



Synthesis Report:

XENOPHOBIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY: WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

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The search for (and against) structural causes.....	1
Perceived structural causes of xenophobia.....	3
Structure and agency in social theory and South African history	6
South Africa's structural and human crises	14
Transcending xenophobia through structural analysis?.....	24
Recommendations.....	30

The search for (and against) structural causes

Xenophobic outbreaks are often impossible to predict beforehand, because violence arises in incidents unrelated to the structural conditions (described below as 'flashpoints') which breed discontent between local inhabitants and immigrants/visitors. This discontent does not obviously take the form of a 'tipping point' which signifies steadily rising tensions; it can flare at any time based upon seemingly unrelated catalysts. And when it comes to identifying 'causes' of xenophobia, there are often temptations to replace grounded structural analysis with symptom-searching.

However, notwithstanding the importance of avoiding 'reductionism' – i.e., reducing complex social phenomena to a single overarching explanation – there are indeed structural conditions which are repetitive and systemically-significant, and which therefore must be investigated, explained with theoretically-coherent ideas, and then acted upon.

The question that must be asked, simply, is 'why?' What factors caused the xenophobia, in a structural sense, beyond day-to-day conjunctural conflicts that can never theorised?

The rationale for this question is that prior to any other challenge posed in the research – namely, describing civil society's response; analysing the strategies; generating more durable anti-xenophobia coalitions; and assessing state-society links – we should have a sense of the 'box' within which we are all operating. We should know whether the limits of actions by civil society are within the parameters of the causes, or instead inadequate to the task at hand (halting and reversing xenophobic tendencies) because they are far beyond civil society's abilities or even conceptions.

Several of the structural causes of xenophobia are laid out, following by context: a brief look at structure and agency in social theory and South African history. Documentation of South Africa's contemporary structural and human crises follows, as these appear closely related to the xenophobic outbreaks. Next we consider civil society's very uneven attempts to come to grips with structural processes during efforts to transcend xenophobia. Recommendations for more durable state-society strategies conclude the chapter.

Oftentimes, answers to the question 'why' are not sufficiently probing. Blaming individual xenophobes, neighbourhoods and communities, reverting to national/ethnic generalisations, turning to cultural explanation, and simple denial – these are the kinds of problems that researchers encounter (sometimes falling victim to themselves) without a foregrounding of the deeper, root causes.

Another approach is to *deny* xenophobia as a structural outcome of inequality and instead consider the billion people who engage in migratory labour in the world today as willing volunteers who enter labour markets with little impact upon local conditions. With this attitude, as United Nations Development Programme administrator Helen Clark puts it, '...fears about migrants taking the jobs or lowering the wages of local people, placing an unwelcome burden on local services, or costing the taxpayer money, are generally exaggerated.'¹

Likewise, the then president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, reacted to a report of xenophobic tendencies brought to his attention through the African Peer Review Mechanism - 'xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud' - in December 2007: 'He said the report's assessment that xenophobic tendencies prevailed was 'simply not true.'² Moreover, if there are no structural reasons for xenophobia, there must be outside agitators; Steven Friedman reports that this attitude became a tempting explanation:

So much of an aberration was this violence, the government suggested, that sinister forces might be to blame. Minister for Home Affairs Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula told Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs that a 'third force' might be orchestrating the violence: 'there could be people who are stoking fires because these are people who have been living side by side for a very long time'. National Intelligence Agency Director General Manala Manzini, went further, insisting that violence was orchestrated 'by internal and external racist elements bent on destabilising next year's general election.'³

Blaming a 'third force' or 'opportunistic elements' was a useful strategy to avoid a terrible reality that afflicted the government, civil society, journalists and analysts alike: ignorance of prevailing conditions and consciousness deep in the society. As Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils explained, 'Of course we were aware there was something brewing. It is one thing to know there is a social

¹ Helen Clark (2009), 'Introduction', *Human Development Report - Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*, New York, UNDP, p.v.
² SA Press Association (2007) 'Mbeki critical of crime issues in APRM report', Pretoria, 6 December.
³ Steven Friedman (2009), 'One centre of power', Report to Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

problem and another thing to know when that outburst will occur.' In contrast to those seeking a conspiracy, Kasrils found structural causes - 'poverty, unemployment and a scramble for scarce resources' - for the 'tinderbox. The minister says it is difficult to predict the match that then lights it.'⁴ The causes, however, do need more analysis.

Perceived structural causes of xenophobia

Perceptions of the root causes are a good place to begin. One of the most important sites of conflict between local people and immigrants is, for example, the labour market. The research commissioned by The Atlantic Philanthropies, as part of this project, by Annsilla Nyar, addressed the corporate contribution to xenophobia. It did identify employment as a central issue, but research on how companies take advantage of extremely inexpensive, often illegal, and easy-to-repress immigrant labour was not successful:

Key companies have been reluctant to provide inputs to an issue which they acknowledge is highly sensitive and controversial. Certain corporate bodies have not yet acknowledged the issue onto their institutional agendas and remain sensitive to perception. Therefore they declined to input. Many respondents have been reluctant to speak without first having had an official position developed by the company first.⁵

Perceptions continue that capital manipulates the labour market for the sake of cheapening the cost of workers. The most extreme case of this was the remark about immigrants by First National Bank chief economist Cees Bruggemann to *Business Report* just after the xenophobic attacks began: 'They keep the cost of labour down... Their income gets spent here because they do not send the money back to their countries.'⁶ What is a benefit for Bruggemann's constituency is a cost for those South Africans whose wages are thus lower (not to mention the deindustrialised Zimbabwean manufacturing sector).

Not only is this kind of logic counterproductive, for a cause of an extreme social problem is seen as a benefit by macroeconomists who seek consumer markets and cheaper supplies of labour, without considering unintended consequences. It also distracts from a difficult task: separating structural causes from conjunctural (or contingent) problems. The latter include the regular refrain that xenophobia is 'caused' by factors such as 'low self-esteem', 'ignorance', 'illiteracy' and 'indolence' (all referred to in other research). 'Perceptions' are also often cited, as if simply to cite ignorance or prejudice is to explain its roots.

⁴ SAPA (2008), 'SA knew of xenophobia threat, says Kasrils', Johannesburg, 24 May.

⁵ Annsilla Nyar (2009), 'Business as usual: The response of the corporate sector to the May 2008 xenophobic violence', Report to Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

⁶ Comins, L. (2008), 'African immigrants add value to local economy', *Business Report*, 22 May.

A survey of 2000 Gauteng residents by Plus94 Research in May 2008 recorded a variety of stated causes, which mix up material reality with perceptions and psychology:

Reason for Xenophobic Attacks 2000 (believed by % of those polled)⁷

- › Foreigners accepting cheap labour \ taking all job opportunities 32%
- › Foreigners committing crime \ rape \ theft \ fraud in our country 31%
- › Uncontrollable number of foreigners 18%
- › Hatred \ jealousy \ most foreigners own businesses 16%
- › Foreigners own houses by corrupt means that are meant for South Africans 16%
- › South Africans too lazy to work \ Selective in terms of jobs 11%
- › Poverty \ Lack of jobs 11%
- › Foreigners are selling illegal products \ pirate products \ stuffs \ drugs 11%
- › Foreigners are diluting South African culture \ marrying South Africans 8%
- › Ignorance \ illiterate people 5%
- › SA government \ police accepting bribes from foreigners 5%
- › Inflation \ Cost of living 5%
- › South Africans are tribalists \ Hatred of blacks by other blacks 4%
- › South Africans are greedy \ selfish 4%
- › It is a political issue \ plot to unsettle South Africa 4%
- › South Africans are insecure \ threatened 4%

Other studies and analyses published subsequent to the attacks identify some common themes in the search for causes, or perceived causes:⁸

- › Lack of political leadership and/or competition for power (sometimes violent) and among organisations and individuals in communities where violence occurred;
- › Lack of effective communication between communities and the state and conflict resolution mechanisms;

⁷ Plus94 (2008), 'Xenophobic violence : Causes and impact', Johannesburg, http://www.plus94online.co.za/pdf/press_office/xenophobic_violence_causes_and_impact_executive_summary.pdf.

⁸ See for instance: Jean Pierre Misago, Loren Landau and Tamlyn Monon (2009), *Towards Tolerance, Law and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa*, International Organisation for Migration, Johannesburg; Hadland, A. 2008. 'Shooting the Messenger: Mediating the public and the role of the media in South Africa's xenophobic violence,' paper for CODESRIA 12th Annual Assembly, Yaounde; Crush, J. (ed.). 2008. *The Perfect Storm: Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 50, SAMP/Idasa: Kingston and Cape Town (www.queensu.ca/samp/); Zondi, S. 2008. Xenophobic attacks: Towards an understanding of violence against African immigrants in South Africa. *Africa Insight*, 38(2): 26-35; Department of Social Development. 2009. 'Concept paper for exploring the impact of Xenophobia on the mandate of the Department of Social Development,' unpublished paper; Robins, S. 2009. 'Humanitarian aid beyond 'bare survival': Social movement responses to xenophobic violence in South Africa,' *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 36(4), pp.637-650.

- › Lack of effective policing and justice mechanisms leading to a ‘culture of impunity’ particularly in the use of violence and vigilantism to resolve disputes and crimes and violence against foreigners;
- › Perceived competition for resources in the face of deep inequality, poverty, unemployment and slow service delivery;
- › Institutionalised xenophobic attitudes, policies and practices that reinforce exclusion, including state organisations, legislation, policies and practices;
- › Exclusion of foreigners from participation in community organisations/civil society;
- › Lack of social cohesion in communities;
- › Long standing xenophobic attitudes, misinformation and mistrust of African foreigners;
- › Often uninformed media that often uses inflammatory language and perpetuating mis-perceptions.

In more concrete research sites, such as Cape Town, further aspects of structural causation – e.g. retail shopping market competition - came to light through interviews by Mazibuko Jara and Sally Perbedy:⁹

A particular feature of community organisation and xenophobic violence in the Western Cape is that xenophobia is often articulated by township business associations who actively organise against black African owned (usually Somali) businesses operating in townships and informal settlements. So ‘in a whole lot of places, in Du Noon, in Masiphumelele, in Gugs, in Khayelitsha, the issue can be about businesses. More so in the Western Cape than anywhere else. The issue was about businesses. The issue was less about whether there was unemployment. The issue was about Somali businesses taking away opportunities from South Africans. The business people mobilised against the foreign shopkeepers. That’s what has happened in Du Noon, in Masiphumelele, in Gugs. It was often about businesses. Whereas in Johannesburg and other places it tended to be much more around taking houses, whatever the case may be’¹⁰...

