

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF XENOPHOBIA AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN
CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA**

SKRIPSI NON REGULER

Publikasi Jurnal Ilmiah

Untuk memenuhi sebagian persyaratan mencapai gelar Sarjana
pada Program Studi SI-Hubungan Internasional



Disusun oleh:

KHOFIYATUL AWALIYAH

22.95.0436

**PROGRAM SARJANA
PROGRAM STUDI SI-HUBUNGAN INTERNASIONAL
FAKULTAS EKONOMI DAN SOSIAL
UNIVERSITAS AMIKOM YOGYAKARTA**

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Pada 2 Mei 2026

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HALAMAN PERSEMBAHAN

Di antara seluruh bagian dalam skripsi ini, halaman persembahan menjadi bagian yang paling bermakna, karena melalui halaman inilah penulis menyampaikan rasa terima kasih yang tidak sepenuhnya dapat diungkapkan dengan kata-kata. Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, skripsi ini penulis persembahkan kepada:

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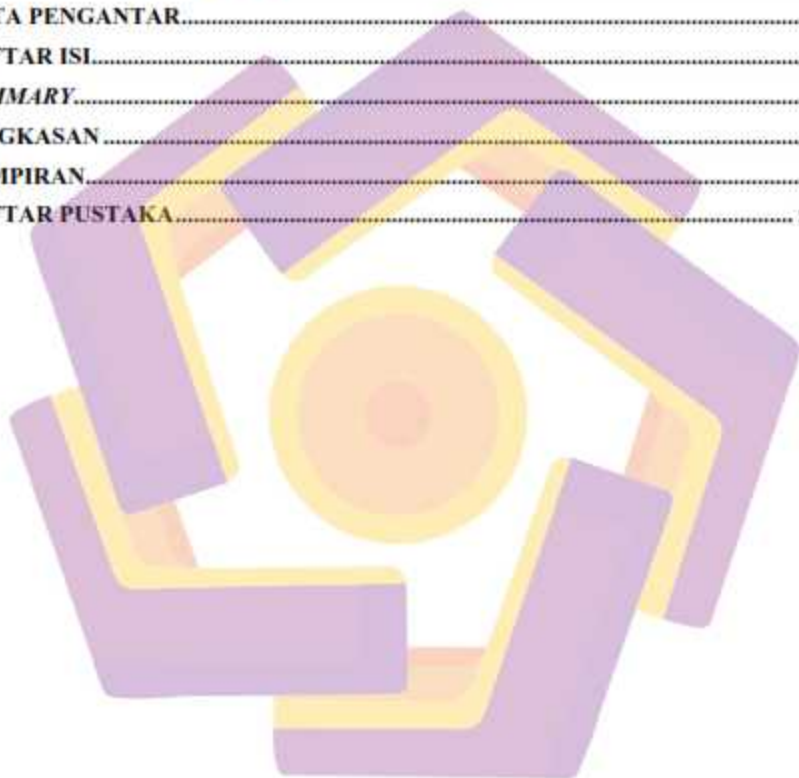
Penulis menyadari bahwa banyak pihak yang telah memberikan bantuan, dukungan, serta bimbingan, baik langsung maupun tidak langsung. Oleh karena itu, penulis menyampaikan rasa terima kasih kepada:

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SUMMARY

This study analyzes how identity politics and the apartheid system inherited from the colonial regime are reproduced into systems of exclusion and inclusion by segments of the local South African community towards other African migrants. The study focuses on lived experiences, as well as discursive and social practices of xenophobia in the postcolonial South African context using structured online interview research methods combined with Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and a postcolonial theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of othering (Edward Said) and mimicry (Homi K. Bhabha) used to examine the understanding and experiences of other African communities regarding intra-racial discrimination and racial violence. Data were collected through online interviews with 17 informants from South Africa and Sub-Saharan African countries, as well as textual analysis of policy documents and official reports. The findings reveal that xenophobia is reproduced through symbolic exclusion, identity categorization, and the legitimization of public discourse that revives colonial hierarchies and dispositions. Identity politics reflected in xenophobia functions as a symbolic mechanism to maintain the boundaries of national identity and contributes to intra-racial violence in postcolonial South Africa.

RINGKASAN

Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana politik identitas dan sistem apartheid yang diwarisi dari rezim kolonial direproduksi menjadi sistem eksklusif dan inklusi oleh segmen komunitas lokal Afrika Selatan terhadap migran Afrika lainnya. Studi ini berfokus pada pengalaman hidup, serta praktik diskursif dan sosial xenofobia dalam konteks Afrika Selatan pascakolonial dengan menggunakan metode penelitian wawancara online terstruktur yang dikombinasikan dengan analisis wacana kritis Norman Fairclough dan kerangka teoretis pascakolonial, khususnya konsep *othering* (Edward Said) dan *mimicry* (Homi K. Bhabha) yang digunakan untuk meneliti pemahaman dan pengalaman komunitas Afrika lainnya mengenai diskriminasi intra-rasial dan kekerasan rasial. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara online dengan 17 informan dari Afrika Selatan dan negara-negara Sub-Sahara Afrika, serta analisis tekstual dokumen kebijakan dan laporan resmi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa xenofobia direproduksi melalui eksklusif simbolik, kategorisasi identitas, dan legitimasi wacana publik yang menghidupkan kembali hierarki dan disposisi kolonial. Politik identitas yang tercermin dalam xenofobia berfungsi sebagai mekanisme simbolik untuk mempertahankan batas-batas identitas nasional dan berkontribusi pada kekerasan antar-ras di Afrika Selatan pascakolonial.

