originated from the Greek word *xenos* which refers to a 'stranger' or a 'foreigner' and the Greek word *phobo* which means 'phobia' – an irrational fear of persons or groups that are regarded as 'outsiders' (Kang'ethe and Duma, 2013:157).

All through history, there are accounts of xenophobia occurring across different nations and peoples, as exemplified in the Jewish holocaust that culminated in hate and an explosion of unimaginable brutality leading to the mass, industrialized murder of nearly six million Jews, not killed in battle or war, but put to death in factories built expressly for murder (Major, 1996). In Europe, a study of social attitudes by Harvard University established strong racial bias in several Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, Slovakia, as well as Malta, Italy, and Portugal (Greenwald and Pettigrew, 2014; Kinge, 2016). In the United States of America (USA), xenophobia has manifested in the form of anti-Hispanic hate crimes (Stacey et al., 2011). A 2016 survey from 'The Environics Institute', which was a follow-up to a study conducted ten years earlier, identified discriminating attitudes in the United States (Kinge, 2016). In Myanmar (former Burma), an estimated 400,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees, out of a total of about one million living in Myanmar, escaped a surge of xenophobic violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017, into neighboring Bangladesh, after at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed by the Myanmar army (Persio, 2017). According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2020), the Rohingya "risked everything to escape by sea or on foot, a military offensive which the United Nations later described as a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing'… (T)he massive numbers of refugees who fled to Bangladesh in 2017 joined hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who had fled Myanmar in previous years." According to Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2019), "more than 730,000 Rohingya have fled to neighboring Bangladesh since the military campaign of ethnic cleansing began in August 2017."

In Africa, Nigeria and Ghana have had records of hatred for foreign nationals ending up with xenophobia (Campbell, 2003). For example, there have been xeno-

phobic reactions of leading politicians and intellectuals in Ethiopia and Eritrea towards each other and the contradictory tendency towards forced 'unification' have made a clear understanding of each other's claims and identities difficult (Smidt, 2012:116). In the beginning of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war in 1998, tens of thousands of Eritreans and persons of Eritrean origin were expelled from Ethiopia within a few weeks. That was followed in 1999-2000 by the expulsions of Ethiopians from Eritrea (Smidt, 2012). Since then, both in Ethiopia and Eritrea, national discourses strongly claim that "the other" belonged to a "different race" (Smidt, 2012:116).

South Africa has been experiencing xenophobia and xenophobic violence both during apartheid and after apartheid (Giliomee, 2003). Giliomee (2003) states that during apartheid in South Africa, hostility between the British and the Boers exacerbated during the Second Boer War, which led to a rebellion by poor Afrikaners who looted British-owned shops. During this period, South Africa passed several laws that ostracized foreign nationals, for example, the Immigrants Regulation Act of 1913 was intended to exclude 'undesirables', a term that referred to foreign nationals (Giliomee, 2003). This effectively halted the immigration of other foreign nationals to South Africa. The Township Franchise Ordinance of 1924 deprived foreign nationals of certain municipal privileges (Giliomee, 2003). In 1994 and 1995, there were several demands by armed youths demanding that the police repatriate foreign nationals back to their home countries. Homes of most foreign nationals were destroyed in Johannesburg (Giliomee, 2003). From 2008 to 2019, recurring spates of xenophobic violence took place in South Africa, where tens of thousands of foreign nationals were displaced, and properties, businesses and homes were looted (Misago, 2019; Kinge, 2016). In their definition of xenophobia, Delanty and O'Mahony (2002) depict this phenomenon as a pathological condition that arises when the self is unable to cope with 'otherness' and is destructive of both self and others. In South Africa, the term *makwerekwere* is widely used to refer to foreign nationals (Kinge, 2016:14). Interpretively, the term refers to "a people who speak strange languages coming from economically devastated countries in search of greener pastures" (Kinge, 2016:14).

