



**Synthesis Report:**

# **‘WHAT HAPPENED?’: A NARRATIVE OF THE MAY 2008 XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE**

**by Annsilla Nyar**

*Gauteng City Region Observatory (GCRO)*

*The*  
**ATLANTIC**  
*Philanthropies*

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## Introduction

This chapter constitutes a narrative description of the nature and form of the xenophobic violence which took place in South Africa in May 2008. It relates to the comprehensive explanatory framework for the xenophobic violence as presented by Patrick Bond and Trevor Ngwane,<sup>1</sup> by sketching a contextual picture of the dynamics of the violence as well as the conditions which created and enabled its outbreak. It draws in part on data from 22 focus groups discussing relevant socio-political issues, before and after the onset of the xenophobic violence.

Xenophobic violence may be seen as a deeply institutionalized legacy of South Africa's apartheid past and has to be specifically contextualized against a broader pattern of attacks conducted against African non-nationals<sup>2</sup> since the beginning of 1994. A culture of violence is so firmly embedded within the fabric of society that it is still perceived as a legitimate means of conflict resolution in South Africa. African non-nationals are most likely to suffer public violence by South Africans who blame them for crime and unemployment and see them as unfair competitors in the struggle for jobs, houses and other resources deemed 'deserving' for the South Africans whose citizenship makes them legitimate heirs to the spoils of democracy.

The use of violence as a problem-solving mechanism and as a tool of political leverage, is familiar to South Africans. However the wave of xenophobic violence perpetrated against African non-nationals in various informal settlements and townships across South Africa in May 2008, was able to shock even South Africans long desensitized to violent social and political crime. It was the first case

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<sup>1</sup> Bond, P. and Ngwane, T. *Xenophobia and Civil Society: Why did it Happen?* Research for Atlantic Philanthropies, January 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The terminology used to refer to victims of the xenophobic violence, is contested. I argue that terms such as 'non-national' or 'foreign national' denote a level of generality to the citizenship of the latter. The term 'African non-national' is used in this paper. It hopes to sufficiently capture the category of victim, with minimum analytical confusion.

of large-scale, sustained, nation-wide civilian violence in democratic South Africa. Democratic South Africa has previously experienced public violence, such as service delivery protests, demarcation disputes or community vigilantism against crime. The massive scale and scope of the May 2008 spate of xenophobic violence distinguished it from other comparable incidences and experiences of violence in South Africa.

Bishop Paul Verryn has described the xenophobic attacks as an “unexpected thunderstorm”<sup>3</sup>. It poses the question of whether the thunderstorm ought to have been predicted, in the same way that technology allows weather experts to predict storms and develop appropriate storm-proofing measures. The attacks did not present a surprise to those civil society organizations involved in grassroots work or directly with refugee or migrant protection issues. Rather they presented a surprise to broader South African society whose lives are not directly affected by the plight of marginalized sectors of the population-poor black Africans. This generalized lack of awareness of xenophobic crime and violence, also speaks to particular biases of mass media, which generally reflects the concerns of those groups in society with access to resources and finances and reports accordingly. It must also be remembered that politicians also respond to the pressures to prioritise the kinds of crime which achieve the most media coverage.

Although South Africa is a xenophobic country, it is also one which has tried to resist the onslaught of xenophobia. Due to an active and vibrant civil society sector, South Africa has a basis of research, awareness and warnings on which it could have drawn to prepare for the outbreak of violence<sup>4</sup>. Research organizations such as CSVR, Center for Policy Studies (CPS) and Institute for a Democratic South Africa (IDASA) had repeatedly warned of increasing xenophobic attitudes and the potential for attitudes to harden into violence. The 2006 Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) Xenophobia Survey confirmed that in comparison to citizens of other countries worldwide, South Africans are the least open to outsiders and advocate the greatest restrictions on immigration. 67% of SAMP respondents indicated that African non-nationals use up resources, 49% believed that foreign nationals bring disease, and that they are responsible for high crime levels. 84% felt that South Africa is allowing “too many” African non-nationals into the country and consequently that they should not be accorded any rights or protection from the state<sup>5</sup>.

A number of social action-oriented organizations have historically spoken out strongly against xenophobia and specifically warned about the potential for violence. These included Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Black Sash, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. An early warning signal was sounded by the Southern African Bishops Conference (SACBC) in a report which stated,

<sup>3</sup> Verryn, P (2008): Foreword to *Go Home or Die Here* (Johannesburg) in Worby, E, Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (eds) *Go Home or Die Here*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg pp vii

<sup>4</sup> See Bekker, S, Eigelaar-Meets, S, Eva, G and Poole, C. (2008) *Xenophobia and Violence in South Africa: A desktop study of the trends and a scan of explanations offered*

<sup>5</sup> Crush, J. (2008) *The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa*, Migration Policy Series no 50, Cape Town p 16

*there is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country...one of the main problems is that a variety of people have been lumped together under the title of 'illegal immigrants', and the whole situation of demonizing immigrants is feeding the xenophobia phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>*

The resisting voices of civil society actors have tended to be lost amidst the deep institutionalization of xenophobia in institutions of the state, the media and the general public. Though there is no scope within this chapter to review the full range of exclusionary strategies and tendencies within the South African state and society, it will highlight the pervasive nature of xenophobia and relate it to the trajectory of xenophobic violence in May 2008.

## The “Thunderstorm” of May 2008

Between 11 and 25 May 2008, 62 people, the majority of African non-nationals, died in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and to a lesser extent, in parts of the Free State and Eastern Cape. A third of the death toll included South Africans who had been erroneously identified as ‘foreigners’ or were simply caught up in the maelstrom of violence. It is estimated that at least 35,000 African non-nationals were driven from their homes and displaced. An un-estimated number of shacks and small businesses were burned down, and the belongings and properties of foreign nationals “worth millions of rands”<sup>7</sup> were looted and dispossessed. The crimes perpetrated against African non-nationals were characterised by brutality and a flagrant disregard for both the law and the basic humanity of the victims the violence. The reaction of the South African government was slow. The eventual declaration of a national state of emergency and the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was too late to prevent the full brunt of violence being perpetrated.

Eric Worby, Shireen Hassim and Tawana Kupe note that

*The surprise and anxiety triggered by the violence of May derive from the implosion of a fantasy—the fantasy of an inclusive ‘rainbow’ nation whose citizens regard difference not merely with tolerance, but with respect.<sup>8</sup>*

The violence was more than an exposure of the specious quality of the popular exhortation in the Freedom Charter that ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it’. It was also a potent reminder of the apartheid past. It drew disturbing parallels with the way in which difference was invoked by apartheid to justify violence, oppression and injustice. The revival of the apartheid-derived term ‘black-on-black violence’ invoked painful historical memories of the systematic devaluation and destruction of black

<sup>6</sup> SACBC website at <http://www.sacbc.org.za>

<sup>7</sup> Misago, J.P. Loren, L.B and Monson, T. (2009) ‘Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence Against Foreign Nationals in South Africa’ Published by International Organisation for Migration Regional Office, Pretoria

<sup>8</sup> Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (2008) Introduction in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (eds) *Go Home or Die Here*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg.

lives under apartheid. It was also a keen reminder that apartheid's legacy—the institutionalization of violence as a means of communicating grievances and achieving political leverage—is still very much embedded within the national psyche. The fact that the victims of the violence were exclusively black immigrants from Africa or *'amakwerekwere'*<sup>9</sup>, raised critical and uncomfortable questions about an internalized reverse racism on the part of black South Africans, and an overall dangerous sense of national superiority particularly in relation to the rest of Africa.