Discourse Analysis of Xenophobia and Identity Politics in Contemporary South Africa

Khofiyatul Awwaliyah¹, Yoga Suharman², Isti Nur Rahmahwati³
Universitas Amikom Yogyakarta^{1,2,3}

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how identity politics and the apartheid system inherited from the colonial regime are reproduced into systems of exclusion and inclusion by segments of the local South African community towards other African migrants. The study focuses on lived experiences, as well as discursive and social practices of xenophobia in the postcolonial South African context using structured online interview research methods combined with Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and a postcolonial theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of othering (Edward Said) and mimicry (Homi K. Bhabha) used to examine the understanding and experiences of other African communities regarding intra-racial discrimination and racial violence. Data were collected through online interviews with 17 informants from South Africa and Sub-Saharan African countries, as well as textual analysis of policy documents and official reports. The findings reveal that xenophobia is reproduced through symbolic exclusion, identity categorization, and the legitimization of public discourse that revives colonial hierarchies and dispositions. Identity politics reflected in xenophobia functions as a symbolic mechanism to maintain the boundaries of national identity and contributes to intra-racial violence in postcolonial South Africa.

Keywords: National Identity, Intra-African, Mimicry, Othering, Postcolonial, Xenophobia

A. INTRODUCTION

The trend of increasing intra-African migration to South Africa continues to rise significantly. Data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that South Africa is recorded as the country with the most significant number of immigrants. According to data from International Organization for Migration in 2020, Zimbabwean immigrants are the dominant ones with a total population of 911,981 people or roughly 14% of the total immigrants. The next ones are Mozambique 539,219 people equivalent to 8% of the total immigrants, Angola 337,621 people, the Central African Republic 323,409 people, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo 321,102 people, each of these groups contributes approximately 5% of the total immigrant population in South Africa (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021). Based on the International Migrant Stock 2024 data, 2,631,000 international migrants have been living in South Africa, presenting 4.1 percent of the total national population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025, p. 12). The migration mobility in southern Africa is quite high since the region is ranked among the main economic centres in the African continent. Migration to South Africa comes as a result of development of the industrial, mining, and agricultural sectors that provide different employment opportunities. However, the intensive migration in South Africa has sociopolitical and economic effects.

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The local population tends to view the presence of migrants in South Africa as a threat. Migrants are portrayed as job thieves even though they generally work in the informal sector with low wages and without legal protection (Lebo Diseko, 2022). Furthermore, migrants heading to South Africa also provoke Xenophobia. Migrants are constructed as 'the other', considered to threaten the identity, existence, and economic access of the native population. The other group is also seen as disposable or worthy of sacrifice to maintain the power and security of the dominant group (Mbembe, 2019, pp. 30-80). South Africa has become one of the most relevant case studies for understanding how identity politics, a legacy of colonialism, and Xenophobia against intra-African migrant groups are reproduced in the context of a postcolonial state.

Xenophobia in South Africa has triggered serious impacts on social cohesion and diplomatic relations in the African region (Thinane, 2022). More recent reports indicate that xenophobia motivated violence and discrimination remain persistent. In 2022, United Nations experts reported severe incidents illustrating this trend, including the killing of a Zimbabwean national in Diepsloot in April 2022 by a group conducting door to door checks demanding proof of legal status, and the alleged burning of Yeoville Market in Johannesburg in June 2022 targeting migrant shopkeepers (OHCHR, 2022). Beyond physical violence, the experts highlighted that discrimination against foreign nationals has become institutionalised in both government policy and broader society, resulting in violations of fundamental rights, including the right to life, physical integrity, adequate living standards, and access to healthcare, as well as increased risks of arbitrary detention, torture, and refoulement (OHCHR, 2022). The phenomenon is connected to the construction of an exclusive national identity, which is formed through the practices of discrimination and the formation of social hierarchies based on racial segregation linked to the long legacy of colonialism and apartheid. In addition to enforcing racial segregation, the apartheid system also actively shapes and exploits ethnic identities among African communities through the bantustan or homelands policies (Szeftel, 1994, p. 191). The colonial apartheid system has left behind forms of exclusion of Africans from the national political system while simultaneously creating social segregation between ethnic groups and establishing a singular national identity (Szeftel, 1994, pp. 185-186).