Kersting (2009) argues that, across the African continent, xenophobia and xenophobic violence have become a common feature in post-colonial Africa, manifesting in different forms, ranging from everyday street-level abuse to discrimination and harassment by government officials, the police, and private organizations. Nnoli (1998) concurs, positing that in post-colonial Africa, it is no longer a question of excluding 'out-group' members from jobs and the enjoyment of various social services or repressing them, but the trend has become about ruthlessly and inhumanely eliminating them in violent actions including xenophobia and genocide. Illuminating examples of xenophobic sentiments in post-colonial Africa abound in the histories of Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Djibouti, and South Africa (Kersting, 2009).

In his seminal work, Horowitz (2001) analyzes forms of xenophobia and he adduces four reasons for xenophobia and xenophobic violence in human society.

He identifies the first form of xenophobia as 'ethnic' or 'national' antagonism. This form involves conditions where there are outbursts against out-groups who differ in language, religion, or a myth of shared kinship. The second form of xenophobia occurs in cultures that have a 'reasonable' justification for violence, such as cultures that emphasize absolute obedience to religious texts with the aim of eliminating outsiders' influences from every part of their culture. The third form of xenophobia has to do with retaliating with violence when confronted with a xenophobic event. The last form of xenophobia relates to the form that prevails in societies where there is little or no punishment for perpetrators of xenophobia.

Mark et al. (2014) note that with the increase of strong nationalism in post-colonial Africa, citizens of most African countries are becoming strong supporters of affective and normative systems that are nationalistic in nature. The implication of this is that national identities and local cultures are reinvigorated, thereby consolidating strong nationalism and in-group solidarity at the expense of out-group hostility (Kersting, 2009). These dispositions are heightened at unprecedented scales especially with the advent of new information and communication technologies (Bennett, 2012).

Gijsberts and Hagendoorn (2017) show that foreign nationals in most African countries are confronted on a daily basis, with barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the political, economic, and social life of host countries. These barriers rob them of dignity, security and the opportunity to lead a better life. Other studies from the World Bank (2010) and Nurse (2018) illustrate that the exclusion of foreign nationals or minority groups from the political, economic and social life of a country, has damaging consequences for human capital development. This is because the majority of foreign nationals have been recognized as possessing the capacity of promoting inclusive growth and achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in both country of origin and country of destination (Nurse, 2018). Hence, the acknowledged developmental potential of foreign nationals, as captured in four goals and five targets of the SDGs, which established the prominence of labor mobility and remittances as development triggers, especially in developing countries (Clemens and McKenzie, 2018). With the call, as provided in the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), to create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries, social inclusion of foreign nationals is undoubtedly vital in achieving the World Bank Group's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity (GCM, 2018:3). The advocacy here is that foreign nationals need to be accorded the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms which must be respected, protected and fulfilled at all times. The social inclusion of foreign nationals in this context implies the process of improving their ability, opportunity and dignity to take part in the political, economic and social life of their host country (Ratha, 2016). Consequently, social media have both the potential and responsibility to contribute towards continental and international efforts at unlocking the potential of foreign nationals in enriching the social, economic and

political life of both origin and destination countries.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The research strategy wherein data for this paper emerged involves a close textual analysis of reviewed national immigration policies and Facebook newsfeeds in East/ Central, West and Southern Africa. The following top African countries of origin of migrants in South Africa were purposively selected: Zimbabwe (Southern Africa), Ethiopia (East/Central Africa), the DRC (East/Central Africa), Nigeria (West Africa), Somalia (East/Central Africa), Ghana (West Africa), and Uganda (East/Central Africa). The systematic review of national immigration policies and Facebook newsfeeds was complemented with direct observation of nationals of Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, the DRC, Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa, living, working and doing business in the City of Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa. Throughout the period of the systematic review and observation from July 2018 to December 2019, the researcher lived in Sunnyside, a part of the City of Tshwane, where a significant number of the identified foreign nationals live, work and do business (Segatti et al., 2012). Events and behaviors relating to how social media reinvigorate national identities and local cultures among these foreign nationals were observed. Systematic observations were directed at membership and attendance of churches and mosques, business partnerships and patronages, and sport groupings among foreign nationals.