Political leadership is a powerful factor underpinning South Africa's global status as a model of tolerance and democratic redemption. It was notably lacking in terms of mounting a powerful and humane response to the violence. Rather, the reactions of top political leadership did little to dispel the perception of South Africa as intolerant, divided and incapable of a coherent response to the violence. Political inertia—and outright denial—regarding xenophobia and xenophobic violence, has had the effect of downplaying the violence. Explanations of criminality, right wing elements or a 'third force' prevailed, with a minister in the Gauteng provincial government claiming "concrete evidence" of the involvement of a third force. The director-general of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Manala Manzini, claimed that the violence was intended to destabilise the 2009 elections:

*"We believe that as South Africa prepares for another national election early next year, the so-called black-on-black violence that we witnessed prior to our first election in 1994 has deliberately been unleashed and orchestrated."*<sup>10</sup>

Silence prevailed from the national presidency for a long time. When President Mbeki did react, it was to defensively deny xenophobia as a motivation for the violence and stated

*"none in our society has any right to encourage or incite xenophobia by trying to explain naked criminal activity by cloaking it in the garb of xenophobia."*<sup>11</sup>

The denialism of the presidency had the unfortunate effect of downplaying xenophobia as a serious structurally-located issue. It also denies any historical memory of the body of post-1994 xenophobic attacks which have promoted and incited the ongoing nature of xenophobic violence. The emphasis on 'our society' delineated the mass of *authentic* South African citizens from the criminal elements inciting the violence, but also from the non-South Africans. This further distances African non-nationals from South Africans and clouds issues of responsibility and accountability for the violence.

Apart from exposing the lack of political astuteness, responsibility and leadership, the violence also had the effect of exposing serious national shortcomings in responding capably as well as humanely,

<sup>9</sup> This is the colloquial term used to refer specifically to black Africans in a derogatory sense. Its pronunciation evokes the multi-syllabic sound of other African languages, and is intended to mock the languages of other African non-nationals as well as their inability to master South African languages.

<sup>10</sup> Mail and Guardian website at <http://www.mg.co.za>.

<sup>11</sup> Address by President Thabo Mbeki at the national tribute in remembrance of victims of the xenophobic violence, 3 July 2008, Tswane.

to a large scale civil disaster situation. Government set up temporary camps to host the displaced victims of xenophobic attacks, who lost their homes and belongings and consequently feared returning to the communities which had violently expelled them. For government, the xenophobic violence fell under the purview of disaster management at provincial level. However the violence did not fit the typical profile of 'disasters' and government had its overall competency in crisis management severely tested by the numerous challenges of overseeing the humanitarian response, including ancillary urgent issues of security and documentation presented by the violence. There also appeared to be a fear of public perception of government giving too much recognition and support to the needs of African non-nationals as opposed to South African citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Tensions emerged between civil society and government to the point that litigation was undertaken by civil society to compel government to keep the camps open. When legally compelled to stay closure of the camps, government's response was to dramatically scale down services to the camps in order to force people out. This resulted in a drastic erosion of trust between government and civil society organizations.

The story of the camps cannot be recounted in detail for the purposes of this chapter but speak to the considerable gap between policy and practice of the state's commitment to the human rights and dignity of refugees. In principle South Africa has committed itself to protecting the rights of refugees, and accordingly has signed all major international policy instruments. However this commitment is not reflected in official practice. A significant body of research has documented the institutional prejudices and abuses by the South African authorities<sup>13</sup>.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) had a mixed record of success in responding to the xenophobic violence. Police stations were the first place of safety to which victims of the xenophobic attacks fled, in spite of the fact that police stations are ill-equipped to handle a humanitarian disaster of such a scale. Local police stations played an important role in providing initial shelter to the displaced. There are anecdotal accounts of individual police officers who extended compassion to the displaced, for example procuring the kind of amenities which allowed a level of comfort to those sheltering at police stations<sup>14</sup>. However such positive accounts are overshadowed by claims that police intervention in the actual violence itself was ineffective. In many instances, victims alleged that police refused to intervene in situations of violence and stood by allowing violence to be perpetrated against them. It appeared to suggest to victims that there was a lack of will to assist victims of the violence, possibly because of xenophobic sentiments harboured by the police themselves.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See a full explanation of government response to the victims of the xenophobic violence in Steinberg, J. South Africa's Xenophobic Eruption. ISS Paper no 169. November 2009.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Harris, B. (2001) A Foreign Experience: Violence, crime and xenophobia during South Africa's transition as well as Harris, B. (2008) 'Xenophobia: a new Pathology for a 'new' South Africa' Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation Research Report downloadable at <http://www.csvr.org/reports>.

<sup>14</sup> Hornberger, J. Policing Xenophobia in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (2008) Introduction in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. Go Home or Die Here. Wits University Press, Johannesburg.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

As Jara and Peberdy show, civil society organizations and private citizens played a critical role in the response to the violence. Their report details how civil society organisations:

*filled the gap left open by the absent, incapable and dysfunctional state in the major sites of the xenophobic attacks and during the most critical periods in the early days of the attacks. Once the state had begun to play its part, civil society played an effective watchdog role through the monitoring of conditions in the displacement camps and advocacy for the rights of migrants during moments where the state failed to meet basic minimum humanitarian standards or sought to avoid its responsibilities. Remarkable in the civil society response was the diverse and plural nature of the volunteer and organisational base that was mobilised and played a pivotal role: in the form of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements, community based organisations (CBOs), civics, schools, women's groups, peace and justice organisations, academics, students, Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith-based organisations (FBOs), refugee and migrant organisations, school governing bodies, community policing forums, professional associations and trade unions. These diverse groupings were brought together under several umbrellas which served different purposes, from humanitarian aid to political activism. These organisations also acted as a pressure on political parties and constitutional institutions to act and play a role. In the case of Cape Town, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) brought to bear its well-organised social presence and combined it with an effective understanding of, and using human rights law through strategic litigation, lobbying and advocacy. The Gauteng social movements surveyed in the case studies also demonstrated the importance of political principles that permeate into the grassroots and are based on advanced critical consciousness on the ground<sup>16</sup>.*

Jara and Peberdy's research captures the scale of civil society's multi-faceted contribution to the response to the xenophobic violence. The adjective 'remarkable' is not applied lightly as a descriptor of the response mounted by various sectors of civil society to the May 2008 xenophobic violence. Civil society's immediate response to the humanitarian crisis was robust and energetic and saw a number of different civil society organizations mobilize rapidly and powerfully within a relatively short space of time. A process of coalition-building evolved, with a wide cross section of civil society organisations forming a Gauteng-based alliance under the banner of the Coalition against Xenophobia (CAX). A

<sup>16</sup> Peberdy, S. and Jara, M. Taking Control: Civil Society Responses to the Violence of May 2008 January 2010.

similar civil society grouping evolved in the Western Cape, the Social Justice Forum (SJF), with a close relationship to the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). Civil society organizations mobilised external resources and often used their own. Humanitarian NGO Gift of the Givers (GOG) has calculated that it expended approximately R6million on its response to the xenophobic violence<sup>17</sup>. The scale of its response helped position the civil society sector as a significant institutional actor, even if only on a short term basis for the duration of the response.

The massive public volunteer effort cut across class and race divides. It even crossed age barriers, with public schools taking up collections amongst its young learners to support victims of the violence. Companies placed boxes in offices to hold donations from employees. For the short time period of the response, the seeds of a counter-movement sprang from an exclusionary ethnic nationalism which targeted people on the basis of skin colour or ethnicity, to a potentially more equitable cosmopolitan order which saw people across class and race barriers taking to the streets to protest xenophobia. This was particularly remarkable in Johannesburg, which is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Africa. Despite its spatial and racial divisions, it was able to mobilise its middle classes-usually insulated in white suburban enclaves from the messy realities of the lives of poor black people - into the streets alongside the poor. The city's intelligentsia from both Wits University and the University of Johannesburg turned out in numbers from their respective 'ivory towers' to march and hold aloft banners denouncing xenophobia. It seemed to presage the possible birth of a new African identity.