Contemporary xenophobia in South Africa should be interpreted in terms of the post-apartheid society of the country, especially since the beginning of the 2000s to the present day. Yet despite the fact that in 1994 the country officially abolished apartheid and gave way to the multiracial democracy in the hands of Nelson Mandela (Worden, 2009, p. 131). Social and economic disparities are still being influenced by the heritage of colonialism and institutionalized racial segregation (Guswantoro, 2023). Traditionally, the expansion of colonialism and the apartheid regime embedded racial stratifications, spatial segregation, unequal resource distribution, which were disproportionately disadvantaging to non-white

populations (Worden, 2009, pp. 81–82). Although these systems are officially over, the structural effects of the systems remain as inequality, heavy unemployment, and lack of access to opportunities. Since the 2000s, especially in the post-apartheid period, South Africa has witnessed an upsurge in migration to the country, mostly as a result of economic disparities with other African nations. This mobility has enhanced competition in terms of jobs and resources which have been among the causes of xenophobic tendencies among the local communities. The xenophobic tensions are demonstrated by large-scale violence, including the 2008 attacks and a more recent event of the 2024 Soweto case (Bornman Jan, 2024; Worden, 2009, p. 168). Xenophobia has also ceased to be racial segregation, but rather intra-African conflicts, which are commonly referred to as “black-on-black violence” and this means that the exclusionary practices are reproduced in a postcolonial context. Moreover, the anti-immigrant rhetoric and organizations like Operation Dudula contribute to the strengthening of anti-immigrant sentiments by portraying migrants as a threat to the stability of the economy and the national identity (Schwikowski, 2023). The popularity of “us versus them” discourses, such as “alien”, are also contributing to the legitimization of social exclusion and the further division between the local communities and the migrants (Danso & McDonald, 2001, pp. 116–129).

It is against this background that this study narrows to the 2022–2025 time frame a present day epoch characterized by the escalation of xenophobic violence, the emergence of anti-immigrant movements, and the growing unemployment rates which aid in the development of xenophobic attitudes towards intra-African migrants. In particular, the unemployment rate was kept at a high level in this period. According to the data provided by the World Bank, the unemployment rate in South Africa has increased to approximately 33.3% in 2022, then slightly decreased to approximately 32.1% in 2023, and increased again to approximately 33.2% in 2024, where in 2025 the figure is still above 30% (World Bank, 2026). This condition reflects one of the highest unemployment rates in the world and indicates ongoing economic instability, which intensifies competition over jobs and resources and reinforces anti-immigrant sentiments. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How are the historical traces and apartheid systems inherited from the colonial regime reproduced in the relations among local South African citizens, reflected in forms of othering and mimicry toward intra-African migrants, thus giving rise to xenophobia and racial violence (black-on-black violence) in the postcolonial.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Studies Review

Various studies have examined xenophobia in South Africa as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by economic, political, historical, and socio-cultural dynamics. One dominant strand in the literature situates xenophobia within an economic and materialist framework, emphasizing unemployment, inequality, and labour competition as key driving

factors. Onor (2024) argues that xenophobic violence is rooted in structural economic tensions, where migrants are constructed as competitors over limited resources, particularly in relation to the framework of SDG 8 (Onor, 2024, pp. 45–48). Similarly, Yingi et al. (2024) conceptualize xenophobia as a form of scapegoating and isolationism, in which migrants function as symbolic representations of the failures of post-apartheid socio-economic transformation. While these approaches provide significant contributions, they tend to reduce xenophobia to material dimensions, thus falling short in explaining how social relations between local citizens and migrants are constructed through identity formation and historical legacies (Yingi et al., 2024, p. 70).

In addition, a number of studies highlight the role of the state and governance in shaping xenophobic dynamics. Mlambo et al. (2023) propose a more comprehensive analytical framework by positioning xenophobia as the result of interactions between migrants, the state, and local communities. Their study underscores that weak migration policies, institutional failures, and the lack of effective integration mechanisms intensify social tensions between citizens and migrants. However, this approach remains largely focused on the institutional level and does not sufficiently account for how these relations are reproduced through symbolic practices, social meanings, and identity constructions in everyday life (Mlambo et al., 2023, pp. 118–129). A study by Cinini and Singh (2019) highlights Xenophobia as a serious threat to human security for African migrants in Durban. They explain that Xenophobia has endangered the safety, employment opportunities, and access to social services of migrants. Addressing this issue requires government intervention and inclusive social integration (Cinini & Balgobind, 2019, pp. 56–58).

From a historical and ideological perspective, several studies link xenophobia to colonial legacies and the apartheid system in shaping social identities in South Africa. Bello Yekeen et al. (2024) highlight the erosion of pan-African solidarity as a consequence of colonial legacies and incomplete decolonization, which in turn shapes how South African citizens perceive and interpret “foreigners,” reflecting the persistence of unresolved colonial hierarchies” (Bello Yekeen et al., 2024, p. 391). This argument is reinforced by Mthombeni (2022), who problematizes the concept of ubuntu as a universal African ethic and argues that xenophobia should not be understood merely as a moral failure, but rather as a manifestation of unresolved colonial and political contradictions continuously reproduced within contemporary social structures. Nevertheless, these studies have not sufficiently elaborated how such colonial and apartheid legacies are reproduced in social relations among local citizens in the postcolonial context (Mthombeni, 2022, pp. 62–73).