The data analysis took an inductive approach. This approach allows for the descriptive and detailed analysis of collections of stories, which enables the researcher to constitute a logical account based on a comparison of different accounts (Ritchie et al., 2003). This recognizes inter-relationships between the interpreter and the interpretation. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS CURATOR OF XENOPHOBIA AND
XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

In its wider use, the term 'social media' connotes a generic term that refers to all forms of electronic communication and networking sites that allow users to follow and share content such as texts, pictures, videos and ideas within an online community (Zeitzoff 2017:1970). In broad terms, social media have made it easy to maintain connections with close friends, relatives, as well as acquaintances, which also allow for new connections with other people (Harari, 2018). In this way social media have demonstrated the ability to blur audience boundaries, where audiences are collapsed into one general space (Sanchez Abril et al., 2012). This is because social media offer public and private communication features in the form of tagging, liking or commenting and passive communication which involves the silent consumption of what is on the newsfeed (Utz and Muscanell, 2015).

Gerbaudo (2018) has highlighted how social media are taking away the mo-

nopoly of traditional media sites and outlets that have been controlling information dissemination in human society. Sunstein (2018) describes this take-over as the 'Facebook' or 'Twitter' revolution. According to him, this revolution has given enormous emancipatory powers to social media users in diverse ways. In many parts of the world, including post-colonial Africa, social media have been relied upon to organize collective action against oppressive regimes. For example, social media played a critical role in both the 'Arab Spring' uprisings across the Arab world from late 2010 until 2011, and in the 9-month protests in Sudan that eventually led to the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. McCombs (2018) and Valenzuela (2013) argue that the power of social media is in its ability to mobilize and get ordinary people on the streets to use its platforms as both content producers and content receivers to shape public opinion. In this way, social media allow ordinary people to be active in sharing instant information in news that go viral in a matter of seconds (Lievrouw, 2009). On the contrary, Lievrouw (2009) argues that as a result of instant sharing of sensitive information in seconds, African societies are becoming desensitized to violence, murder and death to a point where these do not affect citizens any longer, as images of gruesome deaths and torture of humans are circulated on social media with no trace of respect for the dead. With its far-reaching capacity, social media reaches out to a wide range of people, including the most isolated people, thereby posing both a threat and an opportunity for African societies (Van Dijck, 2013). Digital transformation therefore has brought about a social condition whereby about half of the world's population get their news from social media (Allen, 2018:193).

With the increasing penetration of news through social media in Ethiopia and Eritrea, nationalist discourses are continuously framed in manners that the existence of 'otherness' is no longer acknowledged. Most of the news that exacerbated tension between Ethiopia and Eritrea in recent times was obtained from digital or social media (Gagliardone and Stremlau, 2011). This provoked xenophobia and xenophobic violence, especially among younger Ethiopians who continue to use social media to uphold Pan-Ethiopianism, by claiming that Eritrea belongs to Ethiopia and to express xenophobic rejections of Eritrea as a nation-state. Ethiopian nationalism in this way regards Eritrea as an eternal trouble-maker (Smidt, 2012). Even though the development and use of social media in Ethiopia is similar to the path taken by other authoritarian regimes, there are, however, unique characteristics of social media in Ethiopia (Gagliardone and Stremlau, 2011). The Ethiopian government has a strong monopoly over social media platforms, in spite of pressure from the international community to liberalize the market. A high-ranking Ethiopian technocrat confirmed that the monopoly of telecommunications and social media is crucial to the government. This is because social media have the capacity to penetrate every aspect of "our lives that we have to make sure that it is the state that is in charge of using and implementing them. Hence, state-ordered internet shutdowns are on the verge of becoming the 'new normal' in Ethiopia" (Statement by an Official of the 'Internet Society', 18 June 2019). In Ethiopia social media is synonymous with Facebook, which

accounts for about 84% of social media users (Pettersson and Solomon, 2019). Other social media players are Google's YouTube, Facebook-owned Instagram and WhatsApp, and messaging service Telegram. In a 2019 report by Fojo Media Institute, social media in Ethiopia is described as a dark horse that not only mobilizes people but is also a means of spreading rumors, hate speech and disinformation (Pettersson and Solomon, 2019:3). In Somalia, statistics of social media users as at January 2020 from Globalstats (2020) show the Facebook dominance at about 63.23%, followed by YouTube (15.56%), Twitter (10.48%), Pinterest (3.5%), and Vkontakte (0.14%).

