

# Xenophobia is the new racism of the 21st century

The racism that many experienced during the apartheid era is not the same as we see today. Racism of the 21st century is no longer an issue of race but an issue of nationality. Throughout the world there is a growing pandemic of the unjust and inhumane treatment of those who have entered a country legally or illegally.

Xenophobia is defined as the discrimination, fear, or hatred of people based on their ethnicity or nationality. It has become increasingly widespread throughout the world particularly, in South Africa and the United States of America as political campaigns call for the deportation of immigrants. It has been allowed to grow and intensify in these places as its citizens are led to believe that foreign nationals are responsible for the increasing unemployment and crime rates in the countries due to their presence in those countries. This false narrative has greatly endangered the lives of immigrants and has fostered environments in which hatred of these communities has been normalized. In the 21st century, racism has evolved into xenophobia due to the social and political instability in the established systems of these countries and the government's failure to provide equal opportunities for all.

Mandela had spent his life working for an equal and just South Africa, and it was through his actions and of others that people of colour were liberated from the oppressive apartheid regime. The apartheid era was built to segregate and dehumanise people of colour in South Africa and benefit one race that was considered to be racially superior whilst people of colour were inferior. This ideology was supported by the concepts of pseudoscience and eugenics that were present in 20th century science that was used to create a racial hierarchy and justify the poor treatment and oppression of people of colour during colonialism and apartheid.

Many people suffered during this time, but it is surprising to see those who suffered through dehumanization and persecution just because of the colour of their skin, now ostracize and criminalize foreign nationals because of the passport they hold. As South Africans, we believe in ubuntu, which can be defined as the acceptance and celebration of coming together of different people from diverse backgrounds and is the concept of shared humanity. The spirit of Ubuntu is forgotten when it comes to foreign nationals as it seems that the language you speak and where you come from is truly more important in this modern era than our shared humanity.

During the apartheid era, there was a Pan-Africanist movement that aspired to build an Africa for Africans. It aimed to bring about unity among black South Africans in order to fight against the tyrannical apartheid government and the same countries that provided a safe refuge for South Africans during apartheid such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana are now home to citizens that many South Africans resent. As a nation, we have turned our backs on the same countries that helped us but we instead bully and criminalize them, and even deny their basic rights as humans. This betrays our shared history as nations and contradicts the spirit of Ubuntu that we claim to uphold.

Throughout the 30 years of freedom in South Africa xenophobia has increased drastically towards people from other African nations. The first major incident in the country of xenophobia was the riots of 2008, in which violence against immigrants started Alexandra. Residents of the neighborhood killed 2 people and injured 40 others during the altercation and this violence incited more xenophobic attacks to happen across South Africa. This attack left approximately 100,000 people displaced and seeking refuge in camps which emphasised the issue of xenophobia in the country that are still present in our communities. Immigrants have been used as scapegoats for the problems in South Africa ever since the influx of immigrants coming into South Africa, after the rise in economic prosperity of the nation. With the increase in South Africans becoming unemployed and suffering through poverty many blame foreigners for stealing jobs and

opportunities from South Africans. This in turn has incited violence and example being the xenophobic attacks of 2015 in which a rumor arose that businesses were planning to replace local workers with foreign nationals. This instigated violence towards immigrants as people feared for their job security and attacked as well as displaced immigrants due to this rumor which sparked similar attacks to increase. Following this incident in the township of KwaMashu locals raided and burned down spaza shops that are owned by foreign nationals resulting in the death of immigrants.

In recent months, Operation Dudula has been making the headlines for trying to make a 'South Africa for South Africans' and in their efforts they have been denying foreign nationals access to clinics. This organisation and its supporters blame foreign nationals for the strain on the public healthcare system and they accuse foreigners of collecting medications from these clinics to produce drugs. This has resulted in children of foreign nationals not being vaccinated and many were forced to provide documents of their legal status in the country but even then were denied access into the clinics despite holding lawful residency in South Africa. Immigrants are used as a scapegoat for the crumbling of the public healthcare system in South Africa instead the government should be criticized for the lack of funds that are allocated to the public health sector. Hospitals and clinics are understaffed which puts a strain on this sector but instead of the government addressing this situation, foreign nationals are blamed for the growing demand of public healthcare.

The actions of the political organization Operation Dudula are unconstitutional and have exacerbated discrimination against foreign nationals. This movement denies foreign nationals their human rights which are protected under article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights and it states, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services". Immigrants are protected under this law thus by denying them access to healthcare is a direct violation of their human rights. Immigrants rights are also protected under the South African constitution in section 10

stating, "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected." This law applies to everyone that is in the country which means that immigrants are legally protected from xenophobic attacks and criminalization thus any actions that violate this law is considered an infringement of their rights. The current situation in South Africa dehumanises immigrants regardless of their legal status and this creates the same fear that many South Africans once experienced during apartheid. The path that we are going on as a country is detrimental to the nation's reputation on the global stage and it is going to damage relationships with neighboring African countries due to this epidemic of xenophobia.

The Trump administration started a mass deportation program that is targeting immigrants from Latin America and in recent months the xenophobia surrounding this community has intensified. America faces a similar problem as South Africa regarding immigrants and the misconception that exists around them, such as: 'they are here to steal jobs from hard-working American people'. The deportation program in America is being met with criticism globally as many question the ethics and morality of deporting these immigrants that are trying to build a life for themselves. The situation in America is escalating as the Republican Party continues implementing radical ideologies that are xenophobic and go against human rights. Similarly, there has been a rise of organizations in South Africa that share analogous ideas. It raises the question as to why South Africa is not being questioned or criticized for this, which creates a double standard in world politics. The criticism even from South Africans shows how xenophobia has been normalized in our nation despite the long history of violence that the state has experienced. Ubuntu and equality, which were once the foundation of democracy, seems like a dream that ended with the start of the 21st century.

In conclusion, xenophobia has the same violence and oppression of foreign nationals that racism had once carried in South Africa thus continuing the legacy of the apartheid government. Xenophobia reduces people's worth and is as degrading as the racism that many had previously faced in South Africa. If the racist ideologies of current political organizations in both the United States' and in South Africa are to be believed then most 'true' citizens are descendants of immigrants leaving a handful of people that can claim native status. In a country with a violent and hateful history of colonialism and apartheid we should have the most understanding of immigrants regardless if they are here legally or illegally because many know what it is like to flee for their safety away from the violence of their country.