Furthermore, the social and discursive dimensions of xenophobia have also received scholarly attention. Thinane (2022) demonstrates how discourse shaped by authoritative figures, such as Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, contributes to the reproduction of narratives that frame immigrants as threats (Thinane, 2022, p. 14). Dube and Setlalentoa (2024) further

reveal that xenophobia is not confined to the macro level but is also internalized within everyday social spaces such as schools, influencing identity formation, social cohesion, and patterns of violence among students. These findings suggest that xenophobia operates through discursive practices that normalize the construction of the "Other." However, these studies have yet to explicitly connect such discursive processes with othering and mimicry as mechanisms through which colonial logics are reproduced in the relationships between local citizens and intra-African migrants (Dube & Setlalentoa, 2024, pp. 1-9).

Overall, the existing literature has made significant contributions to explaining xenophobia from multiple perspectives. However, these approaches remain theoretically and analytically fragmented and have not sufficiently explained how the historical traces of colonialism and apartheid are reproduced in social relations among local South African citizens. In particular, there is still limited research that integrates postcolonial perspectives, especially the concepts of othering (Said) and mimicry (Bhabha) with Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough) to examine such symbolic reproduction. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analysing how colonial legacies are reproduced in social relations and discourse, which in turn give rise to xenophobia and racial violence (black-on-black violence) in the postcolonial state.

Analytical Framework

The Concepts of Othering and Mimicry

Othering reflects a symbolic process in which the dominant group portrays "the other" as inherently backward and different. Said (1979) explains that the representation of the Orient reflects an imaginative construction by the West that serves to assert its superiority. According to Said, "The Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given reality and presence in and for the West" (Said, 1979, p. 5). In the context of this research, othering is reflected in the way the local community constructs immigrants from other African countries as "foreign", even though they come from similar historical and cultural backgrounds. National identity is built through the assertion of a boundary between "us" as the rightful owners of the land, and "them" as illegitimate newcomers.

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry is used to explain that subordinate groups who imitate the behaviours or values of dominant groups are never truly fully accepted. Mimicry produces a form of imitation that is "almost the same but not quite," which creates ambiguity and anxiety for the dominant party (H. K. Bhabha, 2012, p. 86). In the case of migrants in South Africa, the migrants' efforts to adapt to social norms actually reinforce the perceptual construction that their presence is a covert threat to national identity. Postcolonial theory explains that Xenophobia is a part of the symbolic mechanism stemming from the historical practices of colonialism in maintaining the exclusivity of national identity in postcolonial states.

The concepts of othering and mimicry are interconnected as processes of reproducing the power of colonial regimes in postcolonial countries. In this context, a causal mechanism can be seen in how othering positions other African migrants as foreign and inferior groups through identity constructions inherited from colonial logic. Mimicry operates through mechanisms in which local communities imitate colonial practices and logic, including standards, norms, and perspectives toward the "other," to maintain symbolic superiority over fellow African groups, reflecting a form of reproducing colonial power relations. Together, they create discursive formations that have effects on the discrimination against migrants of the same African race.

Research Method

The data collection method in this research conducted through structurized online interviews, which was considered for three reasons. First, the researcher was able to reach informants across countries. Second, it overcame the researcher's limitations in conducting field studies. Third, it addressed potential structural and sociocultural barriers that could arise during the research process. The anonymity and data security of participants remained an important focus in this study, given that the issue of xenophobia is considered a sensitive topic according to most informants.

The first step in the online interview involved predetermined identification of some of the initial informants (purposive sampling). The informants chosen belonged to the African nationality. During the following process, to further develop the research data, all the informants were questioned on their desire to suggest other informants using snowball sampling. The total number of sources that were willing to be interviewed amounted to 17 individuals and they were based in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya and Somalia. The nationalities of the informants are largely composed of the countries of southern Africa, especially Malawi and Zimbabwe, following the social perspective of the community with historical relationship and high mobility to the South Africa. This multiculturalism is rather significant when it comes to the disclosure of the broad spectrum of the views on the migration processes, social attitudes, and migration experiences in South Africa in terms of Xenophobia and racial violence.

Primary and secondary documents used in different written sources also support this research. These document sources include reports from international organisations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the International Organisation for Migration, and policy documents from the South African government as well as textual statements. Meanwhile, the analytical framework in this study utilises academic literature related to postcolonial ideas, particularly mimicry and othering. These sources, both from interviews and documentary sources, are then processed and interpreted, with the results presented qualitatively.