A common thread emerged that xenophobic attitudes and the violence are part of, and a reflection of, the socio-economic and political environment of South Africa and broader issues facing the country.¹¹ Therefore, first, some interviewees indicated that the violence reflected frustration and disappointment with the

⁹ Mazibuko Jara and Sally Perbedy (2009), ‘Progressive humanitarian and social mobilisation in a neo-apartheid Cape Town: a report on civil society and the May 2008 xenophobic violence in Cape Town’, Atlantic Philanthropies research, December.

¹⁰ Interview, Vincent Williams, Idasa/SAMP.

¹¹ Particularly interviews with Afri-South, Black Sash, Idasa, Open Society Foundation, the SAHRC among others.

state of South Africa. More particularly they cited issues around the slow pace of service delivery (particularly housing), unemployment and standards of living which reflect the deep levels of inequality and poverty in South Africa's urban areas. Others also said that lack of transparency and information as well as perceived corruption regarding allocation of services, particularly housing, and the lack of channels to express these frustrations exacerbated the situation.¹² The relationship between dissatisfaction with socio-economic conditions and the violence was seen as complex and not necessarily direct.

The complication, here, is that there are genuine dilemmas about recording perceptions, as were surfaced by David Everatt in his focus group interviews during the xenophobic incidents of May 2008. According to Everatt,

Participants felt that unemployment was a cause of crime and 'foreigners' were taking jobs away from South Africans; and that violent crime was brought to South Africa by 'foreigners'. The linkages were clear – crime/foreigners, or poor service delivery/foreigners get RDP houses; or corrupt officials/foreigners bribe them; or unemployment/foreigners accept lower wages; and so on. For every negative, the link to foreigners was made by participants in the groups.¹³

Some of the linkages are structural in nature, others are not. The difference between contingent phenomena – often, indeed, symptoms of deeper problems - and a structurally-determined cause, is that the latter can be theorised using tools of political economy and social analysis. That is the terrain we now turn to.

Structure and agency in social theory and South African history

Of the studies in this series, only one – Durban – made 'why?' its central question, in part because Centre for Civil Society researchers quickly surmised that the lamentable way civil society organisations in the country's second-largest city (including three specific anti-xenophobia networks) *failed* to cope in mid-2008, reflects the impossibility of small non-profit organisations convincingly addressing vast structural challenges. The challenges identified in Durban, but which apply across the country, are:

- › extremely high unemployment which exacerbates traditional and new migrancy patterns;
- › a tight housing market with residential stratification, exacerbating service delivery problems (water/sanitation, electricity and other municipal services);

¹² Interview, Alison Tilley, Open Society Foundation.

¹³ David Everatt (2009), "That violence was just the beginning... 'Views on 'foreigners' and the May 2008 xenophobic violence as expressed in focus groups staged at the time', Atlantic Philanthropies research, December.

- extreme retail business competition;
- world-leading crime rates;
- corruption in the Home Affairs Department and other state agencies in a manner detrimental to perceptions regarding immigrants;
- cultural conflicts; and
- severe regional geopolitical stresses, particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

The argument from Durban is that because they did not tackle these root problems head on, civil society organisations only *band-aided* the local manifestations of xenophobia, in the short-run and only up to a point. Structural causes were simply not addressed and the terrain on which xenophobic ideas can grow into threatening forms of action is relatively undisturbed, ready to again seed very dangerous weeds of violence. Indeed, a long history of dispossession, racism and violence has generated a ‘national psyche’ in which resort to brute force has been a common problem-‘solving’ strategy, one reinforced in high-profile cases of crime-fighting in which a ‘shoot to kill’ mentality has arisen.

The same structural causes can be ascertained everywhere in South Africa, but the interplay between these underlying factors and contingencies are also very complex. In an extreme East Rand hotspot, Ramaphosa, research by Nobayethi Dube suggested that immigrants were specifically resented due to their higher qualifications (and better education) in a competitive job market; extreme internecine retail competition (a factor that evidently separated not just immigrants from locals, but also customers from retailers – who were looted regardless of nationality); and housing/segregation.¹⁴ As revealed in one interview,

I mean a guy in Zambia should ask himself – he is a black guy, he’s got two degrees in engineering or three degrees in engineering and he found his counterpart in South Africa with perhaps one degree. He should ask himself that question: what happened.

Furthermore, Dube reported, the structural processes were amplified by geographical segregation:

During interviews I was informed that only about ten to fifteen foreign nationals owned RDP houses (something that did not seem to make locals bitter). It appears that the majority had built their own shacks or were renting a shack in someone’s yard. Another observation I made during the research was that the foreigners (particularly) Mozambicans had grouped themselves and assigned a section for themselves along Road Reserve. It appears this could have been the area where there was a door to door campaign searching for people who

¹⁴ Nobayethi Dube (2009), ‘Many shades of the truth’ – The Ramaphosa case study, Research for Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

were non-nationals. Perhaps this is why they were identified easy. This may also indicate that there have always been issues of integration within this community. This also gives one an aura of wanting to be separate.

Geographical segregation is one symptom of socio-economic, structural tension, which in turn generates its own agency. As urban scholar David Harvey puts it, 'The response is for each and every stratum in society to use whatever powers of domination it can command (money, political influence, even violence) to try to seal itself off (or seal off others judged undesirable) in fragments of space within which processes of reproduction of social distinctions can be jealously protected.'¹⁵ If Harvey is correct as a general proposition, and if the South African economy has generated some of the world's most severe stresses since the end of formal racial apartheid, with a rising Gini coefficient and far higher unemployment than in 1994, what this means is that we require a *durable* epistemology to uncover both contingent (momentary, conjunctural) and the necessary (theoretically-derived) processes within South African political economy that help us understand xenophobia so as to transcend it.

These structural forces do not excuse or cancel agency. It is crucial to point out that xenophobic rhetoric and attacks are grounded in a politics that can be traced to leadership decisions (or vacuums), and to explicit discourses in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The first post-apartheid Home Affairs Minister, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, made the following claim, without supporting documents, to the National Parliament in 1997:

With an illegal population estimated at between 2.5 million and 5 million, it is obvious that the socio-economic resources of the country, which are under severe strain as it is, are further being burdened by the presence of illegal aliens... [citizens should] aid the Department and the South African Police Services in the detection, prosecution and removal of illegal aliens from the country... the cooperation of the community is required in the proper execution of the Department's functions.¹⁶

Migration researchers Jean Pierre Misago, Loren Landau and Tamlyn Monon contend that violence against [black] immigrants to South Africa has been a permanent attribute across the apartheid and post-apartheid divide, where otherness/outsiderness, stereotypes, and structural exclusion prevent immigrants from exercising 'political rights and rights to residence in the cities'.¹⁷

The combination of immigrant *rightlessness* and structural exclusion, amidst a perceived invasion of 'foreigners', resulted in organised social activism against individuals perceived as dangerous to the socio-cultural and moral fabric, and as threatening the economic opportunities of poor South

¹⁵ David Harvey (1989), *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp.13-14.

¹⁶ Jonathan Crush (2008) 'The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa'. Southern African Migration Project. (Cape Town), pp17-18.

¹⁷ Misago; Landau, and Monson, *op cit*.

Africans, within a system set up by wealthy South Africans to *superexploit* migrant labour from both South Africa and the wider region. Hence we require a framework to incorporate not only the flows of labour, the reproduction of labour in housing (especially during an unprecedented real estate bubble), the nature of extremely competitive retail trade in community reproduction, gender power delineations, and regional geopolitics, but also the consciousness that arises from these socio-economic relations, and the ways civil society organisations both contest the xenophobic reactions and in many cases fail to locate or address the root causes of xenophobia in structural oppressions.

South African has a long history of migration linked to the mining industry. Contract labour initially compelled migration from Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Zambia – and of course India - to work in sugar cane fields of Natal from the 1840s onwards, and later on in diamond and gold mines in the 1870s in Kimberley and 1890s on the Witwatersrand.¹⁸ As Brij Maharaj notes, 'Historically, the mining and agriculture sectors in South Africa have been dependent on migrant [abundant cheap] labour from southern African countries. In fact much of South Africa's mineral (and natural) wealth has been produced on the backs of migrant mine workers.'¹⁹

This tradition was recognised by Mondli Hlatshwayo in his overview of the history of migrant labour:

The history of migrant labour in Southern Africa is intricately tied to the uneven development of the capitalist mode of production at the onset of colonization. Because capitalist production started around plantation (agriculture) and mining concerns, it is these two sectors, and especially the latter, that played a dominant role in the evolution of migrant labour within the region. Labour migrancy in Southern Africa dates back to the 1850s, when large numbers of men migrated to work in sugar plantations in Natal, where British colonial capitalism was taking shape. At this juncture, the hunting and ivory trade of Southern Mozambique was in decline. The opening up of diamond mines in Kimberley in 1870 resulted in large numbers of workers from all over Southern Africa flocking to the new mines, which paid better than the plantations. As a result, labour was attracted away from the plantations in the Natal. An estimated 50-80,000 migrant workers came to work on the diamond mines at Kimberley. Labour shortages were experienced following the opening of the diamond mines in Kimberley and the discovery of gold in the Eastern Transvaal in 1874.

¹⁸ Jonathan Crush (2000) 'Migrations past: An historical overview of cross-border movement in Southern Africa'. In D. A. McDonald (ed.), *On Borders. Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York), pp12-24.

¹⁹ Brij Maharaj (2004) 'Immigration to post-apartheid South Africa'. *Global Migration Perspective* No. 1. (Switzerland), pp2

The further discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886 necessitated recruitment of scarce labour. The pull factors reflected in the high wages (six times higher than in Southern Mozambique) and the push factors represented by the outbreak of rinderpest in 1896, which decimated the cattle herd in the region, and declining peasant production, forced many men to join the trek to the mines. Believing that the rand belt extended northwards, the British hegemony was extended to Rhodesia in 1890. Failure to discover a gold belt of the magnitude that existed in South Africa, together with the crush of the Johannesburg stock exchange in the early 1900s, resulted in the shift to agriculture in Rhodesia.

