

WOMEN'S VOICES IN SOUTH-SOUTH MIGRATION:
EXPOSING SALIENT FORMS OF XENOPHOBIA AND
NEGOTIATED WAYS OF BELONGING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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This research programme focuses on the feminization of migration as one of the most significant social patterns to have emerged in the course of the last century. Too often, female migrants occupy vulnerable positions in their host societies, engaging in domestic work, sex work and other unregulated sectors. Despite being so vulnerable and despite established patterns of exploitation, the numbers of women who choose to migrate is rising. This research programme focuses on this phenomenon, in order to better understand why and how migration may offer routes to empowerment to women. A specific area of focus will be the extent to which migration allows women from the global south new sociocultural horizons as they cross over and settle in the global north.

Women's Voices in South-South Migration: Exposing Salient Forms of Xenophobia and Negotiated Ways of Belonging in South Africa

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Contents

Summary | 1

Introduction | 2

The South African context: Voices of the African women | 5

Categories of foreignness and forms of belonging | 9

Conclusion and Recommendations | 13

References | 15

Summary

This report contains findings from a research project that explored the South African context as perceived by African women with migration experience. It focuses on African women with migration experience so as to include both African foreign women and South African women married to foreign nationals, as both groups are affected by similar issues in the South African context. This report will highlight the complexities that exist in the South African context as underscored by the African women with migration experience and explore the ways in which they negotiate and carve out their own forms of belonging in response to some of the issues they face. Even though xenophobia will be discussed in this report, the focus is on the salient forms of xenophobia and less on the highly publicized violent outbursts that occurred in May 2008 and April 2015. This report aims to highlight to policymakers some of the issues that have been overlooked as a result of the heavy focus on the violent aspect of xenophobia by drawing upon the issues articulated by African women with migration experience.

Introduction

The increasing numbers of migration between and amongst developing countries has led to a growing body of research on South-south migration (Bakewell, 2009). This increase in numbers is also reflected in the South African census of 2011 which revealed that out of the 2,173,409 international migrants which accounted for 4,2% of the country's total population of 51,770,560, 75,3% percent of the migrants were from Africa. 68,0% of the African migrants originated from countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region whilst only 7,3% were from other African countries (Statistics South Africa, 2011: 128). These statistics reflect the continued migration from Southern African countries such as Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Malawi, which prior to democracy, were the traditional labour-supplying countries to the mining and agricultural sectors (Ibid, 120). These high numbers are an illustration of the loosening of restrictions since the advent of democracy in 1994, that had long forced African migrants to only enter South Africa as labour migrants (Khan, 2007; Crush, Peberdy and Williams, 2005).

The end to this restriction also resulted in a surge in legal female migration as the formal labour contracts during apartheid were gender biased (Crush, Peberdy and Williams, 2005). International migration to South Africa in general, is still dominated by males with females comprising of 39,8% (Statistics South Africa, 2011: 131). Moreover, as explained by Crush and Williams, "data from the recent Census, as well as other data sets (such as refugee claimants), demonstrate that males still predominate in cross-border migration to South Africa. Of the 687,000 SADC-born residents of South Africa at the time of the Census, 37% were women and 63% were men" (2005:14). Further, they argue that, "there has been an apparent increase in female migration to South Africa over the last two decades although Dodson questions whether some of it may represent "an increase in visibility rather than volume" (cited in Crush and Williams, 2005: 14). This increase in the visibility of females could be attributed to the growing interest in researching and understanding xenophobia in South Africa that has seemingly targeted African foreigners; bringing African foreign women to the fore enables an understanding of their particular experiences at the intersection of being both female and foreign in South Africa (Sigsworth et al., 2008: 2).