Critical discourse analysis related to the three-dimensional framework of Norman Fairclough is used to unravel the interconnections between the textual dimension, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995, p. 9). The focus of the study lies in the relationship between language, power, and ideological values in shaping meaning and power relations. The interconnection of these three dimensions is explained through causal mechanisms (process tracing), namely how the concepts of othering and mimicry, originating from the logic of colonialism, are reflected in the text, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices between South African indigenous communities and migrants from different countries in the African region, affecting symbolic violence (discursive practice) as well as direct violence and Xenophobia (social practices).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result of Interviews

The results of interviews with 17 informants from sub-Saharan African countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Somalia revealed the issue of xenophobia in South Africa. All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The informants described their experiences of facing xenophobia in daily life, which manifested in various forms such as social rejection, exclusion, verbal and physical violence, and discrimination in public services. As indicated by Chikondi and Mphatso, immigrants often became targets of expulsion from public facilities, including hospitals and workplaces. Chikondi stated that a local resident openly kicked out foreign patients out of the hospital due to the feeling that he was not entitled to receive the same healthcare services. Kudakwashe, Mphatso, and Domingos highlighted the reality of physical threats in places where anti-immigrant vigilante groups were presented.

Most informants emphasized that interactions between local residents and immigrants result in more rejection than support, as explained by Limbani, especially in places with high economic pressure. Explaining why this is rejected, Tendai indicates that xenophobia is rooted in economic insecurity, unemployment, and the struggle to obtain limited resources such as jobs, housing, and access to basic services. Immigrants are often perceived as taking away job opportunities and placing pressure on housing and other resources, which creates jealousy and a sense of threat among local communities. This perception is clearly reflected in the informants accounts. For example, Thandeka explained that migrants are often blamed for local economic hardship, with a common belief that they "come to take jobs" or contribute to rising housing costs due to increased demand. Similarly, other informants Tendai and Chimwemwe highlighted that competition over limited employment opportunities and scarce resources frequently leads to resentment and negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Moreover, all informants assessed that mass media and social media play an important role in supporting xenophobic discourse in South Africa. According to Dalitso, the media

tends to associate immigrants with crime, insecurity, or economic crises, thereby developing similar negative impressions in society. This is exacerbated by the dissemination of biased and unverified data on social media because most anti-immigrant sentiments become popular without strong evidence, fueling fear and prejudice that in turn affect public mindset. Thandeka stated that the media sustains hatred by spreading hate speech and negative images, and Dalitso stated that the news that spreads rarely features the positive contributions that immigrants bring to the local economy.

The impact of xenophobia on the daily lives of migrants is strongly felt in access to employment, education, healthcare, and other public services, as noted by informant 5 from Malawi, who reported that discrimination occurs both openly and covertly, as stated by Domingos that Mozambican immigrants in South Africa, who often work in mining, frequently report cases of xenophobia and segregation, and even a local party called Operation Dudula supports hatred against foreigners. Moreover, according to Chikondi and Limbani xenophobia causes many migrants to work in unstable and hazardous informal sectors, or to avoid public services out of fear of being attacked, belittled, or rejected. This constant fear leads migrants to limit their social activities, thereby affecting long-term integration and well-being.

All informants believe that xenophobia remains a real problem in South Africa today. Although some mentioned that the forms of violence may not be as widespread as during the peak period, discrimination and rejection still occur extensively, especially in urban areas with high levels of poverty and unemployment. The experiences gathered from these interviews show that xenophobia has become part of everyday social dynamics, shaping relations between local residents and other African migrants, as well as influencing how communities understand identity, rights, and humanity in the context of a postcolonial state

Immigration Policy: Control and the Legacy of Repression

Apartheid was a policy of racial separation implemented in South Africa, which literally means "apartness" or "separation" in Afrikaans and Dutch (Clark & Worger, 2013, p. 3). Martin Luther King called it "the world's worst racism" (Apartheid, 1948). The policy regulated the separation of people based on race in various aspects of life, such as housing, education, employment, and even death. Apartheid was officially implemented by the National Party government after winning the elections in 1948 and remained an official practice until the party lost power in 1994 (Clark & Worger, 2013, p. 3). The term apartheid began to be used in the 1930s as a way to express the importance of the cultural identity of the African nation, separate from the English-speaking European nation in South Africa. However, during World War II, the term gained a new connotation as part of a political campaign that emphasised physical separation between races, especially between white and

black people, which was manifested through legislative policies and state actions (Clark & Worger, 2013, p. 4).

Apartheid policy placed white people at the top of the power hierarchy, while Africans and other racial groups were in lower positions, with restricted rights and limited freedoms. This condition created a police state that monitored and suppressed the majority of non-white residents through various discriminatory laws and a strong security apparatus (Said, 1979, p. 5). The legacy of colonialism and apartheid shaped an exclusive social structure and a national identity narrative that rejected 'the other' (Thinane, 2022, p. 15). The apartheid system excluded the groups according to the race and ethnic background systematically with the white citizens holding the dominant positions and the black citizens and other groups being put in the inferior positions. Here, national identity was commonly built around the migrants of other African nations as a threat (Chisadza, 2024, p. 102).