In South Africa, a study by the 'Citizen Research Centre' analyzed public social media posts (comments and blog posts) across Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, forums, and chat rooms. In their report, social media contents represent the truest expression of the people's views on xenophobia and xenophobic violence in South Africa (Khoza, 2017). The report reveals that between 2011 and 2015, Twitter posts that demanded that 'all foreigners' must leave South Africa, amounted to about 5.7 billion feeds (Khoza, 2017:1). The report also affirms that on average, there are about 760 posts per day in social media calling for all foreign nationals to leave South Africa (Khoza, 2017). The report notes that social media played critical roles in two incidents involving xenophobic violence in South Africa in April 2015 and in February 2017. In the April 2015 xenophobic violence incident, the Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini was reported to have commented on social media that "all foreigners should leave the country" (Khoza, 2017:1). These comments were believed to have sparked the violence directed at foreign nationals in KwaZulu-Natal which rapidly spread to other parts of the country. During the periods of xenophobic violence in South Africa, daily social media conversations around the subject of 'xenophobia' rose from 760 posts per day to 5,670 posts per day (Khoza, 2017). Misago et al. (2015) observe that even local business associations such as the Greater Gauteng Business Forum (GGBF) and the South African Blacks Association (SABA) depended on social media to mobilize their members against foreign business owners in South Africa.

XENOPHOBIA AS 'POLITICS' BY OTHER MEANS: SOCIAL MEDIA AND SAFE-ORDERLY MIGRATION

Within continental and international frameworks, migration has been recognized as a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development (GCM, 2018:2). Migration therefore affects countries, communities, families, and migrants in very unpredictable ways. Hence, in order to effectively appropriate the development-dividend of migration, it is crucial that social media be engaged in ways that unite people and communities to make migration work for all, rather than divide and impoverish them. The potential of social media as the fastest channel of disseminating information means that social media can be engaged in ways that ensure that current and potential migrants are fully informed about their rights, obligations and options for safe, orderly and regular migration and are also informed of the risks of irregular

migration (GCM, 2018).

Although different explanations have been given to account for xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa, Misago et al. (2015) point out that most of these explanations are not based on empirical evidence. Instead, they are merely based on normative assumptions, political rationales and ideological stances (Misago et al., 2015:24). These explanations only trace xenophobia and xenophobic violence in Africa to factors like poverty, unemployment, rising costs of living, poor service delivery, and poor border control (Misago et al., 2015). These explanations name 'nationality' as the sole reason for xenophobia and xenophobic violence in Africa without credence to other structural variables (Misago et al., 2015).

Misago (2016) argues that while structural factors such as history and national immigration policies are important factors in explaining xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa, these factors are not given serious attention in xenophobia discourses. Hence, there is a need to explain why there is pronounced xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa especially as most countries in Latin America with similar socio-economic conditions have remained calm with peaceful co-existence between citizens and foreign nationals. Misago et al. (2015) argue that a critical assessment of the nature and character of xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa shows that specific groups of foreign nationals are usually targeted during acts involving xenophobic violence and that these incidents occur at certain times and at certain locations. With these peculiarities, it is convenient to posit that there is a political dimension to xenophobia and xenophobic violence in post-colonial Africa. According to Misago et al., (2015), acts of xenophobia and xenophobic violence against foreign nationals in post-colonial Africa are in most cases organized and led by local groups and individuals who are attempting to get and solidify their power bases for political and economic purposes. To these local groups and individuals, xenophobia is just 'politics by other means' (Misago, 2016). In this sense, acts of xenophobia and xenophobic violence are products of coloniality rather than products of differences in national origins or cultural heritage. This is when post-colonial African politicians take advantage of social media to reinforce strong nationalistic bonds and solidarities to justify their non-performance by scapegoating foreign nationals as presenting threats to national prosperity and development.