This moment for civil society was predictably short lived. The greatest concentration of energies by civil society was around the humanitarian crisis; after that only a few civil society organizations continued to provide direct services. This was easier for certain civil society organizations such as CoRMSA, with a specific mandate to promote and protect refugee and migrant rights. However it was operationally impossible for other civil society organizations. Thus the sector was unable to sustain a large scale response to xenophobia and xenophobic violence. Intense competition for funding amongst civil society organizations mitigated against possibilities for extensive collective action.

The end result of the energies and drive invested by civil society organizations, seemed outwardly discouraging. The May 2008 attacks appeared to pass as a temporary, if vividly memorable, blip on the national screen. The storm of public condemnation and shock and horror subsided relatively quickly (and understandably) after the eye of the storm had passed. The fate of victims of the violence was left hanging. Those who were repatriated to their home countries, appeared to be the most fortunate. Their fellow non-nationals left behind faced a much more uncertain future. In Gauteng, those left remaining in the camps faced a difficult choice of repatriation or reintegration. Those who chose to go to Lindela repatriation center<sup>18</sup> did so, even possessing valid documentation, and once they arrived, Lindela authorities were perplexed as to what to do with them. Those who did not wish to brave returning to their communities, simply formed new informal settlements in patches by the roadside. There are media reports of non-nationals with nowhere to go, being arrested for loitering.

<sup>17</sup> Desai, A. Responding to the May 2008 Xenophobic Attacks: a case study of Gift of the Givers. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies, December 2009.

<sup>18</sup> The Lindela repatriation center outside Johannesburg, is one of two main detention facilities which house detainees prior to deportation. The other is the Musina detention facility near the Zimbabwean border.

Despite widespread condemnation of the violence from government, there appeared to be little or no accountability for the perpetrators of the attacks. Although the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJCD) had committed to instituting dedicated 'special courts', judicial outcomes were slow and limited<sup>19</sup>. The storm had passed and life predictably went back to normal.

Civil society organizations who had expended their energies on the response to the violence, reported being 'drained' and 'exhausted' in the aftermath<sup>20</sup>. It seemed to indicate that the original organizing energy which had propelled the response, had been lost. According to Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) spokesperson Dale McKinley, the real gains of the response were the connections that had been made amongst civil society organizations. With reference to the Coalition Against Xenophobia (CAX), he says:

*CAX is now a space, a collective space. There are no office bearers as such. In fact there were just coordinators when we started out...but the connections we made, are still there, and can be activated when the need is there...Yes we knew the attacks were continuing, but in the absence of no immediate thing and only isolated incidents, you don't need a coalition...but the important thing is that the commitment is there and the space exists<sup>21</sup>*

This view is supported by Jara and Peberdy's understanding that:

*The response (of civil society organizations) points the way forward showing that there is a significant core of organisations and individuals prepared to challenge intolerance and inequality and mobilise for change and advocate for the rights of South Africans and foreigners alike.*

The dynamic quality of the sector's response to the needs presented by the xenophobic attacks, indicates a kind of renewal of organising spirit, which could be drawn upon to resuscitate the sector. Importantly, the dynamism and organizing energies of the sector's response has helped fashion a kind of vision for future possibilities of sustained civic action. How that vision, whether real or imagined, may be implemented, remains a question for debate. This book and its accompanying body of research into aspects of the xenophobic violence, will revive that critical question.

<sup>19</sup> SAHRC Report on the SAHRC investigation into Issues of Rule of Law, Justice and Impunity arising out of the 2008 Public Violence against Non-Nationals: p69

<sup>20</sup> Interviews with N. Mogapi, CSVr; J. Kalala of Sonke Gender Justice and B. Tolboom of Medicines Sans Frontiers

<sup>21</sup> Interview with D. McKinley, representative of Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and Coalition Against Xenophobia (CAX)

# Understanding Xenophobic Violence in South Africa

**“You cannot blame people...they took out all their anger...”<sup>22</sup>**

This section locates the 2008 xenophobic violence within the context of an extended history of xenophobia in South Africa, in order to understand the nature and form of the May 2008 violence. As detailed below, a timeline of major xenophobic violence incidents since the advent of democracy in 1994 captures the trajectory of ongoing, steadily-increasing violence against foreign nationals.

Date	Place	Incident
December 1994	Alexandra township (Gauteng)	There is a public backlash against African non-nationals in Alexandra township. The homes and property of foreign nationals are destroyed and demands are made for their expulsion.
Sept 1998	Johannesburg (Gauteng)	Three African non-nationals (two Senegalese and a Mozambican) are violently attacked and thrown from a train.
October 2000	Zandspruit (Gauteng)	Local residents clash with Zimbabweans living in the township.
August 2005	Bothaville (Free State)	Zimbabwean and Somali refugees are targeted and physically assaulted.
December 2005	Olievenhoutbosch (Gauteng)	African non-nationals living in the Choba informal settlement in Olievenhoutbosch township are violently expelled from their shacks, shops and businesses.
July 2006	Knysna (Western Cape)	Somali small businesses living in a township outside Knysna are targeted and expelled from the area. The following month sees a pattern of 20-30 deaths of Somalians in townships surrounding Cape Town.

<sup>22</sup> From interview material with residents of Alexandra in Sinwell, L. Towards Addressing the Root Causes of Social Tensions: Evaluating Civil Society and Local Government Responses to Xenophobic Violence in Alexandra. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies. December 2009.

February 2007	Motherwell ( <i>Eastern Cape</i> )	Somali-owned shops are looted.
May 2007	Ipeleleng ( <i>North West</i> )	Bangladeshi, Somali, Pakistani and Ethiopian-owned shops are looted.
September 2007	Delmas ( <i>Mpumalanga</i> )	A protest over lack of service delivery turns xenophobic. Shops owned by foreign nationals are looted and burned, forcing African non-nationals to take refuge in mosques. The incident results in one death.
October 2007	Mooiplaas ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two deaths result from a clash between locals and Zimbabweans neighbours.
January 2008	Duncan Village ( <i>Eastern Cape</i> )	Two Somalians are found burned to death in their shop.
January 2008	Jeffery's Bay ( <i>Eastern Cape</i> )	Somali shops are attacked by local residents, forcing many Somali nationals to take refuge at a nearby police station.
January 2008	Albert Park ( <i>KwaZulu Natal</i> )	A community forum meeting in Albert Park, calls upon residents to expel African non-nationals living in the area.
January 2008	Soshanguve ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	'Foreigners' are blamed for crime in the area, leading to attacks against African non-nationals. One person was burned to death and at least 10 seriously injured. Shops belonging to African non-nationals are looted.
Feb 2008	Laudium ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A community meeting in the informal settlement of Itereleng outside Laudium, calls upon residents to attack African non-nationals. Shacks and shops belonging to African non-nationals are burned and looted.
Feb 2008	Valhalla Park ( <i>Western Cape</i> )	Somali shop-owners are attacked and forced to flee due to threats from the community.
Feb 2008	Kroonstad ( <i>Free State</i> )	Somali shop-owners are attacked and their shops looted.
Mar 2008	Olievenhoutbosch ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two Zimbabweans are attacked and beaten to death by residents.
Mar 2008	Mamelodi ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Residents of Mamelodi attack African non-nationals in the form of a mob. They loot and burn homes and shops belonging to African non-nationals.
31 Mar 2008	Atteridgeville ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A community protest stemming from anger over faulty power lines, turns into a full-fledged xenophobic attack. Seven deaths are reported, including a South African mistaken for an African non-national. Shacks, shops and properties belonging to foreign nationals were destroyed and burned. African non-nationals are displaced on a large scale.