The social control system was put into place during the era of apartheid where the black citizens were required to carry residence permits (internal passports) in order to access jobs, services and some other places. There is a risk of arrest and punishment to a migrant who is discovered beyond the stipulated zones without any official authorizations. This policy was a rigid movement and labour control regime especially to the blacks and it was found to be one of the primary mechanisms keeping the system of racial segregation in South Africa intact. The policy was also employed to limit the mobility of non-white citizens and dominate racial supremacy in their day-to-day life (Medien, 2023, p. 949). Even though apartheid was formally put to an end in 1994, the rationality of exclusion and surveillance of the other remains. This is captured in the immigration policies that are more inclined to repressive elements to the migrants of the other African countries, including Zimbabwe and Mozambique, which include intensive detention and deportation policies, and a high level of support of the harsh state measures against the migrants of these countries. New types of state control that strengthen discrimination of migrants include complicated administrative processes, checks of documents of the population and the threat of arbitrary arrest and deportation (Crush & Ramachandra, 2014, p. 11). In this context, social control is no longer dominated by white over black, but is reproduced by local black citizens toward fellow African migrants, through practices resembling a colonial legacy.

This process can be understood as a form of mimicry, which occurs when postcolonial subjects imitate the forms of colonial power to consolidate their dominant position, even though this imitation still results in exclusion. Other migrants from Africa who try to adapt are often seen as 'inauthentic imitators', which in turn reinforces the perception of a threat to local identity (Crush & Ramachandra, 2014, pp. 7-10). In this context, Xenophobia becomes a symbolic instrument of identity to assert the boundaries of who has the right to be part of the community. As one informant, Dalitso expressed, 'Xenophobia greatly limits the lives of immigrants in South Africa. Basic necessities and public services, like healthcare and education, essential for human existence are denied'

In the period 2022-2025, xenophobic violence in South Africa has been closely linked to public discourse that frames migrants as sources of crime and economic insecurity. A notable case occurred in Krugersdorp in 2022, where a criminal incident triggered widespread xenophobic reactions, including mob violence, destruction of migrant housing, and public assaults against migrants. Local residents explicitly blamed migrants for rising crime rates and unemployment, with some openly calling for their expulsion. This sentiment is reflected in statements such as “they are like wolves in a sheep skin” (DW, 2022). This story demonstrates the way in which migrants are framed as an anonymous threat, which seems to be legal and harmless, but which is presumed to contain malicious intentions on the inside. This sentence belongs to the text structure which, according to the frames of Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is used to frame migrants as latent enemies. On the discursive practices level, this metaphor has an implication of the reproduction of local public opinion via the media as a mode of moral legitimacy on the acts of exclusion. In the social practice, however, the application of the metaphor strengthens the existing power systems where migrants are treated as never fully accepted group, including legal ones. This kind of symbolism is a powerful rhetorical instrument to justify the demands of mass deportation and also bolster the state policies against migrants belonging to the neighbouring countries, including Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

An announcement by one of the members of Operasi Dudula to foreign shop owners, saying, “You are displacing us. Our social economy, we don’t participate in it because of your influx into our country. You come in droves and you own all the businesses, and we end up just being spectators in our own country” (Rondganger, 2024). It demonstrates that anti-migrant discourse is produced using moral discourse of national right to economic space. On the text structure level, the use of such phrases as you are evicting us and we are just spectators in the country we live in positively frame migrants as outside agents who claim financial resources of the local people lending them economic opportunities and thus make them the direct source of poverty and inequality. Narratives in discursive practice is a replica of larger discourses enforced by movements such as Operation Dudula, a discourse that is a mixture of nationalist feeling, economic exasperation and protectionist language that is similar to state policy talk on excess inflows. On the plane of social practice, this story mirrors the colonial and Apartheid traditions that traditionally ingrained the notion that access to economic resources is scarce and that some groups need to be eliminated in order to ensure social stability. As a result, the narrative serves as a moral justification for the eviction of fellow African migrants on the grounds that they hinder the nation’s economic recovery. Thus, the Dudula discourse reinforces exclusionary structures rooted in colonial history while normalizing the practice of segregation and repression against other African migrant groups.

Black on Black Violence

Apartheid politics in South Africa inherited the classic divide-and-rule strategy by splitting society into rigid racial and ethnic categories. This social segregation reinforced the centralisation of state power and fostered tensions among local population groups themselves, not just between white and black people. This divide-and-conquer strategy made society segregated and distrustful of one another, while the state's structure maintained its dominance through practices of exclusion and racial hierarchy (Curtis, 1972, pp. 286-287). This phenomenon shows how national identity formed during the apartheid era is now reproduced by the native population to negate the presence of migrants from other parts of Africa, who are perceived as imitators and intruders within the construction of national identity. This mechanism shows how colonial power originally exercised by white people is now inherited and re-practised by the local dominant group towards migrant groups who are "almost the same but not fully accepted" or almost the same, but not quite (H. Bhabha, 1984, p. 127).