Meanwhile, the fall of the Gaza State in Mozambique to the Portuguese in 1895 meant that the Transvaal government could now enter into an agreement with the Portuguese authorities there regarding the sourcing of migrant labour. The first formal agreement between the two authorities was signed in 1897. A recruiting agency in South Africa, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) was created and given exclusive rights to recruit labour from the region. WENELA established recruitment stations in present-day Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. It built a 1,500 mile road linking its stations in Namibia and Botswana. By 1955, there were 32 flights in and out of Gaborone (Botswana) each week.²⁰

But once the dynamic changed from migration based upon economic activity function to large-scale capital, to desperation-based refugee immigration over the past thirty years, official reaction changed dramatically. White-ruled South Africa aimed to reduce the latter, by electrifying the Mozambican border and arresting and deporting asylum seekers despite Pretoria's involvement in civil wars which pushed people to leave their countries of birth. Regrettably, immigration law remains one of the apartheid legacies that South Africa maintains, with slight changes, from which xenophobic attitudes grow and explode.

At the same time, with apartheid giving way to a more legitimate process of business activity in South Africa, the ability of Johannesburg business to move into the region increased, with consequences Hlatshwayo describes:

In the Southern African region and indeed Africa as a whole, South Africa plays the role of the centre. The policies of the IMF and the World Bank have led to the collapse of African economies through the process of transfer of wealth from these countries to the North. These days wealth is also transferred from all

²⁰ .Mondli Hlatshwayo (2009), 'Cosatu's responses to xenophobia', Atlantic Philanthropies research, December.

economies in the region to South Africa in various ways, such as centralisation of Africa's capital market in Johannesburg, South African state corporations' investments in other African countries and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). During the process of proletarianisation, migrant workers found work in South Africa; now the crisis of globalisation and the decline in employment makes it difficult for these workers who are coming from struggling economies in the periphery to find jobs in South Africa. This then intensifies the competition for jobs and opportunities at the centre – South Africa.²¹

To explain South African xenophobia, several theoretical arguments and discourses have emerged in South Africa and the world at large. CCS researcher Shauna Mottiar draws upon Bronwyn Harris' work to discuss three hypotheses that help to explain xenophobia using both structure and agency:

- ▶ firstly, locating xenophobia within the context of social transition and change, 'scapegoating' explains hostility towards foreigners in relation to limited resources such as employment, housing, healthcare and services coupled with high expectations for social change during a transition. 'In the post-apartheid epoch, while people's expectations have been heightened, a realisation that delivery is not immediate has meant that discontent and indignation are at their peak. People are more conscious of their deprivation than ever before. This is the ideal situation for a phenomenon like xenophobia to take root and flourish. South Africa's political transition to democracy has exposed the unequal distribution of resources and wealth in the country.' In this context people create a target to blame for ongoing deprivation and poverty. The scapegoat theory suggests that foreigners become scapegoats because they are seen as a threat to the aforementioned housing, employment and services.
- ▶ secondly, there is the problem of 'isolation' which situates 'foreignness' at the heart of hostility toward foreigners. The isolation hypothesis understands xenophobia as a consequence of apartheid South Africa's seclusion from the international community. 'There is little doubt that the brutal environment created by apartheid with its enormous emphasis on boundary maintenance has impacted on people's ability to be tolerant of difference.' This theory suggests that South Africans are unable to tolerate and accommodate difference, indeed find difference challenging.
- ▶ thirdly, there is the 'biocultural' hypothesis which situates xenophobia in terms of physical biological factors and cultural differences exhibited by African foreigners. The use of biocultural elements has long been utilised: 'In trying to establish whether a suspect is an illegal or not, members of the internal tracing units focus on a number of aspects. One of these is language: accent, the pronouncement of certain words (such as Zulu for 'elbow', or 'buttonhole' or the name of a meerkat). Some are asked what nationality they are and if they reply 'Sud' African this is a dead give-away for a Mozambican, while Malawians tend to pronounce the letter 'r' as 'errow' Appearance is another factor in trying to establish whether a suspect is illegal -- hairstyle, type of clothing worn as well as actual physical appearance. In the case of Mozambicans a dead give-away is the vaccination mark on the lower left forearm ... [while] those from Lesotho tend to

²¹ Ibid.

wear gumboots, carry walking sticks or wear blankets (in the traditional manner), and also speak slightly different Sesotho.' The biocultural hypothesis suggests that certain physical or cultural attributes generate xenophobia as they highlight whom to target.²²

Michael Neocosmos suggests that citizenship and political identity can contribute to our understanding of xenophobia, for it is primarily a discourse of exclusion of some groups of population from the community. This process of exclusion is a political process in that the state plays a key role, and only politically marginalised groups are excluded. Xenophobia means exclusion from the community, i.e. exclusion from its citizenship, rights and duties - and is connected to the fact of belonging and not belonging. It is the outcome of a relation between different forms of politics i.e. state politics and popular politics, state subjectivity and popular subjectivity.²³

In contrast, historical materialism views xenophobic violence through the lens of class struggles and the mode of production, and especially through the work of David Harvey, integrates study of space with that of time, of geography and history.²⁴

Some researchers try to explain xenophobia as a function of competition over scarce social goods such as housing.²⁵ Others have pointed out that many African immigrants end up living in informal settlements because of their economic circumstances and also because many of them do not have the necessary documents to live and have access to some rights including can access to a shack and perhaps to reckon that they are less likely to be found out and arrested as 'aliens'.²⁶ However, this line of research sometimes tends to be descriptive, without exploring underlying processes which push some South African citizens and the migrants to informal settlements. It is equally important to explore the political, social and economic dynamics that sometimes lead to xenophobic attacks in some informal settlements and not in others. The existence of informal settlements, or squatter camps, is a whole field of study in itself.²⁷ In South Africa it is estimated that 6 million live in shacks.²⁸ Often

²² Shauna Mottiar (2008) 'Responses to Xenophobia: Building Local Capacity to Mitigate Violence and Displacement'. Original Centre for Civil Society Proposal, the Xenophobia Project.

²³ Michael Neocosmos (2006) From 'Foreign' Natives to Native Foreigners. Explaining Xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. (Dakar) 15-18.

²⁴ David Harvey (1985) *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, op.cit. Please see also *The Urbanization of Capital* (Oxford).

²⁵ 'The xenophobic attacks that took place at the end of May in Johannesburg were located in particular spaces in the city: in shack settlements, in the vicinity of hostels, and in inner city suburbs. These are housing environments that have been neglected by the state. They are characterized by severe overcrowding, deteriorating services, high levels of poverty, rampant unemployment, ongoing racial segregation and the daily struggles of poor people forced to compete with one another for increasingly scarce resource.' (Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack (2008) 'Housing Delivery, The Urban Crisis and Xenophobia' in *Go Home or Die: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg.

²⁶ 'Access to this [RDP subsidised] housing is severely circumscribed. Beneficiaries must have South African residency...But again [with social housing] there are restrictive conditions of access: South African residency... [whereas] In theory almost anyone can occupy a shack. Shack settlements are often the key reception points for most new migrants to the cities, particularly foreign-born residents'. (Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, op. cit. pp.148-150).

²⁷ See for example Michael Davis's *Planet of Slums*, a seminal Marxist work on the subject.

²⁸ Angela Brown, *Environmental Health Interventions in Informal Settlements*, Ethekewini Health Unit, Ethekewini Municipality, 21 May 2009.

this is blamed on the government's failure to 'deliver' enough houses, fast enough to accommodate everyone in need.²⁹

As Alex Thomson argues, arbitrary boundaries, weak links between state and society, formation of a state elite and weak political institutions will remain major causes of Africa's failing economic system in the twenty first century, and in turn, major factors in the generation of economic refugees to South Africa.³⁰ Given the continuing imbalances of the distribution of resources, Africa's liberation and social democratic movements have lost their original vision of social and economic transformation aimed at reducing poverty and demonstrating sensitivity to human rights values. Political diversity failed to make a distinction between party and government, and gave more power to the ruling party. In Southern Africa this has come to define political correctness and patriotism in terms of political interests of the ruling elite.³¹ This new form of repression, in the words of A. Abrahamsen, suggests that African governments, including South Africa, operate in a power structure based on colonial principles of 'rulers and subjects', the very political mentality that they proclaimed they would destroy.³² Generally, all these problems have caused serious tensions between the state and the society, resulting in unrest and warfare against the state.

South Africa joined the democratic nations of the world in 1994 with its liberal constitution. Although South Africa is one of the better-developed and wealthier nations on the continent, the nation is not immune to problems facing other African states. South Africa has been divided along, for example, ethnic, class, race, gender and political lines. Internal repression and contradictions remain a challenge to South Africa's liberal democracy. The historical context of these divisions is understandable. Rapid industrialization, urbanization and labour migration have dislocated many communities. These social changes have resulted in black impoverishment and the growing rate of physical violent crime, as well as worsening inter-ethnic and inter-racial tensions. Although none of these problems is new, the post-apartheid era produced a new form of political violence, conflicts between black masses and the state, and escalating levels of political intolerance in the country. Rapid urbanization, massive influx of people into shack areas around cities, economic recession and massive unemployment, increasing class differences, fight for resources by diverse people and political struggles between competing political parties all gave rise to antagonisms of different kinds.

The crisis has been exacerbated by the growing rural/urban divide, with the vast majority of economic activity restricted to major cities and towns; Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and other cities.

²⁹ See, for example, Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, op.cit. They question the type and method of housing provision.

³⁰ Alex Thomson (2000) *An Introduction to African Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

³¹ Graham Harrison (2001) 'Bringing Political Struggle Back in: African Politics, Power, and Resistance', in *Review of African Political Economy*, 89, pp. 387-402.

³² A. Abrahamsen (2003) 'African Studies and the Post colonial Challenge', in *African Affairs*, volume 102, pp. 189-210.

This has resulted in widespread rural poverty, unemployment, and escalating urban development which has rendered urban development less functional.³³ Accompanying this was the growing number of female-headed families and generational conflicts as the youth rose to assert their political agency.³⁴ All these forms of social identification created new senses of belonging that Shula Marks calls 'maps of meaning', an expression more powerful than mere adherence to a particular racial and ethnic political philosophy.³⁵ This is also reflected in the fast growing number of poor whites in South Africa.