April 2008	Diepsloot ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	30 shacks belonging to Zimbabweans are destroyed by residents.
Apr 2008	Mamelodi ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Residents claim a perception that those displaced in Atteridgeville had moved to Mamelodi. They conduct a mob attack upon African non-nationals in the area, resulting in one known death.
May 2008	Alexandra/Kew ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	An armed mob attacks African non-nationals, resulting in two deaths, including one South African who was fatally shot for refusing to join the mob. Two women are gang-raped. At least 60 severe injuries from beatings and shootings, are reported. The violence continues on the same scale for a week longer, resulting in 1 more death, 2 more rapes, at least 70 severe injuries and an estimated 1000 displaced.
May 2008	Diepsloot ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Somali and Pakistani-owned businesses are looted and destroyed. Four people, including 2 South Africans, are injured in the attack by residents.
May 2008	Olifantsfontein, East Rand ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	32 African non-nationals are robbed, attacked and told to 'go home or die here'. Residents blame them for the increase in food prices. They are deported by the police.
May 2008	Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	An African non-national is attacked and robbed.
May 2008	Diepsloot ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mass evictions by a mob. The belongings of African non-nationals were burned.
May 2008	Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Hostel dwellers in Tembisa's Sedibeng section attack shops owned by 'Shangaans' and Somalis.
May 2008	Thokoza ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Residents clash with African non-nationals living in the area and two shacks are burned.
May 2008	Kwathemba, East Rand ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Hostel dwellers in Lithuleni informal settlement near Springs, carry out attacks in the formal part of the township where it is said Pakistani traders had converted RDP houses into shops.
May 2008	Informal settlements of Emlotheni and Emandleni, East Rand ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Attacks are carried out against African non-nationals at the Emlotheni and Emandleni informal settlements on the East Rand, resulting in at least 12 injuries, one gang rape and the destruction of various properties and belongings.
May 2008	Kanana, Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Attacks are conducted against African non-nationals, resulting in one death and the destruction of 15 shacks.
May 2008	Thokoza ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Violence breaks out in Thokoza, resulting in 3 deaths.
May 2008	Katlehong ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two deaths and the destruction of 18 shacks are reported.
May 2008	Jeppestown ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A mob conducts an attack on an Ethiopian-owned shop. The shop-owner's home is vandalized.

May 2008	Makausi ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Violence breaks out amongst residents in the Makausi informal settlement, bordering Primrose.
May 2008	Cato Crest ( <i>KwaZulu Natal</i> )	Mozambican nationals are attacked and told to 'go home'.
May 2008	Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Four African non-nationals are murdered and 50 shacks destroyed.
May 2008	Katlehong ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Violence breaks out in Sakhile informal settlement in Katlehong, resulting in the destruction of 18 shacks.
May 2008	Cleveland informal settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two African non-nationals are burned dead, 3 beaten to death and estimated 50 severe stab and gunshot injuries.
May 2008	Jeppeshtown and CBD ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Conflict targeting with Pedi and Shangaan-speakers, breaks out.
May 2008	Hillbrow ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	African non-nationals street vendors are attacked and flee to Jeppe police station for shelter. An estimated 2000 people are given shelter at the Jeppe police station.
May 2008	Thokoza ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	There is mob violence targeting Shangaan and Pedi speakers. A number of shacks are destroyed.
May 2008	Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two Mozambican nationals and 50 shacks burned in Madelakufa section of Tembisa.
May 2008	Kanana, Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mob violence by groups of youth targeting homes of foreigners.
May 2008	Daveyton, East Rand ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mob violence targeting foreign nationals breaks out in the Zenzele informal settlement near Benoni and 7 shacks are destroyed.
May 2008	Actonville, East Rand ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A South African citizen is burned to death when his home is set alight by a mob searching for 'foreigners'.
May 2008	Soweto ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A mob searching for 'foreigners' loots the homes of African non-nationals in White City, Jabavu in Soweto.
May 2008	Reiger Park, Ramaphosa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Violence breaks out, resulting in four deaths, including Mozambican national Ernesto Nhamuave who was burned to death. Foreign-owned shacks and shops are destroyed.
18 May 2008	Makausi ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Five African non-nationals are killed and their shacks destroyed.
18 May 2008	Dukathole settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Violence with hostel dwellers results in the deaths of two African non-nationals. Shacks are burned down.
18 May 2008	Zandspruit ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A mob destroys the shacks of resident Zimbabweans.

18 May 2008	Kya Sands ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Conflict between local residents and African non-nationals breaks out, resulting in mass displacement of the latter in the area. Residents barricade roads in Kya Sands.
18 May 2008	Johannesburg CBD ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	6 deaths are reported in Cleveland. A mob searches the Bree Street taxi rank for 'foreigners' and vandalized and looted foreign-owned shops.
19 May 2008	Malvern ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	An armed mob searches for 'foreigners' and attacks a man in the street.
19 May 2008	Randfontein ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Chinese-owned spaza shops and Shangaan shacks were attacked in Moholakeng Extension Four of Randfontein.
19 May 2008	Makausi ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A Mozambican national is killed.
19 May 2008	Ramaphosa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mob violence results in 4 deaths and homes and cars of African non-nationals are destroyed and set alight.
19 May 2008	Jerusalem informal settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Public violence breaks out, with a mob firing on police.
19 May 2008	Kagiso ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	African non-nationals are targeted by a mob.
19 May 2008	Marathon informal settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mob violently expels African non-nationals from their homes and burns their shacks. Media reports circulate that the mob was aided by the police.
19 May 2008	Mayfair ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Somali women and their children are threatened at their home and take refuge at local mosque.
20 May 2008	Orange Grove and Highlands ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Shops close for fear of attacks on Zimbabwean residents.
20 May 2008	Muvhango settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Attacks on African non-nationals who sought refuge in police stations
20 May 2008	Kagiso ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Mob violence
20 May 2008	Tembisa ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Public violence. 3 people shot and wounded
20 May 2008	Reiger Park ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	Two Mozambican nationals are killed and police clash with armed mobs.
20 May 2008	Joe Slovo informal settlement ( <i>Gauteng</i> )	A man is fatally stabbed.

20 May 2008	Duduza, East Rand (Gauteng)	Mob violence-150 people displaced and seek refuge at the local police station.
20 May 2008	Tudor Shaft informal settlement (Gauteng)	Public violence breaks out and police clash with residents.
20 May 2008	Umbilo, Durban (Kwazulu Natal)	Hostel dwellers attack a Nigerian-owned tavern in Umbilo. Violence spreads to Cato Manor where a man is shot dead.
20 May 2008	Tudor Shaft informal settlement (Gauteng)	Clashes between police and mobs; police had to enter the area in riot gear.
20 May 2008	Villiers (Free State)	Pakistani owned shops are looted.
20 May 2008	Park station in Johannesburg (Gauteng)	Police foil attacks by armed gangs on African non-nationals returning home.
21 May 2008	Zondi, Soweto (Gauteng)	A Mozambican street vendor robbed of cash, cigarettes and small goods he was selling, by four men.
21 May 2008	Ramaphosa (Gauteng)	4 deaths take place in Ramaphosa.
21 May 2008	Mabopane (North West)	African non-national street traders are attacked.
21 May 2008	Sebokeng (Gauteng)	Foreign-owned shops are looted.
21 May 2008	Kenville (KwaZulu Natal)	The home of a Malawian national is petrol bombed.
21 May 2008	Bottlebrush informal settlement (KwaZulu Natal)	African non-nationals are attacked, causing mass displacement.
21 May 2008	Okasie, near Brits (North West)	Foreign-owned shops are looted and burned.
21 May 2008	Marabastad( Tswane)	Hostilities break out amongst local and African non-nationals street traders.
22 May 2008	Mohlaletsi (Limpopo)	The homes of African non-nationals are targeted by armed groups of people who attempt to extort money from them.
22 May 2008	Masiphumelele and Du Noon (Western Cape)	African non-nationals are attacked and their shops looted.
22 May 2008	Witlokasie, Knysna (Western Cape)	Somali-owned shops are looted and destroyed.