Racial violence against fellow African citizens has recently tended to increase. One of the most tragic incidents occurred in April 2022 in the Diepsloot area of Johannesburg when a migrant from Zimbabwe was beaten to death by a group of local residents for being unable to show identification documents (Amnesty International, 2023, p. 333). This phenomenon shows how migrants from other African ethnicities are still positioned as 'the other', even when they share the same skin colour and similar colonial history. In addition, organised vigilante movements such as Operation Dudula have emerged, actively encouraging the expulsion of migrants from major cities like Pretoria and Durban. This movement accuses migrants of stealing jobs, causing crime, and burdening public services. Operation Dudula has even received sympathy from some politicians ahead of the 2024 elections, highlighting how anti-immigrant sentiment is mobilised for electoral purposes and becomes an instrument of symbolic power (Allison, 2023). Laporan Human Rights Watch (2024) records that between 2022 and 2024, there were at least 170 incidents of xenophobic violence against migrants in South Africa, with the majority of perpetrators and victims coming from the same African racial groups (Human Rights Watch, 2024). 'Black on black' represents a historical reproduction of the colonial exclusion system in a new guise. Mimicry and othering play a crucial role as ideological mechanisms to maintain the boundaries of an exclusive national identity in the postcolonial state and society.

Symbolic narratives that strengthen the exclusion process for migrants also emerge from traditional figures who have symbolic authority in society. In 2015, Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini delivered a controversial statement likening migrant workers to parasites: "Let us pop our head lice... We must remove ticks and place them outside in the sun. We ask foreign nationals to pack their belongings and be sent back" (Wroughton Lesley, 2022). This statement reflects the process of othering, when migrants are no longer treated as humans but rather as social pests that must be removed to protect the 'our' community. The statement represents

three dimensions in critical discourse analysis. First, at the text level, diction such as 'head lice' and 'ticks' reflects a biological metaphor that frames migrants as non-human entities, thus opening space for the justification of symbolic violence. Second, at the discursive practice level, the Zulu King as the speaker holds a strategic position in the social structure, using the word 'we' in his statement to represent the local community, particularly the Zulu ethnic group, as the legitimate owners of the national space, while the term 'foreign nationals' is positioned as outsiders (others) who are not legitimate and must be removed. Third, at the social practice level, this statement reproduces colonial-era exclusionary structures through customary authority that functions to construct the boundaries of national identity. The mechanism of mimicry is reflected when local elites reproduce the logic of colonial exclusivism towards fellow Africans who are considered 'almost the same but not fully accepted'.

Fredson Guilengue's statement from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung reveals that the tension between black South Africans and fellow African migrants is caused by several factors directly inherited from colonialism and Apartheid, stating that "colonialism and Apartheid not only led to a split between whites and Blacks but also to a split within the Black majority putting immigrants on the bottom rung of Black South African society" (Schwikowski, 2023). Similarly, as stated by one of the informants 'I think it might be rooted in oppression, economic instability, and fear. South Africans, especially minority races, have only recently gained their freedom from apartheid. Many people there are still trying to find their place in a country that is not favorable to many. So, if people migrate to that country and 'take their jobs', especially in a country with a high unemployment rate, the citizens will surely feel hurt, angry, and dissatisfied.'

Guilengue places the issue of Xenophobia within a broader historical framework. In Fairclough's text analysis, this statement builds hierarchical relations inherited from colonial structures, where African migrants are constructed as the lowest group in the social hierarchy, a form of mimicry created through internal social structures that have undergone colonisation. At the level of discursive practice, the statement shows how the narrative of colonial history is reproduced by research institutions and the media, thereby providing intellectual legitimacy to the understanding that today's Xenophobia is not merely spontaneous hatred, but a continued manifestation of social segmentation that has been formed since the apartheid era. Meanwhile, in social practice, Guilengue's explanation emphasises that violence against migrants is not just a matter of identity or economy, but a replication of colonial patterns of domination that operate by positioning migrants as a group that is always 'less entitled' within South African spaces. Thus, the statement reinforces the analysis that contemporary Xenophobia reproduces colonial hierarchies that divide black communities themselves and force migrants into the 'other' position, the most vulnerable in postcolonial society.

From the Native Land Act to Discrimination Against Fellow African Migrants

In the context of South African history, the 1913 Native Land Act explicitly restricted the land ownership rights of black citizens (natives) through the following provisions: From and after the commencement of this Act, land outside the scheduled native areas shall, until Parliament, acting upon the report of the commission appointed under this Act, shall have made other provision, be subjected to the following provisions, that is to say: – Except with the approval of the Governor-General – A native shall not enter into any agreement or transaction for the purchase, hire, or other acquisition from a person other than a native, of any such land or of any right thereto, interest therein, or servitude thereover; and a person other than a native shall not enter into any agreement or transaction for the purchase, hire, or other acquisition from a native of any such land or of any right thereto, interest therein, or servitude thereover." (Native Land Act, 1913, Section 1(1))"