Since the late 1970s, the growing influence of trade unionism and the fast growing unionization among migrant workers across regional, ethnic, gender and, to some extent, racial boundaries in South Africa suggests mobilization with a strong sense of working class consciousness as a common goal among the impoverished majority.³⁶ Therefore, processes accompanying urbanization have given rise to proletarianization, social dislocation and violence as the poor majority competed for scarce resources to survive in the city, employment, housing, and land. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa should thus be seen in terms of poverty, growing unemployment and urban overcrowding, in which residents were willing to use it to protect their interests against other workers or citizens.³⁷

South Africa's structural and human crises

This section lays out background context for *structural* crises that have adversely affected South Africa's low-income communities and that help contextualise the recent surge of xenophobic sentiments. If analysed properly, these should also provide clues for long-term, bottom-up antidotes. These crises are the result of interlocking, overlapping market and state failures, including:

- ▶ extremely high unemployment which exacerbates traditional and new migrancy patterns;
- ▶ a tight housing market with residential stratification, exacerbating service delivery problems (water/sanitation, electricity and other municipal services);
- ▶ extreme retail business competition;
- ▶ world-leading crime rates;
- ▶ Home Affairs Department corruption;
- ▶ cultural conflicts; and
- ▶ severe regional geopolitical stresses, particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

³³ Maxine Schoeman, 'The political economy of South Africa in global context', in A. J. Venter (1998) *Government and Politics in the new South Africa*, Johannesburg, J. L. Schaik, pp. 302-303.

³⁴ C. Glase (2000) *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Cape Town),

³⁵ Shula Marks (1992) 'The Origins of Ethnic Violence in South Africa', in N. Etherington (ed), *Peace, Politics, and Violence in the New South Africa*, London, Hans Zell Publishers, pp. 126-128.

³⁶ For some of these see, for example, Tom Lodge (1983) *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Braamfontein).

³⁷ Examples of this can also be seen in the pattern of violence between AmaZulu and AmaMpondo in the 1980s in Malukazi, Durban. See Shula Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity in Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness', in L. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, 1989.

A variety of indicators suggest a mixed story with regard to socio-economic, political and environmental change, especially during the early 2000s when democracy and the 'developmental state' strategy were being consolidated. On the one hand, various indicators suggested sustained growth and political optimism lay ahead, as predictable macroeconomic policy and rising world commodity prices maintained confidence in post-liberation state management. An 'economic boom' was regularly proclaimed by observers such as the *Financial Times*,³⁸ thanks to 'macroeconomic stability', GDP growth uninterrupted since 1998, and a substantial rise in exports.

Yet at the same time, South Africa began suffering not only economic problems, but also a dramatic increase in social unrest that presaged a deterioration of the integrity of several central liberal political institutions. As one reflection, there were 5813 protests (as defined under the Regulation of Gatherings Act 205 of 1993) recorded by the South African Police Service in 2004-05, and subsequently, an average of 8,000 per annum,³⁹ with higher amounts for the year 2008-09 anticipated. This is probably the highest per capita rate of social protest in the world.

By mid-2008, however, it was evident that the protests could as easily be directed against fellow community residents – especially if they hailed from outside South Africa – as against the genuine sources of their problems. Along with rising domestic violence and the AIDS pandemic, the xenophobia wave was perhaps the worst case of the tearing South African social fabric. But there were, in contrast, other more optimistic signs of social grievances channeled through policy advocacy, public conscientisation, international alliance-building and even the court system. These signs correspond to what Karl Polanyi termed a 'double movement' in which, initially during the 19th century in Europe, 'the extension of the market organisation in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction'⁴⁰ as people defended their land, labour and other resources from excessive commodification. Certain areas were illustrative of great potential, such as the Treatment Action Campaign's 1998-2008 street pressure and legal strategy of acquiring anti-retroviral drugs for HIV+ people; and Soweto activists' protests which helped drive the controversial water privatiser Suez out of Johannesburg and whose Johannesburg High Court victory in April 2008 began undoing its commercialised water policies.

Whether campaign-oriented or simply momentarily explosive in character, civil society activism was by all accounts a contributing factor in the 2007-08 transfer of power within the African National Congress, from the man favoured by local and global corporations and the prosperous classes (Thabo Mbeki) to the candidate of trade unions, the youth, organised ANC women and the South African Communist Party (Jacob Zuma). This latter group represented a 'centre-left', comprising the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), South African Communist Party, South African National Civic Organisation, some churches and NGOs, ANC Youth League and ANC Women's League. South Africa's 'independent left', in contrast, is comprised of social and community movements, NGO critics, feminists, internationalists, environmentalists, some in the faith community, and others alienated by the 'neoliberal' (market-oriented) economic policies, cronyism, corruption and patriarchal nationalism that represent durable

³⁸ Alec Russell (2007), 'South Africa's malls trounce township shops', *Financial Times*, 12 March; Russell, A. (2007), 'Post-apartheid phase two: Zuma's leadership of the ANC needs to prove sceptics wrong', 19 December; MacNamara, W., A. Russell and W. Wallis (2007), 'Post-apartheid phase two', *Financial Times*, 20 December.

³⁹ Charles Nqakula (2007), 'Reply to Question 1834, National Assembly, 36/1/4/1/200700232' (Cape Town), 22 November.

⁴⁰ Karl Polanyi (1957), *The Great Transformation*, Boston, Beacon Press, p.76.

ideologies within the ruling party, including the Zuma camp. They are part of a 'social justice' tradition that arose across the world over the past decade and achieved prominence in contesting globalisation's adverse impacts.

There are several areas of socio-economic and environmental progress and problems that represent socio-economic flashpoints in the post-apartheid era, that are the result of either post-1994 policy problems or even deeper structural forces. The impact of the global/national economic crisis amplifies and extends the existing, inherited contradictions. Minister of Trade and Industry Rob Davies has begun to identify the inherited distortions, as reflected in his 2010 industrial policy speech in parliament:

SA's recent growth was driven to too great an extent by unsustainable growth in consumption, fuelled by credit extension. Between 1994 and 2008 consumption driven sectors grew by 7.7% annually, compared with the productive sectors of the economy which grew by only 2.9% annually. This has meant that even at the peak of our average annual growth - 5.1% between 2005 and 2007 - unemployment did not fall below 22.8%. Manufacturing – which constitutes a sizeable chunk of our value added production – has not enjoyed sufficient dynamism. This is mainly because the relative profitability of manufacturing has been low as a result of a number of factors. These include:

- *A volatile and insufficiently competitive currency;*
- *The high cost of capital relative to our main trading partners; particularly that channelled towards value-added sectors such as manufacturing, resulting in a too limited allocation of capital to these sectors;*
- *The monopolistic provision and pricing of key inputs into manufacturing;*
- *An aged, unreliable and expensive infrastructure system;*
- *A weak skills system; and*
- *The failure to adequately leverage public capital and other large and repetitive areas of public expenditure.*

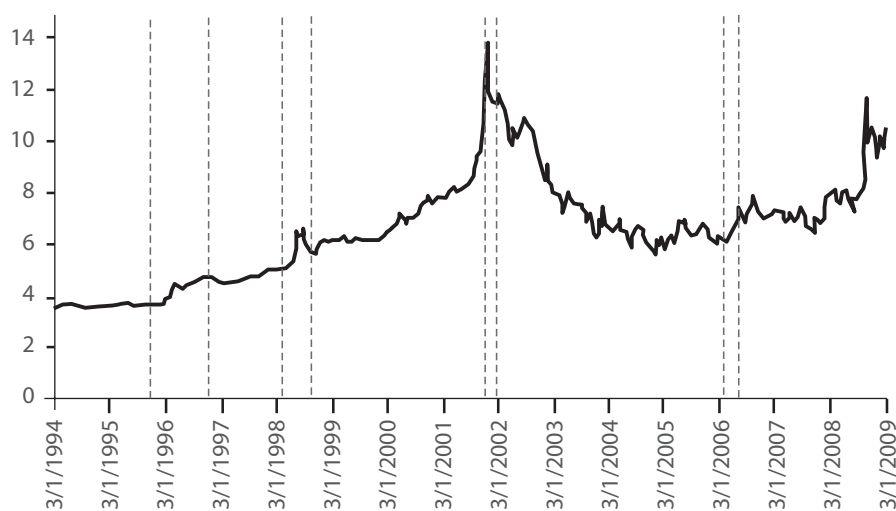
The negative, unintended consequences of this growth path are manifold they include large and unsustainable imbalances in the economy, continued high levels of unemployment and a large current account deficit. These weaknesses have been exacerbated by the global recession.⁴¹

⁴¹ Rob Davies (2010), 'Statement to Parliament', Cape Town, 28 January.

But there are additional, crucial elements to be added to the structural analysis, including financial bubbling, generalised overcapacity and the inequality/unemployment factor. First, for context, return to the early 1990s when neoliberalism as an overarching philosophy was adopted by the late apartheid regime. The period was marked by several policy shifts away from 1980s-era sanctions-induced dirigisme carried out by 'verligte' (enlightened) Afrikaner 'econocrats' in Pretoria, once the influence of 'securocrats' faded and the power of white English-speaking business rose during the 1990-94 negotiations. That period included South Africa's longest depression (1989-93). Finally in late 1993, the last touches were put on what might be termed the 'elite transition' to democracy.

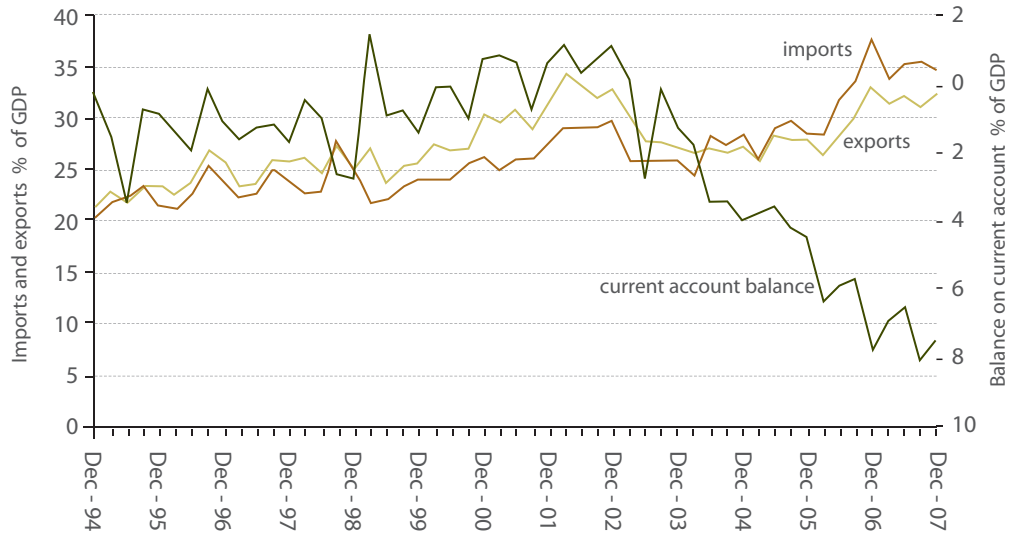
The transition assisted 'elite' (white and black) accumulation, as long-standing African National Congress promises to nationalize the banks, mines and monopoly capital were dropped; Nelson Mandela agreed to repay \$25 billion of inherited apartheid-era foreign debt; the central bank was granted formal independence in an interim constitution; South Africa joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade on disadvantageous terms; and the International Monetary Fund provided a \$850 million loan with standard Washington Consensus conditionality. Soon after the first free and fair democratic elections, won overwhelmingly by the ANC, privatization began in earnest; financial liberalization took the form of relaxed exchange controls; and interest rates were raised to a record high (often double-digit after inflation is discounted). By 1996 a neoliberal macroeconomic policy was formally adopted and from 1998-2001, the ANC government granted permission to South Africa's biggest companies to move their financial headquarters and primary stock market listings to London.