In defining xenophobia, an analysis of the hashtag '#xenophobia' shows that 17,000 tweets were issued with this hashtag between 30 January 2017 and 26 February 2017. Of all the ten top hashtags involved in the conversation, only one was aimed at an individual; the rest were targeted at groups. For instance, the South African Minister of Home Affairs tweeted a denial of the existence of xenophobia, stating that:

It is merely crime, drugs and prostitution that South Africans are fixating on. In a tweet, '@johny_theblessd' said:

To me #xenophobia is: selling counterfeit goods, human trafficking of SA

women, selling drugs, kidnapping and prostituting young SA girls by Nigerians, not paying your taxes, overcrowding SA schools and hospitals, smuggling of cigarettes by Zim and 4x4 highjacks by Moz and Zim.

However, along with related hashtags, there are words that are often used in conjunction with '#xenophobia' – 7.7% of tweets with this hashtag included the word 'fellow', indicating that nationals acknowledge that foreign nationals ordinarily were supposed to be 'fellow' Africans.

REVIEW OF AFRICAN POST-COLONIAL MIGRATION POLICIES

Building on the global interest in migration development, international immigration policies are recognizing key policy issues, debates, and consequences of international migration. A close analysis of Africa's post-colonial international migration policies identifies at least three areas where migration is influencing development in post-colonial Africa. First, by offering options to Africans affected by conflicts and crises, especially in countries with limited formal disaster management and social protection systems. Second, by mitigating shortcomings and distortions in national and regional labor markets. Third, by providing support to struggling rural economies and ever-expanding urban areas in the continent in terms of livelihoods and social capital transfers.

In analyzing changes in contemporary official attitudes toward migration in South Africa, Segatti (2011) observes that despite changes in the economy and the adoption of constitutionally sound legislation, regulations governing low-skilled labor remain largely unchanged, and the mobility of skilled professionals has not been addressed. Rather, policy developments in South Africa reflect increasing engagement with research and advocacy groups on issues such as human rights, but these groups' appeals have remained largely unheeded in terms of substantial changes in the management and implementation practice of international migration. Three continuing challenges befall international policy in South Africa. First, the fundamental disagreements between government, business, and unions on access to the South African labor market and the role of the state and the market in the control and management of international migration. Second, the leadership deficiencies of the Department of Home Affairs; and third, the absence of a functional platform of engagement between stakeholders, including migrants' organizations, rights advocacy groups, research, business, unions, and different government departments (Segatti 2011:31).

Within the Southern African region, Tevera and Zinyama (2002) note that Zimbabwe's migration history is unusual. They argue that Zimbabwe has always been in the unusual position of being both a recipient and sending country for international migrants. Over the years, many Zimbabweans migrate primarily to South Africa to work. For example, almost a quarter of adult Zimbabweans have parents and grandparents who have worked in South Africa at some point in their lives (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002). On the other hand, Zimbabwe was a recipient of international

labor migrants from countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002:2). During the 1951 census, there were about 246,000 foreign Africans in Zimbabwe (40% of them from Mozambique) (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002:2). Zimbabwe has been a source, destination and a corridor country for international migrants. Benyera (2018) identifies the preconditions that brought about xenophobia and xenophobic violence in Zimbabwe: the construction and reinforcement of certain identities, contestation over land and land ownership and by extension, exclusion from land ownership, and human movement within states' borders.