The problem of being an African foreigner in South Africa is that although 1994 signalled the loosening of restrictions on migration, "there has been a seeming hardening of public attitudes to migrants and immigrants in South Africa, or a rise in xenophobia. These changing attitudes are a reflection of changes in the political dispensation, including a new nation-building project" within which migration is a "perceived

threat to citizens' rights and interests" (Crush and William, 2005: 4). This rise in xenophobia is described as "hostility towards foreigners... in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health care and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition" (Harris, 2002). Another author further adds to this description by arguing that xenophobia is also fuelled by "a rampant misconception in the country that all immigrants are 'illegal aliens' and, therefore, a threat to the thriving but unstable new democracy in South Africa" (McKnight, 2008: 19). The other side of the coin of being female in the "thriving but unstable new democracy in South Africa" is dealing with the threat of violence that has

"reached epidemic proportions, one of the highest rates in the world of countries collecting such data. It exists in millions of households, in every community, in every institution, in both public and private spaces. Violence against women cuts across race, class, ethnicity, religion and geographic location...All these have left in their wake social and gender relations of a militarised society that has nurtured extremely violent masculinities to the detriment of women." (POWA, 2010: 7)

The focus on violence against women, although justified, as Belinda Dodson (2010) argues, has also been the reason that much of the research on African foreign women has been on their vulnerability and exposure to violence.

Also interesting in the South African context is that the primary targets of violence are Black Africans from the African continent where there is no racial difference between the perpetrators and the victims, and thus certain markers are used to identify African foreigners as the 'other' and this is where the gender aspect becomes critical. Research conducted on xenophobia in South Africa found that,

"the biological-cultural features of hairstyles, accents, vaccination marks, dress and physical appearance can be read as indexical markers or signifiers. They signify difference and point out foreignness in a way that is immediately visible. As signifiers, these features do play a common role in prompting xenophobic actions." (Harris, 2002)

Further, these signifiers are doubly problematic for women in that through various markers of difference such as dress and hairstyles, "migrant women are often made more visible, and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and xenophobia...and this is particularly a gendered problem" (Sigsworth et al, 2008:18). As interesting and important as these findings are, there has been a neglect of voices among African foreign women in South Africa whose invisibility when it comes to experiencing salient forms of xenophobia has been both a challenge and an opportunity.

However, the emergence of groups such as United Nigerian Wives in South Africa (UNWISA) draws attention to their plight in the media and illustrates a need for such groups and voices to be foregrounded. UNWISA is a club organized by a group of South African women who are married to Nigerians. This club was started as a necessary support system to these women who are “shunned by family and friends for falling in love with Africans from outside of South Africa” (Biznews, 2015). The media has covered many stories of local women married to African foreigners beyond the UNWISA club (Biznews, 2015; AFP, 2015; Ground Up, 2015), however, many of these stories emerged during and after the April 2015 attacks and thus, the likelihood of these stories being overlooked is very high. Further, even with this group of African foreign women, there is a diversity of histories, trajectories and experiences pertaining to their lives in South Africa, that to only focus on the violent aspects of xenophobia is not only misleading but also fails to see the heterogeneity among these women.

Not all those impacted by migration in South Africa are exposed to violence and even when they are, it is not in the same way. This report therefore aims to highlight these other salient forms of xenophobia that are being experienced by these women in South Africa on a daily basis. The reason for focusing on African women with migration experiences is to avoid getting stuck on the term ‘migrant’ and to ensure that the voices of South African women married to foreign nationals are also accounted for in this report. The objective of this report is an exploration of the South African context as perceived and experienced by African women with migration experiences. Although this report on gender and South-south migration with a focus on South Africa is timely as the country experienced its second outbreak of xenophobic violence in April 2015, the focus of the report is to underscore the heterogeneity of women’s voices in South-South migration against the backdrop of xenophobia. While the findings of this report cannot make the claim of being representative due to being such a small sample, the point of this report is to add voices into this discourse that have been silent and overlooked in the whole xenophobia and migration debate in South Africa. The sample of the respondents was diverse as it included women living in different parts of the country, involved in different forms of employment and all had interesting trajectories in relation to how they found their way to South Africa. Some were born here to those who came to join their parents while others came as students or recently arrived in search of employment opportunities.