Sustaining the subsequent property and financial bubble was due to two sources: residual exchange controls which limit institutional investors to 15% offshore investments and which still restrict offshore wealth transfers by local elites; and a false sense of confidence in macroeconomic management. The oft-repeated notion is that under Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, 'macroeconomic stability' was achieved. Yet no emerging market had as many currency crashes (15% in nominal terms) over that period: SA's were in early 1996, mid-1998, late 2001, late 2006 and late 2008.



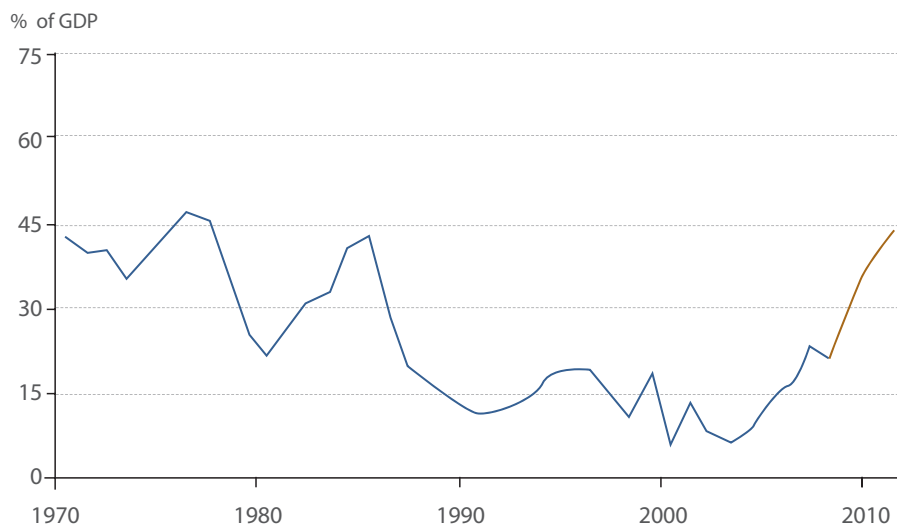
Five major currency crashes (R/\$)

By early 2009, *The Economist* magazine (25 February 2009) ranked South Africa as the most 'risky' of seventeen emerging markets. A key reason was that corporate/white power had generated an enormous balance of payments deficit thanks to outflows of profits/dividends to London/Melbourne financial headquarters.

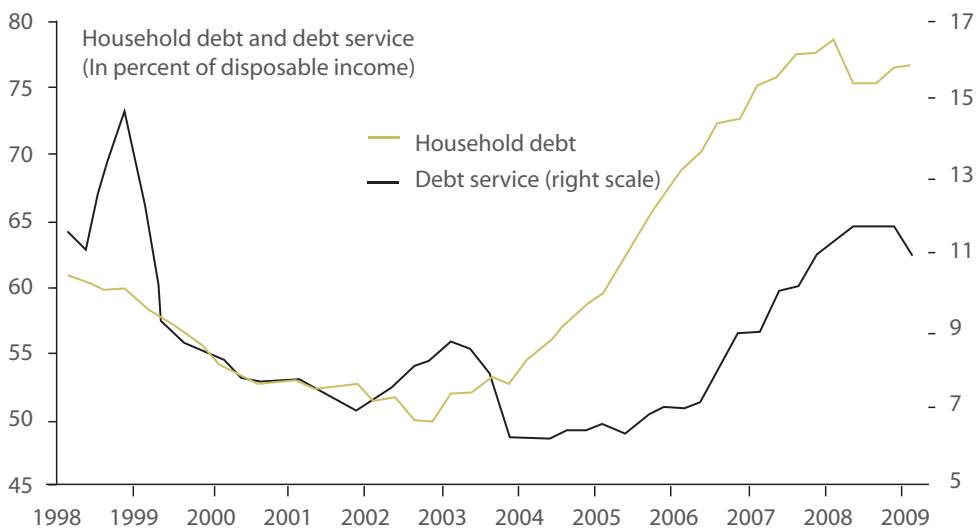
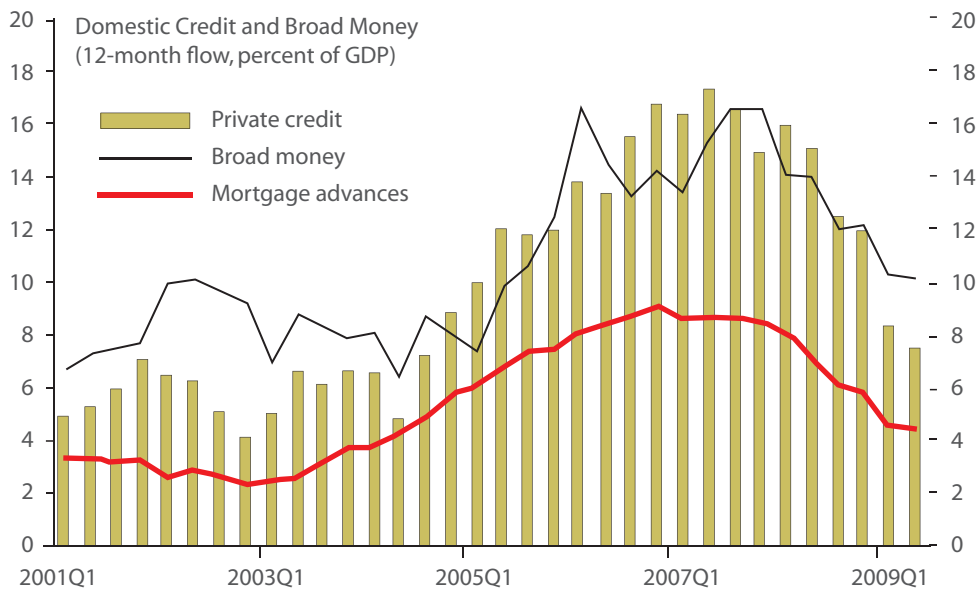
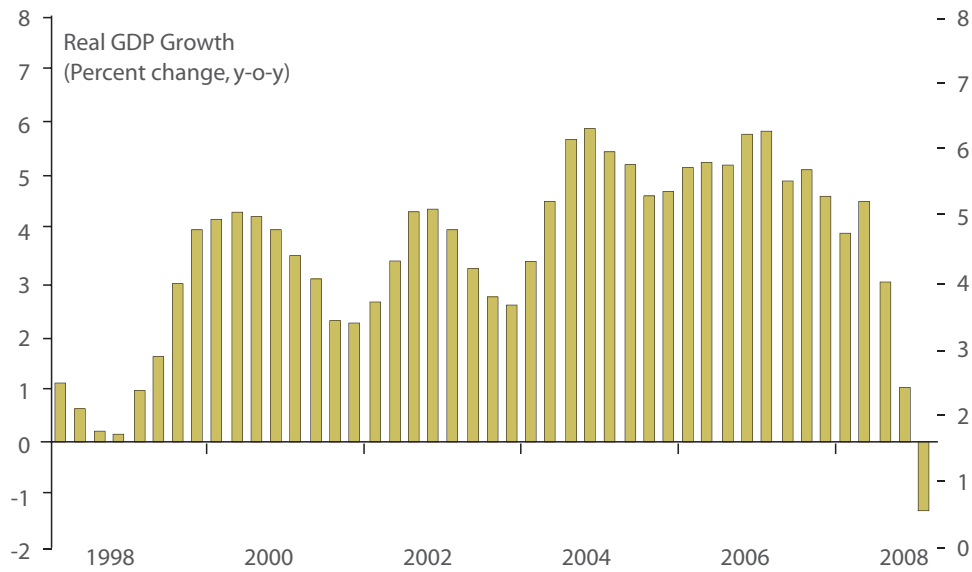


Dangerous trade, payments deficits (% of GDP) – source: SARB

To cover the current account deficit, a vast new borrowing spree began, with foreign debt rising from \$25 billion in 1994 to nearly \$80 billion by late 2008. Moreover, consumer credit had drawn in East Asian imports at a rate greater than South African exports even during the 2002-08 commodity price bubble. If there was a factor most responsible for the 5% GDP growth recorded during most of the 2000s, by all accounts, it was consumer credit expansion, with household debt to disposable income ratios soaring from 50% to 80% from 2005-08, while at the same time overall bank lending rose from 100% to 135% of GDP.