In the past three decades, Nigeria has witnessed a "reverse migration transition, transforming itself from a net immigration country to a net emigration country" (De Haas 2008:162). Within the African continent, Nigerians increasingly emigrate to countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Gabon, Cameroon and Botswana (Adepoju, 2000). Nonetheless, Nigeria remains a migration destination for international migrants. Despite the country's economic decline since 1980, substantial communities of West African migrants remain in Nigeria, especially Togolese, Nigeriens, Beninoise and Cameroonians. Nigeria has largely pursued laissez faire international policies. In early February 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced the introduction of the issuance of a visa at the point of entry into Nigeria to all persons holding passports of African countries. This is intended to encourage the free circulation and mobility of Africans within the continent, especially as the African Union (AU) launched its operational phase of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in July 2019 (WEF, 2019). In contrast to this aspiration of a free flow of trade with other Africans, in late August 2019 and "until further notice" (President Muhammadu Buhari statement on 2 December 2019 when he received a delegation of Katsina State Elders Forum in his country home in Daura, Katsina State). Nigeria closed its international land borders with neighboring African countries that highly depend on the Nigerian market. This could be interpreted as being driven by xenophobic sentiments, as the main explanation for closing the border, as given by the Controller-General of the Nigerian Customs Service:

> …is to ensure that we have total control over what comes in… (T)his time Nigeria must survive first before we begin to ask for our rights (Interview with the Nigerian Customs Service Boss during his appearance before the National Assembly Joint Committee on Finance on 2 October 2019).

This no less reinforces national solidarity and xenophobia against nationals of neighboring African countries who are blamed for colluding with Nigerians to bring into Nigeria about:

> …95 per cent of arms and ammunition inflow to Boko Haram, kidnappers, killer herdsmen and bandits… (Statement made by Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture on 26 November 2019).

On 19 January 2020 'TallJohn@JohnFanimokun' posted a tweet that said:

> President @MBuhari has again said that the Nigeria's border will remain closed. Only a fraudulent soul will be displeased with what the president said.

There were 300 retweets and 685 likes of the tweet. All the retweets coalesce to represent these xenophobic sentiments. For example, '@OduObodumu' replied to '@JohnFanimokun':

> Borders should be SEALED. All noise about some West African countries doing better have gone. All depend on illegal businesses in Nigeria. We can see that we have capacity to do many things on our own, that is how to grow an economy of about 200m persons.

Also, '@zheun85' replied to '@OduObodumu' and '@JohnFanimokun':

> Throw the key into the Lagos Lagoon. Who will believe that we can grow our own rice to this level? We only need a serious leader, Walahi this country will be great.

A further response – '@sethmola' replying to '@zheun85' and '@OduObodumu':

> So many idiots and bots still so seriously believed that Nigerian Rice production is a fallacy still? Meanwhile the facts are all there now, we are the best Rice producer in whole of Africa, from a position of best importer of same Foreign Rice. Asides other Nigeria farm produces.

CONCLUSION

In post-colonial Africa, foreign nationals are looked upon as competitors with nationals (citizens) for markets and social services. Hence, kin or ethnic solidarity is vigorously pursued and mobilized through affordances and offerings of social media to reinforce in-group loyalty (solidarity) and out-group hostility against foreigners, particularly foreign nationals of other African countries. Also, nationalist immigration policies in post-colonial Africa strengthen and pressurize national governments to maintain structural injustices that encourage citizens to resort to xenophobia and xenophobic violence with little or no punishment. So far, the perception of foreign nationals by citizens of most African countries is intensely incongruent with the vision of Pan-Africanism as promoted by Agenda 2063 that has a vision of perceiving Africans as comrades who need to be supported by one another to achieve the vision of African renaissance and development. Hence, there is a need to reinvigorate and strengthen kin and friendship networks within Africa's rural and urban spaces, as these networks have shown resilience to persist in terms of continued interaction among kinfolk of different generations, in spite of the impacts of globalization. Kin and friendship networks are intensely characterized by strong affective ties among members that perform various services for one another. Hence, kin and friendship networks should become the sphere wherein interventions and campaigns against xenophobia and xenophobic violence occur in post-colonial Africa. This is because these social networks hold the social capital and cohesion to bring together citizens and foreign nationals in peaceful co-existence. With advances of digital technologies, social media hold the potential to play the role of 'lynchpins' (Ryan et al., 2008) through which newsfeeds, gossip and information are shared among nationals and foreign nationals in ways that place the responsibility for social cohesion on society

as a whole, rather than on individuals.

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