The South African context: Voices of the African women

In a study conducted by Romi Sigsworth, Collet Ngwane and Angelico Pino where they explored the gendered nature of xenophobia in South Africa, it was argued that:

“violence against foreigners and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but are normalised ways in which South African society interacts with minority and vulnerable groups. Foreign women in South Africa therefore face a double jeopardy: they are at the intersection of these two groups that are so vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence.” (Sigsworth et al., 2008: 2)

There are strong linkages between violence against foreigners and violence against women; however, an interesting insight that emerged from this study was that although many of the respondents perceived that South Africans generally held xenophobic attitudes, the violent outbursts that occurred in April 2015 were not mentioned as much as one would have imagined when keeping in mind the extensive media coverage. Many of the respondents focused more on the daily experiences within which they encountered xenophobic attitudes. One respondent who has had many dealings with home affairs while trying to apply for South African citizenship, argues that the treatment she has received at the hands of the Home Affairs officials was akin to xenophobia. This argument is hardly surprising as Handmaker and Parsley (2001) assert that,

“civil servants provide the hands-on delivery, which is essential to implementation of policy. As the gatekeepers of access to legal documentation, safety and security, education, housing, and a host of other social services, civil servants are powerful figures in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees.” (p. 46)

And yet the way in which many of the government officials conduct themselves is based on their feelings and opinions and less on professional human rights conduct (Ibid.,). This is further affirmed by another respondent who is South African and married to a foreign national and who was questioned by a home affairs official as to her choice of a partner. Her response to his questioning was to explain herself so as to not jeopardize the purpose of her appointment; however, this kind of conduct not only renders civilians powerless but it erodes any level of trust and legitimacy that might have bestowed on the officials. The kind of xenophobic attitudes displayed by government officials also demonstrates the power they have over foreigners

and citizens alike without any fear of reprisal. Moreover, what this also indicates is that the powerlessness is not only experienced by foreigners but also citizens who are seen as politically weak - in this case, local women married to foreign nationals. This is where it becomes evident that:

“for women, their affiliation and membership of different sub-state collectivities determines their spaces and rights. The related dynamics are interposed between women citizens and the state, mediating their relationship with the state: whether and the extent to which interaction exists, as well as, the nature and quality of the interaction(s) a particular citizen has with the state’s organs.” (Shaheed, 2007: 34)

Equally startling is the way in which these women who are married to or partnered with foreign nationals are treated by South African men and women alike. Some respondents expressed how they are ostracized in the workplace. As one nurse shared, *“there is this South African nurse at work who is disliked by the other South African nurses because she is married to a Ghanaian”* (R5¹, Nigeria). This kind of treatment is not only by men, as suggested by the ‘they steal our women, they steal our jobs’ narrative, but also includes women which implies that the women’s acceptance of marriage with foreign men reproduces unacceptable boundaries of the nation as imagined by South African society (McClintock, 1991). Moreover, this choice to belong to another collectivity that is viewed as unacceptable places them in a position where others who feel marginalized and weaker within the society are able to turn on them and assert some form of power (Neocosmos, 2006: 72). However, as illustrated here, this behaviour is not only limited to the workplace or when interacting with government officials, but also when these women are with their partners doing normal, everyday activities. The looks and stares they get from locals is that of judgement and disapproval.

1. “R5” refers to respondent 5.

For the respondents, it is the impact of these negative attitudes on their children that they expressed very strongly. Many felt fearful for their children and as one respondent said about her child, *“her experience has been very positive at this preschool at this moment in time. But my only fear is that I don’t know how it’s going to be when she gets to primary school and high school”* (R2, South Africa). This echoes the findings of Sigsworth’s research on the impact of xenophobia on migrant women in South Africa, where she asserts that, “migrant mothers often feel unable to protect their children from the fear and trauma of daily xenophobic attacks, which makes them feel derelict in their duties as mothers and powerless to save their children from harm” (2010). Moreover, this kind of fear extends to the family as a whole; for example, if their partners are hurt or attacked, the well-being of the family will be affected. As the same respondent shares,

“there is a concern for his life because if we are going to start killing all these foreigners, what is going to happen to our children because some of them are half. That’s a lot because these are people, not only providing for families back home but also families here” (R2, South Africa).