22 May 2008	Ga-Rankuwa (Tswane)	A letter circulates in the area warn African non-nationals of an impending violent expulsion.
22 May 2008	Shoshanguve (Gauteng)	A shack belonging to an African non-nationals is burned.
22 May 2008	Zwelihle and Overhills, Hermanus (Western Cape)	African non-nationals are attacked and their shops looted and vandalized.
22 May 2008	Namahadi (Free State)	African non-nationals are attacked and their shops looted and vandalized.
23 May 2008	Malvern (Gauteng)	Two Zimbabwean nationals are forcibly evicted from their home.
23 May 2008	Khayelitsha, Malmesbury, Philippi, Kuils River, Mitchells Plain, Nyanga, Ocean View in Langa (Western Cape)	Violence breaks out in various townships and informal settlements in the Western Cape. This involves looting, stoning and threats and causes major displacements of African non-nationals.
23 May 2008	Quarry Heights, Durban (KwaZulu Natal)	Five African non-nationals are attacked.
23 May 2008	KwaMsane (KwaZulu Natal)	A Mozambican family is shot at.
23 May 2008	Umlazi (KwaZulu Natal)	A Malawian national is robbed.
24 May 2008	Ramaphosa (Gauteng)	Public violence continues, including shack and car burnings.
24 May 2008	Kraaifontein (Western Cape)	Foreign-owned shops are looted and burned down.
24 May 2008	Actonville (Gauteng)	Sporadic unrest continues.
25 May 2008	Madelafuka settlement, Tembisa (Gauteng)	A mob destroys shacks in Madelafuka settlement.
25 May 2008	KwaNdengezi (KwaZulu Natal)	Five Mozambican nationals are attacked.
25 May 2008	Ivory Park (Gauteng)	Shacks are looted and burned.

14 June 2008	Phomolong, Atteridgeville (Gauteng)	A 30-yr-old Mozambican national is robbed, stoned and burned to death.
04 July 2008	Alexandra (Gauteng)	A Zimbabwean national returning to Alexandra from a temporary camp River Road, was shot and robbed of his possessions.

Source: This table draws on material from a number of sources such as Tamlyn Monson's unpublished database of recorded xenophobic attacks, 1994-2008 at Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP); Tara Polzer's database of recorded xenophobic attacks; Southern African Migration Project (SAMP); Mail and Guardian; The Star; Business Day; <http://www.bbc.com>.

Based on the extended history of xenophobic violence in South Africa as documented above, this paper argues that the date of May 11 2008 is an artificial starting point for the advent of the xenophobic attacks. The broader patterns of xenophobic violence are a critical reference point in understanding the form and shape of the May 2008 attacks. It is also important to understand how the attitudes and practices of the state play a key role in encouraging and driving xenophobic sentiments. Attacks on African non-nationals can be said to have been implicitly sanctioned and legitimated through institutionalized attitudes and practices which dehumanized African non-nationals and excluded them from access to social protection and rights. A notable example is the Aliens Control Act, one of the early key pieces of legislation governing immigration. The Act allowed state officials to practice state-legitimated forms of lawlessness and repression against foreign nationals. It was therefore common practice to make random arrests on the basis of skin colour, vaccination marks, pronounciation of particular words, or understanding of local dialect<sup>23</sup>. This was often done in front of local communities who witnessed the physical abuse of foreign nationals and dispossession and destruction of their property, often allowing locals to reap the spoils<sup>24</sup>.

The trajectory of the xenophobic attacks showed a trend toward increasing lawlessness, with communities often owing to continue their anti-'foreigner' campaign even in the presence of police. Such a pattern of violence speaks to a culture of impunity in which attacks against foreign nationals have been allowed to continue in a context of a gross lack of accountability. In most of the cases of incidences of xenophobic violence, arrests have been few arrests if any and suspects often released without being charged. This historical pattern of abuses perpetrated against foreign nationals may well be seen as the 'blueprint' for the May 2008 xenophobic attacks where violence, threats, looting and destruction of property featured as the general modus operandi.

Harris calls xenophobia, "a key component of the 'New South African' nation."<sup>25</sup> It has managed to reproduce itself in various modes in different locales across the country, with themes of exclusion and alienation operating in an ongoing spiral which ebbs and flows but does not stop. The dynamics

<sup>23</sup> Neocosmos, M. (2006) *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners' Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa; Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics*, Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research

<sup>24</sup> Crush, J. (2008) South Africa: Policy in the Face of Xenophobia at <http://www.migrationinformation.org>

<sup>25</sup> Harris, B. Xenophobia: a New Pathology for a new South Africa Research Report written for the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation at <http://www.csvr.org/reports>.

of the May 2008 attacks were such that it was able to spread rapidly across various geographical areas and provincial borders. It quickly migrated from Gauteng to other provinces such as KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, and to a lesser extent, the Free State, North West and Limpopo Province. The way the violence spread indicated a kind of 'diffusion' effect which defied an understanding of organizational form. Senior government officials spoke of an unexplained 'third force' bent on destabilization. However there was little evidence to support such a claim. The form of the attacks seemed to indicate both a mix of pre-meditation and opportunism, with an inevitable role played by an opportunistic criminal element.

What distinguishes the 2008 xenophobic violence from preceding incidences? The xenophobic attacks of 2008 denoted a marked difference in scale, for which the increasing momentum of earlier incidences of violence could well be seen as a forewarning.

The inception of the xenophobic attacks in Alexandra is critical in terms of explicating an understanding of the anomalous nature of the violence. Alexandra is a well-established township with a history of sheltering migrants and immigrants. It is also historically well known as a stronghold of civic activism and radical democratic politics. Alexandra is also the site of an anti-poverty programme, the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) which is intended to counter the problems of poverty and unemployment in the township which predispose it toward violence. However Alexandra was unable to contain high levels of frustration and discontent over living conditions, from boiling over into unrestrained violence against foreign nationals living in the township alongside South African citizens<sup>26</sup>.

The violence which began in Alexandra was characterized by scale and intensity. It shared similar characteristics of form and pattern in different geographical areas where they occurred: the use of weapons such as pangas, axes, machetes, bricks/stones; the chanting of xenophobic slogans such as '*phansi amakwerekwere*<sup>27</sup>'; and singing inflammatory songs such as '*Umshini Wami*<sup>28</sup>' and the mobilization of groups of largely male youth to intimidate and oust foreign nationals from their places of residence and employment. The attacks traversed a catalogue of human brutality such as murder, beatings, burnings, rape, theft and looting, all carried out with a variety of weapons such as axes, pangas and machetes. As depicted below, the majority of mainstream media captured images of crowds shouting xenophobic slogans and brandishing their weapons while bystanders laughed and cheered. Such media images shaped a dominant vision of the issue: a violent and alienated black underclass symbolic of social anarchy.