Rising SA foreign debt – source: SARB, RMB FM Research

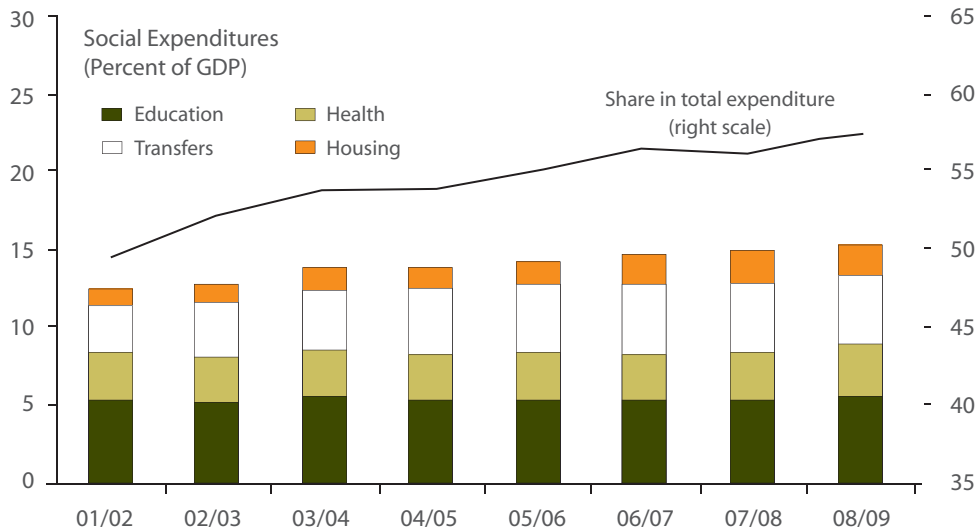


Source: South African Reserve Bank

South African economic growth driven by credit, especially mortgage bonds

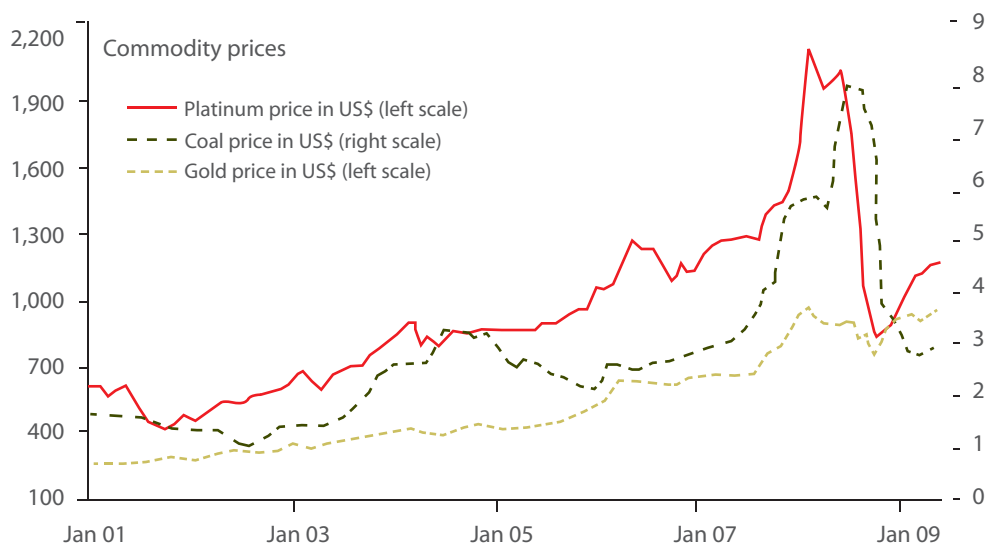
Credit overexposure began to become an albatross, however, with non-performing loans rising from 2007 by 80% on credit cards and 100% on bonds compared to the year before, and full credit defaults as a ratio of bank net interest income rising from 30% at the outset of 2008 to 55% by year's end.

The post-apartheid share of social spending in the total budget only rose from around 50% during the mid-1990s to 57% at the of crisis in any case, boosted only by social grant transfer payments.



South African social spending is still modest – source: IMF

The huge bubble in commodities - petroleum, minerals, cash crops, land - disguised how much countries like South Africa stood exposed, and indeed the early 2000s witnessed increasing optimism that the late 1990s emerging markets currency crises could be overcome within the context of the system.

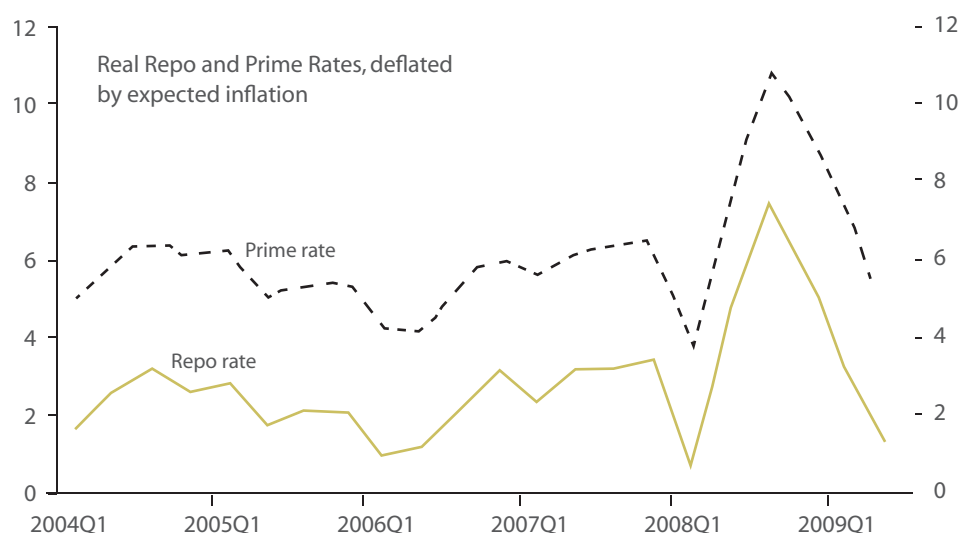


Commodity boom turns to bust in 2008 – source: IMF

Moreover, even before the resources boom, by 2001 the rate of profit for large South African capital was restored from an earlier downturn from the 1970s-90s, to ninth highest amongst the world's major national economies (far ahead of the US and China).⁴²

But high corporate profits were not a harbinger of sustainable economic development in South Africa, as a result of persistent deep-rooted contradictions:⁴³

- ▶ the repeated crash in the value of the rand reflects how vulnerable South Africa became to international financial markets thanks to steady exchange control liberalisation (26 separate loosening of currency controls) starting in 1995;
- ▶ SA's economy became much more oriented to profit-taking from financial markets than production of real products, in part because of extremely high real interest rates, especially from 1995-2002 and 2006-09;



Real interest rates, 2004-09 – source: IMF

- ▶ the two most successful major sectors from 1994-2004 were communications (12.2 per cent growth per year) and finance (7.6 per cent) while labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, footwear and gold mining shrunk by 1-5 per cent per year, and overall, manufacturing as a percentage of GDP also declined;
- ▶ the Gini coefficient measuring inequality rose during the post-apartheid period, which Borhat, van der Westhuizen and Jacobs calculated from 0.64 to 0.69, in part because black households lost 1.8% of their income from 1995-2005, while white households gained 40.5%.⁴⁴

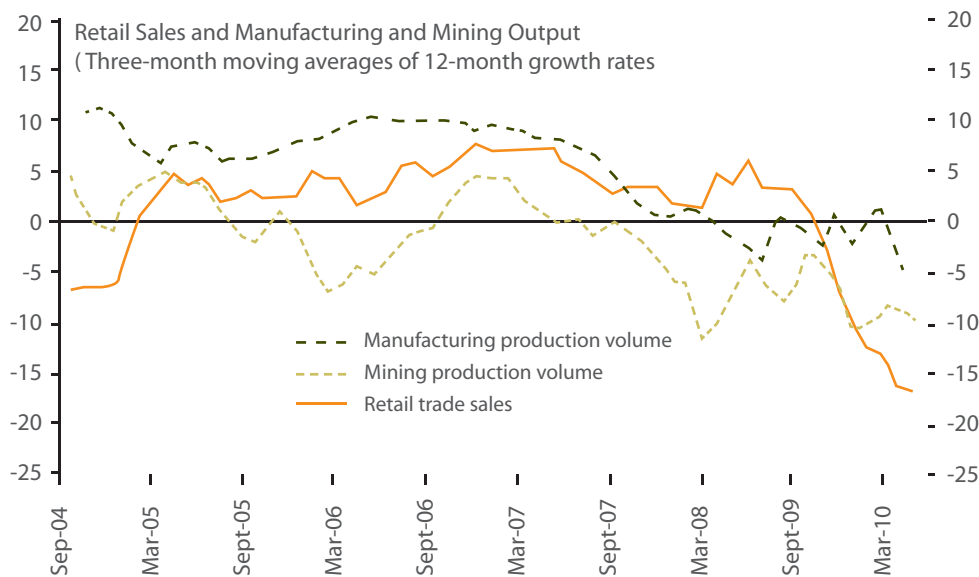
⁴² L. Citron and R. Walton (2002) 'International comparisons of company profitability', Bank of England, London, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/economic_trends/ET587_Walton.pdf.

⁴³ Martin Legassick (2009), 'Notes on the South African economic crisis', Cape Town, <http://www.amandla.org.za>; Chris Loewald (2009), 'A view of the South African economy in the global crisis', Pretoria, National Treasury; Republic of South Africa Department of Trade and Industry (2009), '2009-2012 Medium term strategic framework', Pretoria; South African Reserve Bank (2009) *Financial stability review*. Pretoria.

⁴⁴ Haroon Borhat, Christi van der Westhuizen, and T. Jacobs (2009), 'Income and non-income inequality in post-apartheid South Africa.' Development Policy Research Unit Working Paper 09/138, August, p.8.

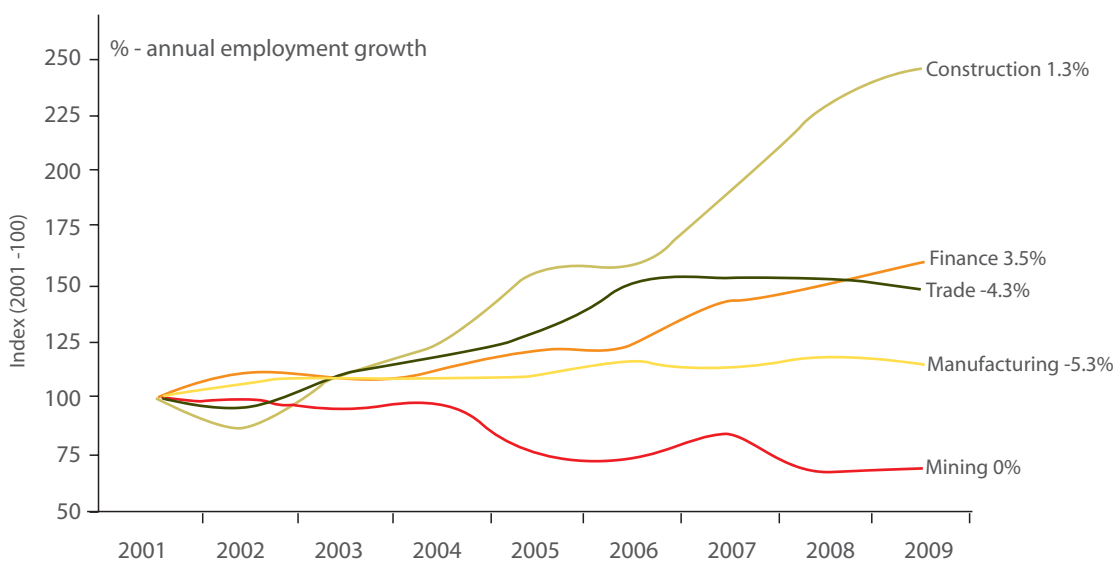
- › unemployment doubled to a rate of around 40% at peak (if those who have given up looking for work are counted, around 25% otherwise) - but state figures underestimate the problem, given that the official definition of employment includes such work as 'begging' and 'hunting wild animals for food' and 'growing own food';
- › overall, the problem of 'capital strike' - large-scale firms' failure to invest - continues, as gross fixed capital formation hovered around 15-17 per cent from 1994-2004, hardly enough to cover wear-and-tear on equipment;
- › businesses did invest their South African profits, but not mainly in SA: dating from the time of political and economic liberalisation, most of the largest Johannesburg Stock Exchange firms - Anglo American, DeBeers, Old Mutual, Investec, South African Breweries, Liberty Life, Gencor (now the core of BHP Billiton), Didata, Mondi and others - shifted their funding flows and even their primary share listings to overseas stock markets mainly in 2000-01;
- › the outflow of profits and dividends due these firms is one of two crucial reasons SA's current account deficit has soared to amongst the highest in the world (in mid-2008 exceeded only by New Zealand) and is hence a major danger in the event of currency instability, as was Thailand's (around 5 per cent) in mid-1997;
- › the other cause of the current account deficit is the negative trade balance during most of the recent period, which can be blamed upon a vast inflow of imports after trade liberalisation, which export growth could not keep up with;
- › another reason for capital strike is SA's sustained overproduction problem in existing (highly-monopolised) industry, as manufacturing capacity utilisation fell substantially from the 1970s to the early 2000s; and
- › corporate profits avoided reinvestment in plant, equipment and factories, and instead sought returns from speculative real estate and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange: there was a 50 per cent increase in share prices during the first half of the 2000s, and the property boom was unprecedented.