For South African women married to foreign nationals, choosing a foreign partner is a risk as some of the issues they encounter are issues they cannot share or discuss with other South African women. This lack of support is what inspired organizations such as UNWISA. However, this fear for their children is also an issue that affects African foreign women who are undocumented. Many respondents in the study expressed wanting to change their status so as to ensure that their children are not affected by their lack of documentation. Children born to undocumented mothers are not always likely to have the documentation even if the child’s father is South African because the laws make it difficult for the father to apply for the child’s birth certificate without the mother present. For one respondent, she was so worried about her son’s lack of documentation as it was brought up at school by his teacher, and she feared this would start affecting his performance. This lack of empathy displayed by locals at the plight of foreign African women is what Sigsworth also discovered as a consensus amongst African foreign women in which it was argued that “South African citizens (are) ignorant, narrow-minded and disinclined to try to understand what motivated the foreigners to leave their home countries and come to South Africa in the first place” (Sigsworth et al., 2008: 32).

This lack of empathy is also evident in various institutions and organizations that work with or employ foreign nationals. Some respondents expressed impediments in the workplace to opportunities that they qualified for but because of their foreign status, those opportunities were not made available or were denied to them. One respondent who came as a student felt victimized at school by her white professors whom she felt treated white students better and offered them more opportunities. She attributed this behaviour to racism, but also argued that, *“I’ve had bad and negative encounters with more black people and a few white people which could be because they were less exposed” (R6, Nigeria).* Her differentiation of racism and xenophobia offers an interesting insight in that it is argued that while “white South Africans hold stronger, anti-immigrant views than other groups, few whites regularly interact with large numbers of non-nationals or are in a position to make official policy towards them” (Landau et al., 2004). Although this might be true in terms of policy, some white South Africans do interact with non-nationals in the workplace and can also show similar xenophobic attitudes. This suggests that xenophobic attitudes may be held by South Africans of different backgrounds. As pointed out here by one respondent employed by a cleaner at a company owned by a white female:

"She doesn't pay us so well for the amount of work we do. So we asked for a raise because the money we earn is really not enough. I work but still have to borrow money in order to support my family back in Zimbabwe. When we asked, she told us we are being too demanding and we should go back to our countries. She will just go to the streets and find someone who is willing to work for less than what we are earning. Hearing that, we just gave up because we don't know what to do. I really need this job but her answer to me was very disappointing." (R9, Zimbabwe)

This story further confirms just how widespread these xenophobic attitudes are in South Africa, and not just confined to the poor and uneducated in the townships where most of the violence has occurred (HSRC, 2008). In research conducted by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC, 2008) on the perceptions of South Africans on xenophobia and violence, only residents in the township were approached and interviewed. This kind of research not only perpetuates the stereotype of xenophobia as a township problem but also creates a rift between South Africans. As explained here by Dodson, "shamed by association with their fellow citizens' display of barbarism, South Africans of all races took to the streets in protests marches reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle" (2010: 3). However, national surveys undertaken by the Southern African Migration Project where respondents of all races, age and gender participated, it was clear that xenophobic attitudes towards African foreigners are prevalent in South Africa (Crush and William, 2005) and thus, it is important to note that xenophobia is not confined to one segment of society.

Further, the experiences shared by the African foreign woman of her treatment in the workplace points to a lack of support for those participating in certain sectors of migrant labour. South Africa has very strong trade unions, and yet there are limited policies on migrant labour and migrants' participation in unions. Unions such as COSATU, which are strong proponents of worker's rights are very ambivalent when it comes to migrant labour and have yet to create the "internal space to rethink the positionality of migrant workers in a post-migrant labour regime" (Sagetti and Munakamwe, 2014). Michael Neocosmos in his 2006 monograph *From Foreign Natives to Native Foreigners: Exploring Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa* notes, "the inability of workers organisations such as unions to state politically the commonality of all working people in South Africa irrespective of communitarian origins" (p. 72). However, he also argues that this is hardly surprising and is in line with, "the migrant labour system [becoming] transformed in the post-apartheid period not so much as a result of a democratic development but rather as a process of nation formation led by the state which then organized distinction between citizens and foreigners" (Ibid, 96).