The modes of violence were extraordinarily visible; conducted in full view of the public, which speaks to the intimidatory and fundamentally *threatening* function of the attacks. Migrant rights protection agency CoRMSA (Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa) has linked xenophobic

<sup>26</sup> Sinwell, L. Towards Addressing the Root Causes of Social Tensions: Evaluating Civil Society and Local Government Responses to Xenophobic Violence in Alexandra. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies. December 2009.

<sup>27</sup> '*Phansi amakwerekwere*' translates literally to 'down with (foreigners)', referring to the colloquial derogatory term used to denote black Africans from other African countries.

<sup>28</sup> *Umshini Wami* or "Bring me my machine gun" is a Zulu song sung by the ANC liberation movement during the struggle against apartheid. It has now become popularized as a song sung by President Jacob Zuma and supporters at ANC rallies. The use of the song during the xenophobic violence suggests that it has become associated with a certain standard of 'Zuluness' which saw those unfamiliar with Zulu vocabulary branded as 'foreigners' and attacked.

violence to that of hate crimes<sup>29</sup>, in terms of the visible 'messaging' quality of the attacks which communicate symbolically messages of hatred and a threat of future violence to an entire grouping of people beyond an individual incidence of violence. This is vividly illustrated by the killing of Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a 35-year-old Mozambican national who was burned alive by his neighbours in the Ramaphosa informal settlement, east of Johannesburg. The victim was dragged to the public square at the centre of Ramaphosa, doused with petrol, covered with his own clothes and blankets and set alight. Images of the burning body and the resulting horrific death, were broadcast internationally in both the print and electronic media. Critical issues of media responsibility were raised by the publication of pictures of the victim's death. His identity was not known and hence his family remained uninformed of his death, the picture was published. Perhaps more importantly, his death firmly established the moral repugnance of the crime of xenophobic violence in the minds of everyone who had seen the pictures of his demise.

The attacks were deemed 'xenophobic' because although the attackers targeted 'foreigners', they were clearly targeted at a particular category of 'foreigner' i.e black African non-nationals. The most severely affected groups were Africans from neighbouring southern African countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as well as West African migrants from countries such as Nigeria and Somalia. A third of the victims of the attacks were South African citizens. The common denominator of the victims is their blackness, with victims often singled out for attack based on the darkness of their skin. The racial devaluation of black lives-and the internalization of an inferiority complex-is a historical continuity from the values of apartheid. This raises uncomfortable questions about what Gqola calls "negrophobia":

*It is not simply xenophobia, but specifically negrophobic in character. No one is attacking wealthy German, British or French foreigners in Camps Bay or anywhere else in South Africa. European citizens are not among those foreigners who are safe to violate in a xenophobic manner.<sup>30</sup>*

The location of the attacks tended to be poor urban neighbourhoods and informal settlements in different parts of South Africa where foreign nationals and South African citizens lived in mixed communities and in close proximity to each other. Many of the victims of the xenophobic violence had lived amicably for years in the same community, and had made conscious efforts to blend in with their fellow South African residents and neighbours. Jonny Steinberg has recorded the accounts of a number of foreign nationals living in Ramaphosa township, through qualitative research conducted in numerous sites throughout Johannesburg. One of his respondents, a Mozambican national named Benny Sithole, has recounted:

<sup>29</sup> Interview with D. Breen, CoRMSA representative

<sup>30</sup> Gqola, P. Brutal Inheritances Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (2008) Introduction in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. Go Home or Die Here. Wits University Press, Johannesburg.

*I just didn't believe it was possible. Four years is a long time to live in one place. You are settled. You know many people by name. Maybe in other places, I thought. But not here.<sup>31</sup>*

Nobayethi Dube's research into xenophobic violence in Ramaphosa revealed a similar dynamic of intra-community violence.

*There were people conducting door to door campaign searching for identity documents – that is verifiable. This started on the Friday at Road Reserve where there was fighting. We thought this was just something that would pass but by the Saturday the fighting was still continuing but we still remained calm until the end of the Saturday. This happened on the Sunday morning. A meeting was called where only men were invited to discuss the death of a South African – that is where everything erupted. We said that if anyone heard about anything they should feed the information to the police. But the other guy from Maputo did not take the information, he decided to call the Shangaans and tell them that they should gather the whole night. That is when we saw the bodies the following morning – the Sunday.<sup>32</sup>*

The following is a part of a recounting of the experience of the xenophobic violence by Alex Eliseev, a journalist for one of Johannesburg's widest-circulation daily newspapers, *The Star*:

*I looked down and I saw red. From there the blood trails ran around a corner and into a dry mielie patch. They led us to three bodies, lying face down in thick blood. Their heads were swollen and the skin had broken from the beatings. Like bags of trash, they had been dragged out into the hostel and dumped into the back. When I looked at the scene, all I could see were the images that emerged from Rwanda....at the hostel, an old man with a deep wound through his eyebrow told us that a mob had arrived the previous night and had gone room to room hunting foreigners. They had beaten him to death and left him in room 21. Three had been dragged outside and he had escaped to tell the tale. But when I returned to the hostel later in search of the names of the slain, it emerged that the mob had vented their fury on the old and the weak. The man murdered in Room 21 was 76 years old and a South African citizen. The man who survived and told the media how the attackers used steel pipes to beat their victims, was also 76. Like predators in the wild, the mob had gone for easy targets.*

<sup>31</sup> Steinberg, J. South Africa's Xenophobic Eruption. ISS Paper 169. November 2009

<sup>32</sup> Dube, N. 'Many Shades of the Truth' – the Ramaphosa case study, Research for Atlantic Philanthropies, January 2009

The attackers based their ideas of 'foreignness' on crude distinctions of 'South African-ness' such as skin colour, knowledge of local dialect, inoculation marks and way of walking. Language was used as an important identity marker. The inability to speak the dominant language in a region or province, or to identify particular words from its vocabulary appeared to be sufficient to brand one an 'amakwerekwere'. Such strategies of identification of 'foreignness' have evolved from the methods used by the SAPS to identify illegal immigrants. For example, the Zulu word for 'elbow', as used to identify 'foreigners' in the xenophobic attacks, is directly derived from the SAPS<sup>33</sup>.

Mohamed Namgoma, a Malawian national, recounted his experience at the hands of a mob:

*They broke into the house with stones. The stones were coming through the window. There were burglar bars near the top of the ceiling, so I pulled myself up so the stones would not hit me. I hung there for three hours. They didn't hurt me but other people's heads are broken... They stole my phone, blankets and money and they said the amakwerekwere [foreigners] must go home."<sup>34</sup>*

Similar stories of brutality abound. One of the most symbolic images of the brutality of the violence is Chris Collingridge's award-winning photograph of an older woman taking refuge at the Alexandra police station, being taunted by young learners. It also speaks to the generational effects of such brutalizing experiences for the youth. Children have tended to be featured in many accounts of the violence as passive observers and recipients of violence. Their role as perpetrators or as active participants in a culture of violence and hostility against African non-nationals, remains to be critically explored.

The contradictions of the violence are such that accounts of extreme brutality are simultaneously accompanied by stories of South African residents who dispersed mobs, physically shielded victims against their attackers and confiscated stolen property. The tensions and contradictions of various aspects of both civil and the "uncivilised society"<sup>35</sup> are further critically explored by Patrick Bond. This paper embraces the fact that civil society means different things to different people, plays different roles at different times and often constitutes both the problem and the solution.

<sup>33</sup> Minnaar, A. and Hough, M. (1996) Who Goes There? Perspectives on Clandestine Migration and Illegal Aliens in Southern Africa. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria.