With this sort of fragile economic growth, subject to extreme capital flight, it is no surprise that in the second week of October 2008, the Johannesburg stock market crashed 10 per cent (on the worst day, shares worth US\$35 billion went up in smoke) and the currency declined by 9 per cent, while the second week witnessed a further 10 per cent crash. The Reserve Bank came under heavy pressure to reduce interest rates - by 5% from late 2008 through mid-2009 - and the real prime rate fell to the 2% range, down from a peak of 15% a decade earlier. But it didn't work, as manufacturing, mining and retail continued to crash. Although as late as February 2009, Manuel claimed such moves would prevent a recession, he was proven badly wrong in May when government data showed a 6.4% quarterly GDP decline, the worst since 1984 during anti-apartheid protests, the gold price's plummet and the tightening of sanctions.



Crashes in manufacturing, mining, retail, 2007-09

Evidence of the weakness of South Africa's economy is especially poignant in the sector that was the fastest growing during the false boom: construction. From 2003-2009, the main growth engines were construction and finance. The first quarter 2009 real sector crash was, indeed, mitigated by the construction industry, which grew 9.4% thanks to infrastructural investments of rather dubious medium-term merits: 2010 World Cup stadiums (hugely overbudget and not anticipated to cover operating costs after the soccer matches), an elite rapid train service for Johannesburg-Pretoria (probably costing R150 for the airport-Sandton trip), a the persistently failing (albeit generously subsidized) industrial complex at Coega, the world's fourth-largest coal-fired electricity generator (Medupi), mega-dams, and expansions to airports, ports, roads and pipelines. But these big projects aside, the number of building plans registered in 2008 was already 40% lower than in 2007.



Construction/finance-led growth/jobs index – source: IMF

These economic problems are deep, structural dilemmas, which had their roots not only in post-apartheid liberalisation, but in long-standing vulnerabilities within the apartheid-era economy. Because of liberalisation of both trade (August 1994 onwards) and finance (from March 1995), the current account deficit is dangerously high compared to peer economies. Although overall corporate profits are up against worker wages since the low-point of the late 1980s, a decisive problem is that manufacturing profits have fallen dramatically since the early 1980s in relation to financial and speculative profits. South Africa's export advantages are in a few areas difficult to maintain, such as auto components, swimming pool filters, wines, coal and base metals. Low fixed investment rates persist, especially by private sector investors, in part because excess idle capacity in existing plant and equipment. That, in turn, helps explain the very low level of Foreign Direct Investment, contrasting with dangerously high inflows of liquid portfolio capital attracted by South Africa's high real interest rate. None of these processes are healthy, and alongside extremely high price inflation in electricity, petrol and food, will generate yet more social unrest.

Some of this, in turn, is misdirected into xenophobia. In a South African Press Association report, 'Our conditions will never change' (15 March 2010), a journalist recorded:

“ The government came under heavy fire on Monday because of poor service delivery in the community of Refilwe, east of Pretoria. Angry residents said the government had been unresponsive and used the opportunity to voice their fury at a parliamentary public hearing. Heavy weather and thunder could barely be heard as one by one the residents filed their complaints. ‘Until a step is taken to stop corruption in government nothing is going to stop,’ Ivan Shabangu told the hearing by the parliamentary ad hoc committee on service delivery. He said he felt their conditions would never change. Stephen Phelani told the panel small businesses were under threat because of Somalian nationals. ‘In the end there will be violence. We will fight and we blame the municipality for that.’ Phelani said he had lost business at his tuck shop because Somalians encroached on his turf and reduced their prices. ”

Transcending xenophobia through structural analysis?

Although there are many issues that are important to address, the central problems we believe that can be tackled through public policy and civil society activities alike, are unemployment and the exclusion of the lower classes of society from access to adequate and secure living space. Whereas economic managers long ago introduced a dichotomy between living and working spaces through migrant labour schemes, this was an artificial division, one which xenophobic attacks traversed by allowing resentments born and kept alive in the workplace to be expressed in places of residence. Blame for xenophobic attacks thus generated should be placed squarely at the door of the economic and political leadership who, from the early 1990s, determined that post-apartheid arrangements

would perpetuate and even exacerbate the social divisions associated with migrant labour. Moreover, by placing limits on what civil society can legitimately 'demand' (and in the process by excluding mass employment, housing for all, and an end to migrancy), the elites limited the ability of working-class people to respond to the problems the declining economy visits upon them. Amongst the limits are the character of working-class leadership, the politics and organizational forms they can generate, their ideology and struggle strategies/tactics, and their alliances.

These are serious limitations, and nowhere were they more explicit than in Alexandra Township, where Luke Sinwell and Neo Podi describe how a politics of structural versus xenophobic narratives emerged in May 2008:

|| The Alexandra Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee (AVCC), another group primarily of shacks dwellers, within Alexandra who have lived in atrocious conditions for years and are understandably desperate to escape to better living conditions. AVCC members typically live in shacks in overcrowded and rat-infested areas in the township. Many of them have lived in these conditions for years and are understandably desperate to escape to better living conditions. The AVCC also has 500 members who occupy the factory area called Ghanda Centre. These people live on the edge of survival and endure some of the worst living conditions in Alexandra. People's rooms are demarcated by corrugated iron sheets inside the factory and most cannot be locked. These makeshift constructions are especially dangerous when it rains because of the damage caused to the amateur electrical supplies. They leak when it rains thereby shorting the electricity, dampening people's clothes and blankets, and creating conditions which are ripe for the spread of illness. Furthermore, there are no bathroom facilities in the factory and water can only be obtained from a few taps around the building. There are no toilets in the factory, which forces residents to use facilities in houses across the road, which is particularly dangerous at night for women. Many of these rooms hardly fit a small bed and are used by single people as well as entire families to eat, sleep, cook and bathe in. ||

While leaders of the AVCC tend to frame their demands in terms of corrupt government leaders, the AVCC organised a march, filmed by Danny Turkein, two weeks prior to the attacks which shows members of the AVCC vowing to evict Zimbabweans from the RDP houses in extension 7. According to Dlamini, many people 'thought that maybe we were involved in planning this whole xenophobic outbreak'. Dlamini explains, however, that while members of the AVCC had exhibited xenophobic attitudes, their leaders had merely hoped to expose the corruption of councilors who, they claim sell houses to both foreigners and South Africans. She reveals that intention of the march was to provide a platform to do research with councilors, ARP officials, metro-police and the residents of Alexandra:

“ We wanted to do it door to door because some of our South Africans are involved in corruption and it is not only foreigners... that was the aim of doing our march and to show the world that we can do better than the councilors and the housing department because they are not doing their job. People have been staying in Alexandra for 20 years, 30 years and staying in a shack and that shows that nothing has changed in Alex. ”

After the outbreak, the APF became involved to get rid of these perceptions. The APF later intervened with a potentially more systemic way of dealing with the problem... While the base of the APF in Alexandra, in particular the AVCC, has blamed corrupt local officials and even 'kwerekwere' for their poor living conditions, the APF movement leadership outside of Alexandra, albeit momentarily, appeared to hold the possibility of redirecting people's anger away from 'kwerekwere' and towards the systemic enemy called capitalism. This highlights the sharp disjuncture between the base of the APF in Alexandra and its leadership outside of Alexandra which frames the demands of the poor in a very different manner. Partially responding to the AVCC's xenophobic sentiments which were publicly revealed in 'Hello, My Name is Alex', the APF leadership submitted a press statement which declared, 'don't blame the poor from other countries for the poverty and joblessness in South Africa – blame, and act against those who are responsible':

“ It is a tragedy that such attacks are happening in poor working class communities, where the poor are fighting the poor. But there is a clear reason for this. Many in our communities are made to believe that unemployment is caused by foreigners who take hobs in the country – this is simply untrue. [this is] the result of the anti-poor, profit-seeking policies of the government and the behaviour of the capitalist class. Such massive and sustained unemployment is a structural problem of a capitalist system that cares little about the poor, wherever they are from/live (APF Press Statement 13 May 2008). ”

The APF, with the Social Movements Indaba (SMI) organised an anti-xenophobia march on 24 May 2008. They handed over a memorandum to Premier Mbazima Shilowa and the Department of Housing and Home Affairs which called on the 'South African government to acknowledge its role in the crisis, and to assume responsibility for providing solutions to the problems that speak to the root causes of the problems... the neo-liberal economic policy'. While the xenophobic attacks could have provided a platform for the APF to work with the AVCC in Alexandra to embark on a radical programme, or at least articulate an alternative development plan to the government's ARP, the AVCC has not changed its development trajectory since the attacks and a disjuncture between APF leadership and its base in Alexandra still remains. Like other civic organisations in Alexandra, the AVCC is trapped within the ARP's programme for development and some of its members still articulate xenophobic attitudes. No organisation in Alexandra, even APF affiliates, have begun to address the question of how neoliberal

policies restrict what is possible in places like Alexandra. They have not developed an alternative that is based on challenging the reality that Alexandra remains a sad slum, while its neighbor Sandton literally across the road remains one of the wealthiest suburbs in Africa.⁴⁵

This is a depressing conclusion, if indeed the most explicitly socialist and internationalist of South Africa's new social movements cannot instil more progressive values at its base. Still, we are encouraged by several countervailing tendencies to xenophobia, including the all-encompassing need of poor and working people to unite. As Joshua Kirshner and Comfort Phokela report from one of South Africa's highest-profile sites of municipal grievances and social struggle during the late 2000s,

Local leaders in Khutsong showed determination in not losing focus on the demarcation issue driving their struggle. They felt that xenophobic actions would undermine their cause, and they sought to influence local attitudes toward immigrants toward full acceptance. This did not involve advocating for special rights or services for immigrants, but rather pushing for overall better services and resources for local institutions through organizing to remain within the orbit of Gauteng. The goal was to uplift the entire community, including non-citizens residing in it, regardless of their legal status.