Categories of foreignness and forms of belonging

Carrying on with Neocosmos' argumentation that, "in South Africa, the process of nation formation was one which went against the trend of globalisation which is usually said to encourage regional/ethnic identities along with a corresponding decline of central power...this state nation formation perforce had to exclude those not seen as belonging to the nation as defined by the state, in other words 'foreigners'" (2006: 72). Further, the process undertaken in South Africa in the nation building project has resulted in a society "which not only [has] reduced citizenship to indigeneity and denied a history to migration, but also enabled state arbitrariness towards 'foreigners' through the excessive power provided to state personnel and the reproduction of racism" (ibid), which was clearly articulated in the previous section. Findings from this study, however, suggest that there are various ways in which the respondents navigate these constructions by negotiating and carving out their own forms of belonging. Discussions with the respondents on the issue of belonging underscored the importance of their country of origin as a defining factor in their differing experiences in South Africa. According to the respondents, this is due in part because certain countries such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe are viewed as problematic because they are fleeing their homes, entering the country 'illegally' and therefore are a threat to South Africans' physical and economic security. Meanwhile, others such as Ghana and Lesotho are seen as 'legal' immigrants who have had a longer migration relationship with South Africa and therefore do not pose a threat. This differentiation by the respondents is interesting in that much of South African research on xenophobia has pointed out that the victims of xenophobic violence have largely been black foreign nationals from the African continent (Landau et al., 2004; Harris, 2002). These victims have therefore been viewed as a homogenous group, however, many of the respondents attest to differences in how they are treated by locals. This is important as it offers insight into the different ways in which inclusions and exclusions are constructed in this context, further highlighting the complexities inherent in this space.

For some respondents, the reputation of their country of origin and the way in which they behave as a collective can help navigate their sense of belonging. As one respondent suggests,

"I think that there is a better reception to Ghanaians and Nigerians than there is to Zimbabweans or people from the DRC. They are treated differently because even during apartheid, there were a lot of Ghanaians who came to South Africa and

were in the Eastern Cape cos you will hear a lot of people say, Oh my teacher in high school was from Ghana so they are seen in a different light.”

I: “Could it be a class thing?”

R: “No, I just think they assume that Ghanaians are good because they have had positive encounters with Ghanaians. Whereas Zimbabweans are seen more as a nuisance who are taking people’s jobs...have jumped the fence and crossed the border illegally. But you can’t hop over a fence from Ghana... you actually have to sit on a plane to come to South Africa so maybe it is a class thing.” (R1, Ghana)

For this respondent, having positive encounters with locals and leaving a good impression is an important way of belonging with the help of being part of another collective which in this case is being Ghanaian and thus placing emphasis on the idea that belonging does not always necessitate making one form of identification invisible. However, it also illustrates the power of public discourses and how they are used to keep African foreigners in line.

This notion of a collective reputation is further affirmed by the experience of a nurse from Nigeria who works at a hospital. She explains that, “I always feel like the nurses from Zambia and Malawi are better liked than me by the South African nurses. I don’t know if it’s because I am Nigerian but it is just like that” (R5, Nigeria). In South Africa, Nigerians do not have the best reputation as they are always portrayed negatively in the media, thus influencing how they are viewed and treated by locals (Segatti, 2012: 3). She also expressed experiencing discrimination at the bank because of having a Nigerian passport. Thus, for this respondent, the reputation of her country of origin is more of a challenge than an opportunity when trying to create her own form of belonging in South Africa (even though the previous respondent had placed her country’s reputation as being better than that of Zimbabwe and the DRC). However, one can argue that her situation in the workplace might have also been linked to the notion that some SADC member countries, such as Malawi and Zambia, have long been part of the labour migration to South Africa working in the mining and agricultural industry during apartheid and as such, their extensive interactions with South Africans might have an impact on how they are viewed in comparison to Nigerians. This could also be why the Nigerian reputation was more favourable when compared to Zimbabweans and Congolese but less favourable when compared to Malawians and Zambians. What this illustrates is that forms of belonging and exclusions might not be as clear cut as one might imagine because citizens of certain countries might be included in one context and excluded in another.