<sup>34</sup> Mail and Guardian website <http://www.mg.co.za> 21 May 2008

<sup>35</sup> Jara, M. and Peberdy, M. Taking Control: Civil Society Responses to the Violence of May 2008. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies. January 2010: p 2

# Framing the Contextual Moment for the Xenophobic Attacks

**“I think foreigners are to blame for all the problems that we are experiencing.”<sup>36</sup>**

The “thunderstorm”<sup>37</sup> of xenophobic violence was contextually framed by what may well have appeared to have been an almost unprecedented environment of national pessimism. The moment was one of political uncertainty and socio-economic depression. Escalations in interest rates and oil prices signaled ancillary burdens of economic hardships for the majority of poor households in South Africa who were already hard-pressed to make ends meet. Increased costs of food and transport combined with the pressures of intermittent electricity black-outs, imposed great strain on poor/working class households. A fearful pessimism prevailed on the ground about the costs of living, compounded as such by a historical conditioning to a seeming perpetual and intractable socio-economic disadvantage.

The moment was characterized by profound political uncertainty about the forthcoming elections and the ability of the ANC to lead the country out of a space of hardship and resource scarcity. Although economic growth, poverty reduction and job creation are key goals of state economic policy, they have largely failed to materialize in ways which are meaningful for marginalised and disadvantaged communities<sup>38</sup>. Sixteen years after the formal attainment of democracy, the national unemployment rate is 24% and economic inequality has become firmly entrenched along racial lines<sup>39</sup>. This is reflected in the growing prevalence and frequency of service delivery-related protests which express the needs of communities for material changes in their lives.

The issue of ‘delivery’ exposes some of the profound contradictions of the transition to democracy and the post-apartheid dispensation: Government has promised its electorate ‘a better life for all’<sup>40</sup> but is constrained to shift resources to benefit the poorest and most marginalised within the context of concomitant challenges to grow the economy and compete in the global economic arena. It is a paradox which captures the multiple complexities of effecting transformation in South Africa. Although formal democracy has been attained, the majority of poor black Africans continue to bear the brunt of poverty<sup>41</sup> and African non-nationals may well be seen as the unfortunate victims of misplaced anger.

<sup>36</sup> Everatt, D. That violence was just the beginning...Views on Foreigners and the May 2008 xenophobic violence as expressed in focus groups staged at the time. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies. September 2009

<sup>37</sup> Verryn, P (2008): Foreword to *Go Home or Die Here* (Johannesburg), pp vii in Worby, E. Hassim, S. and Kupe, S. (eds) *Go Home or Die Here*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg.

<sup>38</sup> See McLennan, A. and Munslow, B. (eds) (2009) *The Politics of Service Delivery*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg, which broadly examines the challenges of delivery within the context of the developmental state.

<sup>39</sup> Stats South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey (February 2010) downloadable at <http://www.statssa.gov.za>. See also Nattrass, N. and Seekings, J. (2006) *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu Natal Press, Durban.

<sup>40</sup> ‘A better life for all’ is the primary campaigning slogan used by the ANC in the 1994 elections.

<sup>41</sup> See Nattrass, N. and Seekings, J. (2006) *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu Natal Press, Durban.

The influence of national politics contributed significantly to the bleak national climate. The historically unassailable ruling party, the ANC, was wracked with intra-party divisions as a result of the bitter succession struggle between then President Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. Four months after the xenophobic attacks, President Thabo Mbeki was dramatically unseated from South Africa's presidency. The leading candidate for the presidency, Jacob Zuma, was an uncertain prospect. His acquittal on rape charges in 2006 was still fresh in national memory and it remained then to be seen whether he would stand trial on corruption charges. Although his populism and anti-establishment ways had secured him a connection with the masses, there was widespread speculation about his ability to lead. Therefore South Africans looking to national leadership for a sense of security about the direction of the country appeared to be confronted with a bleak scenario of an unstable, leaderless, drifting future<sup>42</sup>.

A study into the xenophobic violence conducted by International Organisation for Migration (IOM), attempted to test the hypothesis that changes in national political leadership were somehow linked to the xenophobic violence. The study did not find a direct causal link to the violence. Its findings can be interpreted in terms of national leadership having played a role in exerting different influences and pressures on how people at community level felt and thought about African non-nationals. One finding was the anxiety at community level that African non-nationals would procure fraudulent identity documents for the purpose of voting in the forthcoming 2009 elections<sup>43</sup>. This seemed to presage a fear that this would change the political balance of power in communities, but also that 'foreigners'<sup>44</sup> were assuming greater power in communities by virtue of having the power to vote. The study also found that respondents hoped changed political leadership would help to eradicate communities of African non-nationals, given their belief that the Mbeki dispensation had 'protected foreigners'. It was presumed that this attitude toward 'foreigners' stemmed from the exile history of cabinet ministers in various parts of Africa. It also spoke to perceptions about an aloof president who spent a great deal of his time abroad and was out of touch with the needs of his country.

The study found that there were hopes that a Zuma presidency would specifically help to eradicate the problem of 'foreigners'<sup>45</sup>. This is borne out by the fact that many of the perpetrators sang '*Umshini Wami*'<sup>46</sup> as they conducted their attacks on 'foreigners'. Zulu-ness appears to have featured significantly in the attacks in Gauteng as a marker of an authenticating South African identity, with attackers testing their victims as to their knowledge of Zulu vocabulary. Such anxieties and resentments underscore the desperate struggle for resources at community level, but most specifically, a profound sense of entitlement felt by South Africans to the spoils of state resources. Although poor South Africans remain marginalized from the benefits of resources and development, they are able to wield their

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<sup>42</sup> See Fikeni, S. The Polokwane Moment and South Africa's Democracy at the Cross Roads in Kagwanja, P. and Kondlo, K. (eds) (2008) State of the Nation 2008 South Africa downloadable at <http://www.hrscpress.co.za> : pp 3-34. See also Gumede, W.M. Modernising the African National Congress: the legacy of President Thabo Mbeki in Kagwanja, P. and Kondlo, K. (eds) (2008) State of the Nation 2008 South Africa downloadable at <http://www.hrscpress.co.za> : pp 34-57

<sup>43</sup> IOM Report (2008) 'Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence Against Foreign Nationals in South Africa' Published by International Organisation for Migration Regional Office.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Although *Umshini Wami* is historically an old ANC struggle song, it has now become popularly identified as Jacob Zuma's signature tune.

citizenship as a tool of leverage to demand attention from the state and to cast out those seen as encroaching upon their rights-to the spoils of state resources- as 'authentic' South Africans. The issue of legitimacy of expectations from the state is a particularly vexed one, and echoes what has become a consistent discourse of betrayal and unfulfilled needs from communities.

There are multiple structural factors responsible for broadly contextualizing the xenophobic violence and providing an environment which develops a climate of increasing hostility, crime and violence toward African non-nationals. Such factors include persisting unemployment, service delivery failures, a high crime rate coupled with ineffective policing, and 'soft diplomacy' toward Zimbabwe<sup>47</sup>. Migration flows, in particular, played a critical role in fomenting social discontent at local level about the presence of African nationals. After 1994, urban spaces became re-defined by dual processes of rapid and sustained migration streams of foreign nationals entering South Africa. Such migration streams included sustained numbers fleeing political turmoil in neighbouring Zimbabwe. Rural-based black South Africans also constituted part of the influx to cities in search of jobs and improved economic opportunities/prospects.

This redefinition of the character and complexion of many urban spaces in South Africa, took place in different ways. Working or middle class South Africans who were economically enabled to live in suburban enclaves, are able to take advantage of the availability of unprotected illegal immigrants for piece jobs such as gardening or domestic work. It is poor black communities who experienced the impact of the influx of African non-nationals more directly than other race or income groups. The presence of large numbers of African non-nationals living in close proximity to poor South Africans in squalid and congested urban living spaces, has had the effect of breeding extreme social discontent.