In May 2008, as the violence spread from the townships of Alexandra to Diepsloot and working class communities of the East Rand, residents of Khutsong witnessed the disquieting events on the TV news. While the crisis unfolded, the MDF leaders invited community members to the soccer stadium, as they had done so many times in 2005 through 2007. 'They told us not to be afraid because of what was happening in the townships outside Johannesburg, Alexandra. They said whatever was taking place in Alex would not happen here,' explained a Mozambican man who has lived in Khutsong for 9 years.

In this way, Mogale and other MDF leaders conveyed the notion that our sense of humanity and citizenship does not end at the national borders. The leaders explicitly avoided drawing a rigid distinction between insider and outsider in terms of nationality, or allowing this division shape grassroots protest. The presence of a massive civic movement under the aegis of the MDF has created a strong sense of unity and common cause in the township. In most cases, foreign immigrants have not been regarded as a threat to local interests. The MDF publicly condemned the violence against immigrants that was spreading through the country in May 2008. Such actions demonstrate the importance

⁴⁵ Luke Sinwell and Neo Podi (2009), 'Towards Addressing the Root Causes of Social Tensions: Evaluating Civil Society and Local Government Responses to Xenophobic Violence in Alexandra', Report to Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

of a focused and honest leadership. Several newer migrants chose to move to Khutsong following the xenophobic attacks because they perceived it as relatively safe.⁴⁶

We are also encouraged, in this analysis, by the fact that so many activists against xenophobia share it. As Trevor Ngwane and Nonhlahla Vilikazi found in their research into the main Johannesburg social movement activist networks,⁴⁷

In general, the people who are xenophobic in attitude tended to emphasise the socioeconomic competition between immigrants and locals as the reason that they are against 'these people'. Some also emphasized how different immigrants were from 'us'. On the other hand, the people opposed to xenophobia tended to have fairly elaborate theories that traversed history and politics to argue why immigrants should be treated well. They tended to emphasise the similarity of immigrants to locals referring to their common ancestry and destiny, the fact that they are all black and African....

Respondents who were activists, that is, active participants and leaders in social movement organizations, tended to see the causes of xenophobia as largely the same or having the same source as for the problems they dealt with in their daily struggles. They pointed to the system of capitalism, the divide and rule tactics of the oppressor, the legacy of apartheid and the preeminence of the interests of the rich over the poor as fundamentally behind the xenophobia. The activists saw the campaign against xenophobia as part of 'the struggle'.⁴⁸ Social movement activists locate the xenophobia problem in history and within the political economy of the country, the continent and the world... Many respondents emphasized that xenophobia is not a new thing. They trace it back to colonialism's divide and rule tactics and to apartheid ideology which sought to instill hatred between black people...

There are structural factors that provide the material framework for xenophobia. The continuation of exploitation and oppression in South Africa, the frustration that arises from that, the lack of avenues to change or improve the situation, these are some of the reasons provided by key informants in the research. The analysis goes beyond one country into a critique of economic and power imbalances in the world.

⁴⁶ Joshua Kirshner and Comfort Phokela (2009), 'Khutsong and the xenophobic violence,' Report to Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

⁴⁷ Trevor Ngwane and Nonhlanhla Vilikazi (2009), 'Social movement responses to xenophobia,' Report to Atlantic Philanthropies, December.

⁴⁸ Interviews with SECC, TCC and CAX leaders.

At the same time the local seems to be also important. For example, in Thembelihle local traders were attacked because they were immigrants. This suggested, on the one hand, criminal intent as their goods were stolen, but the hate speech was linked to these traders undercutting South African born traders in business... Sometimes immigrants are accused of not taking part in community meetings and in workplace struggles.⁴⁹ This is related to their sojourner status in the areas that they live and their precarious position at the workplace because they do not have official documents. One respondent was concerned that even when male immigrants marry local women sometimes their children show them no respect because of what they hear in the street about their fathers being 'foreigners'.⁵⁰

Immigrants seem to end up being the losers in the game in that they suffer injustice and are then blamed for this, for example, at work they are forced by the bosses to accept little pay but fellow workers turn around and blame them for accepting less money.⁵¹ The advantage to the ruling class especially big business of a divided working class was emphasized mostly by some respondents:

We say no to capitalist divisions. We say no to the capitalist cancer that is xenophobia. We want to unite with all our African brothers and sisters and other working class peoples of the world. We say the way forward is sharing, compassion and solidarity.⁵²

⁴⁹ Respondent, Thembelihle.

⁵⁰ Bhayzer, Thembelihle leader.

⁵¹ Mapfumo, Thembelihle, immigrant.

⁵² Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (2008), 'March against Xenophobia, press statement', 26 May.

Recommendations

It is to the long-term problems of a durable, structural nature that our recommendations can be best addressed. Without a long-term solution, the lack of coordination and leadership exhibited in South African civil society will continue. Hence this report recommends,

1. A unifying local/ national/regional approach to rising (and durably high) unemployment, based upon a 'right to work' and sufficient public work resources, directed to projects needed by poor people and the communities;
2. A dramatic shift of state investment resources into housing/services, for both capital/ infrastructure and ongoing operating/maintenance subsidies;
3. A rising level of disposable income for low-income people – e.g. through a Basic Income Grant - to accommodate the intensified desperation in the informal sector;
4. A commitment to dramatic increases in publicly-subsidised employment and to channelling investment resources into low-income areas, so as to mitigate the economic desperation that so often generates crime;
5. Changes to South African state regulations that liberalise border restrictions (e.g. the Zimbabwean temporary work visa), and a very strong stance against such corruption, plus a dramatic increase in staff to accommodate the Department's rising clientele base;
6. A much greater South African state commitment to promotion of cultural diversity and the 'melting pot' of regional citizenries within South Africa;
7. A shift of South African foreign policy – driven by regional solidaristic initiatives in civil society - away from strategies which exacerbated political-economic and geopolitical tensions in Southern and Central Africa

Strategies to fight against xenophobia need to traverse and cover many areas of social, political and economic life.

There is a need to address certain structural problems that provide fertile ground for the growth of xenophobic attitudes. There is also a need to address the 'subjective factor', that is, to affirm those ideologies, politics and actions that encourage the subaltern classes to search and find solutions that don't include xenophobia.

Secondly, the strategies to fight xenophobia should address destitute locations' genuine needs. The most pressing needs consist of providing decent housing, water and electricity; sustainable job opportunities; skill empowerment in self-employment, inclusive community policing forum to fight crime, and training in whistleblower techniques in order to fight corruption, and joint social cultural events to bridge the gap between South African poor and destitute migrants.

Thirdly, power without accountability leads to abuse and often the most vulnerable suffer the most, in this instance, African immigrants who end up paying exorbitant rents on pain of being kicked out of their shacks and possibly even out of the country. But South African 'borners' suffer the same fate to some extent. There is a need for the authorities to intervene in this business of renting out shacks,

there is also a need for the community to unite as 'non-borners' and 'borners' to fight this evil and assert the rights of tenants and the right of all to decent housing. As matters stand the landlords are getting their way partly because of playing up divisions between these two groups. A related issue is have a good political leadership which will unite the poor communities across the city because united they will stand but divided they are falling. A principle needs to be found that will provide a basis for unity and this platform could be the equal participation of all irrespective of gender, race and country of origin.

Fourth, it is ordinary working class people who pay the price for the ill-treatment of and discrimination against immigrants. They pay through being kept divided as a working class thus leaving the business class in a stronger position. South African born workers know this when they accuse immigrants of undercutting wages. They should know that the fault is less that of the immigrants, who are victims, than of the bosses who benefit from this perverse arrangement. Hence, the work of getting rid of xenophobia requires raising the awareness of ordinary people about the negative consequences of xenophobia. Political education and leadership are crucial in carrying out this work of raising awareness, of developing a 'working class consciousness.

Durable socio-economic and 'local geopolitical' problems remain as challenges for more visionary civil society strategists. Ironically, there are hints of visionary breakthrough in several relationships established by regional (Southern African) organisations, including the celebrated solidarity expressed during the April 2008 Durban dockworker refusal to unload three million bullets and weaponry destined for Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. There is hope for post-xenophobic civil society, but only if we work through the processes that have taken us from here to here.

In this context, we believe the *structural* problems that have adversely affected low-income people – thus contributing to long-term xenophobic attitudinal norms – can be summarised as follows, with suggested recommendations for mitigation:

Problems & recommendations

Extremely high unemployment

- A unifying local/national/regional approach to lowering (durably high) unemployment, based upon a 'right to work' and sufficient public works resources, especially 'green jobs', directed to projects needed by poor people and their communities

A tight housing market with residential stratification, and service delivery shortfalls

- A dramatic shift of state investment resources into housing/services, for both capital/infrastructure and ongoing operating/maintenance subsidies

Extreme retail business competition

- A rising level of disposable income for low-income people – e.g. through a Basic Income Grant - to accommodate the intensified desperation in the informal sector

World-leading crime rates

- A commitment to dramatic increases in publicly-subsidised employment and to channelling investment resources into low-income areas, so as to mitigate the economic desperation that so often generates crime

Home Affairs Department corruption

- Changes to South African state regulations that liberalise border restrictions (e.g. the Zimbabwean temporary work visa), and a very strong stance against such corruption, plus a dramatic increase in staff to accommodate the Department's rising clientele base

Cultural conflicts

- A much greater South African state commitment to promotion of cultural diversity and the 'melting pot' of regional citizenries within South African

Severe regional geopolitical stresses

- A shift of South African foreign policy – driven by regional solidaristic initiatives in civil society - away from strategies which exacerbated political-economic and geopolitical tensions in Southern and Central Africa