It is for this reason that, even within the SADC community, there is a hierarchy in relation to which countries are seen as more ‘acceptable’ and citizens from these countries are thus able to utilize this to

their advantage. As the respondent from Lesotho indicated, *"I speak Sesotho and because it is one of the languages spoken in South Africa, I do not really stand out and people are nicer to me than they are to my husband who is South African but Shangaan"* (R8, Lesotho). As a person from Lesotho, her stay in South Africa has been relatively easy because, as she says, her ability to speak Sesotho, one of the dominant languages in South Africa enables her to move easily in the country without fear of being stopped by the police or being harassed by xenophobic locals. Moreover, she is a more acceptable 'foreigner' than her own husband who is a South African citizen but speaks Xitsonga and this inclusion is based on the language she speaks and the geographical location she finds herself in. This issue of language highlights how locals can be excluded based on language while a foreigner whose language is also dominant in South Africa is able to become an insider. Even more interesting is the fact that she resides in SOWETO Township in Johannesburg where some of the xenophobic violence has taken place and she has never experienced any form of xenophobia in the community.

This is further confirmed and contradicted in a way by another respondent who was born in South Africa to Mozambican parents when they came to the country as refugees in the 1980s. She lives in Limpopo amongst the Tsonga people and because she speaks Xitsonga, she has never struggled with feelings of belonging in the area. However, if she was residing in an urban area such as Johannesburg, she might experience exclusions in the same way that the husband of the respondent from Lesotho does. This is because of what Neocosmos calls 'degrees of citizenship', whereby some come to possess greater claims to being part of the nation than others, and others are often close to being foreigners or largely 'rightless' because politically weak" (2006: 72). Some of the people like the husband of the respondent from Lesotho and some of the South African women who display a lack of empathy towards African women with migration experience could be identified as those who are "often close to being foreigners or largely 'rightless' because politically weak" and therefore are likely to assert some form of power through xenophobic violence or discrimination towards those they view as more vulnerable than them.

This vulnerability can come in various forms and for the respondent in Limpopo, the sense of belonging that she has is because of her ability to speak Xitsonga and due to her geographical location is challenged because she does not have the documentation to prove her citizenship. As she explained,

"I was born in this country (South Africa) but I am not South African because I don't have a South African ID. My parents are from Mozambique and my mother become a South African citizen in 1998 but when we tried to apply for my South African ID, the

people at home affairs told me we don't give ID's to Mozambicans anymore." (R4, Mozambique/South African)

All of these aspects have had serious implications for this respondent because even though she was born in South Africa, she is still viewed as a Mozambican. She has never lived in Mozambique and most of her family is in South Africa so she really does not see herself moving to Mozambique. She sees herself as neither belonging to Mozambique nor to South Africa as she does not have permanent residency and one could argue that her status is that of a stateless person. The other implications here is that because of her undocumented status, she had to drop out of school since a South African ID document is needed for almost anything. As pointed out here, "South Africa is an extremely Identity driven society. In fact there is no service in the country, whether government or private, that you can access if you do not have an identity document. Whether you are applying to study at a school or want to open a bank account or buy furniture – you require an identity document" (Khan, 2007: 6). Having had to drop out of school, she was left with little choice as to what to do to earn a living and she is now working as a hawker selling fruits and vegetables in Giyani because as she says, "*as a person without papers, there are not many choices for me to make money*" (R4, Mozambique/South African). The lack of choices for undocumented people is one issue, which also means because her business as a hawker is an informal one, there is not much potential for it to grow.

The language aspect is not only confined to those who are from the SADC region but also those foreign nationals who upon arrival have learnt the language and can communicate with the locals easily. As pointed out here, "*as a Ghanaian-South African, speaking some of the local languages (Tswana, Pedi and Afrikaans) have worked to my advantage, as this ability impresses and puts the local people at ease during various interactions*" (R10, Ghana). For this respondent, speaking the local language has made her feeling of belonging much easier in that she even describes herself as a Ghanaian-South African which is not an easy feat for African women with migration experience in South Africa. As shown here by another respondent, also from Ghana, who has struggled with this aspect of belonging because as she says,