Data from a set of 22 focus groups, bears out the issue of extreme social discontent at community level. The focus groups were run by a survey company Strategy & Tactics. They were conducted to assess socio-political attitudes amongst South Africans. Although the focus groups were unrelated to the xenophobic attacks, the timing of the focus groups was just prior to and after the outbreak of the xenophobic attacks and is able to provide a rich source of data about prevailing moods and perceptions at different points in the trajectory of the xenophobic violence.

The focus groups conducted in April/May 2008 immediately preceding the outbreak of the violence, show high levels of anxiety about the vagaries of the external environment framing the lives of communities on the ground. Everatt cites the predictable emergence of issues such as unemployment, the rising cost of living, increasing energy costs, the Eskom blackouts etc. He warns of an exceptional quality to the particular conjunctural moment in terms of the dangerous prevalence of xenophobic sentiments across the responses of almost all the participants in the focus groups:

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<sup>47</sup> See Steinberg, J. South Africa's Xenophobic Eruption. ISS Paper 169. November 2008

*2008 was quite different: the strength of feeling, the depth of anger and the refusal to step back from the visceral edge of what was said, marked the year out as worryingly exceptional-before the violence began<sup>48</sup>.*

Respondents expressed hostility toward 'foreigners' who are identified as linked to concerns about crime and jobs:

*What I think is wrong is when they allow foreigners to live in the country. These people mess things up, they rob and employers prefer them because they accept any amount of wages<sup>49</sup>.*

*(African male, 18-25, student, inner-city Johannesburg)*

Similar sentiments were expressed by other respondents, e.g.

*We don't want these foreigners. They are taking our children's jobs. They are the ones committing rape. Girls drink so much liquor because they are being bribed by foreigners with money.*

*(African female, 50-59, Orange Farm)*

Negative sentiments about 'foreigners' were shared by respondents across class, race and income boundaries. White respondents expressed similar concerns about drugs and 'an influx of foreigners' but the immediacy of their concerns can be seen as mediated by their lack of direct proximity to the presence of African non-nationals. This is clearly not the case with lower income black respondents who live in close proximity to African non-nationals and engage in direct competition with them around jobs, services and resources.

It is possible to imagine that the levels of hostility toward 'foreigners' may well have been overstated, given the anxieties that respondents were experiencing. However the widespread nature of the hostility toward foreigners, is remarkable and suggests that, despite respondents reminding themselves of the benefits that 'foreigners' bring, that the cycle of violence is likely to continue. In the words of one respondent:

*People have been stopped from attacking foreigners. They are relaxing and waiting to see what the government is going to do to address their problems. If government does not address the grievances of South Africans, people are going to resort to violence.<sup>50</sup>*

<sup>48</sup> Everatt, D. That violence was just the beginning...Views on Foreigners and the May 2008 xenophobic violence as expressed in focus groups staged at the time. Research for Atlantic Philanthropies. September 2009: p 8

<sup>49</sup> Ibid: p10

<sup>50</sup> Ibid: p 22

This raises the worrying spectre of a lawless society where people feel free to violate the law with impunity.

It is important that understandings of the xenophobic violence do not remain at the external contextual level and that an attempt is made at interpreting how mass violence erupts at particular points in time and in particular communities, within the context of an ever-volatile external environment. Explanations of the xenophobic violence cannot remain at the external contextual level. The enabling conditions for the xenophobic violence, are broadly applicable to many South African communities, and do not explain why xenophobic violence took place in certain communities and not in others. Misago, Landau and Monson look to “the micro-politics of township life<sup>51</sup>” as an explanation for the violence. Their research in various communities found that in many cases the violence was instigated by local leadership either seeking or consolidating power. Their conclusion is that

*“ Only a trusted, competent and committed leadership (from grassroots to high-level officialdom) can make a significant difference in terms of preventing social tensions from turning into xenophobic violence.”*

There is little to suggest that sufficient measures have been put in place to block or prevent the translation of social tensions into xenophobic violence. Although civil society organizations and academia have invested considerable energy in evaluating the violence and providing recommendations to prevent future attacks, government initiatives to understand and prevent future violence, are less visible. Very little has been done to assist the victims and survivors of the violence or to prevent future attacks taking place. Legal justice mechanisms for the perpetrators of xenophobic violence have largely failed its victims/survivors. It is an unfortunate reality that xenophobic violence in South Africa remains unchecked. While this may invite a depressing prognosis of future scenarios of violence, it is also a reminder that rigorous critical research such as this, is timely and critical.

<sup>51</sup> Misago, J.P. Loren, L.B and Monson, T. (2009) ‘Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence Against Foreign Nationals in South Africa’ Published by International Organisation for Migration Regional Office, Pretoria

## Conclusion

This chapter is deliberately broad and sketchy. This is because it intersects closely with other studies of the May 2008 violence, and is intended to contextualize, frame and describe. It has outlined some broad structural enabling conditions for the emergence of the violence and has highlighted the need to further study the various factors and conditions which help translate xenophobic sentiments into expressions of violence.

This work is purposive and therefore contains a number of focused recommendations. There is little point in revisiting them here. In conclusion what this chapter would prefer to draw out is the broad finding of a generalized lack of will amongst South Africans to talk about the xenophobic violence. This is confirmed by Steinberg:

*“ Ethnic differences amongst South Africans, clearly an important subtext during the troubles, remain a taboo subject. ‘This business was started by Zulus’ we were told by a journalist whose daily reports were the main source of news for tens of thousands of South Africans during the troubles. ‘But you cannot say that, it is too sensitive.’ It seems that there is no way to raise ethnic differences other than to insult or offend”<sup>52</sup>.*

There is a similar wariness about confronting the issues of entitlement and expectation on the part of historically disadvantaged communities, particularly so when juxtaposed against the rights of African non-nationals. Debates unfortunately tend to gloss over the legitimacy of resentments felt by communities. The IOM report recommends that “it is time for civil society, mandated institutions and elected officials to start and lead debates in this regard.”<sup>53</sup> There is an urgent need to begin to debate such issues with each other. Such a dialogue would provide an empirical foundation for effective and sustainable interventions to help prevent future attacks.

<sup>52</sup> Steinberg, J. South Africa’s Xenophobic Eruptions. ISS Paper 169. November 2009: p10

<sup>53</sup> Misago, J.P. Landau, L.B. and Monson, T. (2009) Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa. IOM (International Organisation for Migration) Report, Johannesburg: pp 50

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# Appendix

## List of Interviews conducted in person

Institution	Interviewee	Interviewee Designation	Date
<b>APF(Anti Privatisation Forum)</b>	Dr. Dale McKinley	Activist and development consultant	20/07/09
<b>CoRMSA</b> 23 Jorissen Street 5 <sup>th</sup> floor Braamfontein Center Jhb T: 011 403 7560 F: 011 403 7559	Mr. Duncan Breen	CoRMSA programme officer	14/07/09
<b>CSV</b> 23 Jorissen Street Braamfontein Center Jhb T: 011 403 5640 F: 011 339 6785	Ms. Nomfundo Mogapi	Head of CSV's Trauma Clinic	12/08/09
<b>MSF or Doctors without Borders</b> 79 Pritchard Street Jhb T: 011 403 4440	Ms. Bianca Tolboom	Nurse	05/08/09
<b>Sonke Gender Justice</b> 41 de Korte Street Sable Center Jhb T: 011 339 3589 F: 011 339 6503	Mr. Jean Pierre Kalala	Researcher	06/08/09