"It's weird but I never thought about it until I moved to South Korea and encountered other South Africans and their attitude was, oh how long have you lived in South Africa and I would say, since 95 and then they would say, oh then you are South African but I never felt South African because like obviously in school and just being around other kids that looked like me, they certainly don't take you as one of them so you are always a foreigner." (R1, Ghana)

One of the reasons she mentions not identifying as a South African is because when she was in school, black children whom she thought she could identify with excluded her and saw her as a foreigner. She attributes the exclusion she experienced to her inability to speak the local language that the other black children spoke at her school, which was Xhosa. As highlighted here by Harris in citing Morris, “because of their physical features, their bearing, their clothing style and their inability to speak one of the indigenous languages, they are in general clearly distinct and local residents are easily able to pick them out and scapegoat them” (Harris, 2002).

Although she didn’t experience violent attacks, the exclusion by black students at her school made her feel like an outsider who could never belong. She lamented that in Cape Town, if you are black, you speak Xhosa which means you are either Xhosa or not. Her inability to speak the local language made her seek out other races who spoke the same language as her because as she points out,

“I guess with other races, they didn’t really get that part because with your skin colour, it is assumed that you speak a certain language so for them, it didn’t really matter. We spoke English and that was it, that was the common language that you would have with white people or coloured people but with black people, English for them wasn’t supposed to be the common language between us so that’s where the differences started to come out.” (R1, Ghana)

As part of her way of navigating through this complex space, she was able to find a sense of belonging with those people who spoke the same language as her. What can be inferred from this is that because language is such powerful tool of exclusion, the same people that accept her might exclude another foreigner who is unable to speak English.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has demonstrated the diverse experiences of African women with a migration experience in South Africa and in the process, highlight how certain stories are rendered invisible because of the dominant experiences expected when viewed as a homogenized group. Working within South Africa, it is not possible to speak about foreign African women, without speaking about the issue of xenophobia, which in a way is a form of exclusion and discrimination that takes many forms. And yet, the South African context in its process of nation building poses serious questions of belonging and as such, a very complex space emerges from which to interrogate their experiences. Further, the xenophobic attitudes of South Africans towards African

foreigners does not seem to be changing and as such, it is important for policy makers to stop reacting to the violent outbreaks as a way of dealing with this issue as this does not address the complexity that exists in the country. Reacting to the violent outbreaks is a convenient way to scapegoat certain segments of society that are “poor, uneducated and unemployed” as the perpetrators of xenophobia and allowing the rest of society that harbours xenophobic attitudes to stay invisible. Foreign African women with migration experience are faced with violence and other salient forms of xenophobia that are not always visible and yet, they can be as damaging because of the way in which they exclude and create ‘outsiders’. However, it is also important to point out that these women are very resourceful in dealing with some of these challenges and are able to negotiate and carve their own forms of belonging – whether these are successful is always questionable. From the findings shared in this report, the following policy recommendations are made:

- There is a need for the state and policymakers to rethink the nation-building project as it is now because of the way in which it constructs insiders and outsiders at the detriments of vulnerable and minority groups in the society.
- There is a need to explore in detail how language is used as a tool of inclusions and exclusions in a country where multilingualism is encouraged and celebrated. This could add insight into the contradictory nature of the nation building project that was undertaken and thus help deal with these contradictions while moving forward.
- There has to be a wider definition of xenophobia that is able to address all forms of xenophobia so as to include institutional as well as everyday xenophobic attitudes.
- There is a need to go beyond the violent outbreaks and address the xenophobic attitudes prevalent in the country as these are just as problematic. South African society has to stop perpetuating stereotypes about ‘the poor, uneducated and unemployed’ as this is a continuation of apartheid in a different form.
- The post apartheid migrant policies that are currently in place do not offer migrant labourers in South Africa the kind of support they need, which also contributes to the current climate of xenophobic feelings by locals towards migrant labour.
- Extensive research is needed on the experiences of South African women married to foreign nationals in order to address the needs of their families and children while creating the necessary support so as to illustrate their importance and contribution to the country.

- More linkages must be made between all women in South Africa regardless of citizenship as this would go a long way to eradicating some of xenophobic attitudes that prevail amongst vulnerable groups.

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