These provisions prohibited black citizens from buying or renting land outside the scheduled areas (native reserves) without the permission of the Governor-General, while non-natives were also not allowed to buy from black citizens without permission. Historical analysis shows that these native reserves only accounted for approximately 7% of the total area of South Africa at that time (Clark & Worger, 2013, pp. 55-56). These figures confirm that black residents were confined to very limited areas, while the majority of the land remained in the hands of colonial authorities and white residents. From Fairclough's CDA perspective, this prohibition is repressive and ideological, reinforcing colonial power relations, creating a dichotomy of us (white authorities) vs. them (natives), and reproducing structural subordination. The restriction of areas to only 7% strengthened economic and symbolic exclusion, while also forming the discursive basis for land conflicts and post-apartheid Xenophobia, as land ownership became an indicator of contested identity and historical legitimacy (Clark & Worger, 2013, pp. 55-56). In the post-apartheid era, the legacy of discrimination has not been entirely erased. Instead, it has transformed into intra-Black ethnic tensions over claims to land, particularly in areas with high economic value. A study by Kramer (2020) shows that post-apartheid land redistribution projects often spark conflicts between local ethnic groups, including between indigenous residents and internal migrants from other provinces. Disputes over 'original rights' to land become a means to negate the presence of other groups considered 'intruders', reflecting the reproduction of colonial exclusion in a new form. This reinforces the logic of Xenophobia against migrants from neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe or Mozambique, who are perceived as lacking 'historical rights' to the land, even though culturally and historically they are also part of Sub-Saharan Africa (Kramer, 2020, p. 15). The discourse on land ownership in this context indicates that ethnic identity, claims over space, and colonial heritage continue to shape social tensions in contemporary South Africa. An informant, Limbani, noted that migrants are often seen as competitors for 'jobs, housing, and even land,' considered to belong to local communities, extension and rejection.

In the Expropriation Act, 2025, public interest is defined as “the public interest includes the nation’s commitment to land reform, and to reforms to bring about equitable access to all South Africa’s natural resources; and property is not limited to land” (Government Gazette Republic of South Africa, 2025, p. 2). From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (2013), the definition constructs meaning that positions public interest narrowly within the framework of land reform policy and natural resource management. Although the wording contains egalitarian claims through the phrase equitable access, the subject referred to as “public” is implicitly limited to legally recognised citizens, thus excluding migrant groups who have historically been involved in the agricultural sector or resource utilisation. This pattern can be understood through Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of mimicry, where the postcolonial state imitates the language and symbols of social justice that appear progressive, yet maintains exclusionary structures inherited from colonialism. During the colonial period, agrarian policies were also packaged with the rhetoric of “public interest” to legitimise land control, while simultaneously excluding African black groups from full ownership (Fay, 2010, p. 249). This confirms that the definition of public interest in the law reproduces the logic of colonial exclusion in a new legal and formal form, indicating an ideological continuity between colonial and postcolonial policies through a seemingly neutral legal discourse.

Although the legal constructions and policies in South Africa have historically largely reproduced colonial exclusion, such as the Native Land Act of 1913, which limited land ownership for black citizens to only about 7% of the total area (Clark & Worger, 2013, p. 23; Worden, 2009, pp. 55–56). The implementation of pass laws during the apartheid era controlled the mobility and work access of non-white citizens (Medien, 2023, p. 949). As well as the bantustan policies that separated areas based on ethnicity, such as Transkei for the Xhosa and KwaZulu for the Zulu (Szeftel, 1994, pp. 185–186). Social reality shows that the country remains a major magnet for migrants from the southern African region. In the post-apartheid era, this pattern of exclusion is also reflected in the Expropriation Act 2024, where the definition of public interest limits access only to legal citizens, thus excluding migrants who have historically contributed to the agricultural and natural resource sectors (Government Gazette Republic of South Africa, 2025, p. 2).

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that xenophobia toward intra-African migrants in South Africa during the 2022–2025 period is often understood as a result of economic pressures or high unemployment. However, this phenomenon reflects a deeper historical and political process rooted in the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, which continue to shape contemporary social relations. Through a postcolonial approach integrating the concepts of othering and mimicry, supported by Critical Discourse Analysis, this study finds that xenophobia

functions as both a symbolic and structural mechanism for maintaining the boundaries of an exclusive national identity. Migrants are constructed as “the other” through discursive practices that portray them as economic threats, criminals, or illegitimate actors within the national space, despite sharing relatively similar racial and historical backgrounds with local communities. At the same time, mimicry is reflected in how local communities reproduce colonial logics of exclusion and hierarchy to assert their dominance over migrants.

Empirical findings based on interviews indicate that xenophobia has become embedded in everyday life and manifests in various forms, including social exclusion, discrimination in public services, verbal abuse, and physical violence. These experiences are further reinforced by media narratives, political rhetoric, and the emergence of anti-immigrant movements such as Operation Dudula, particularly within the 2022–2025 context marked by economic instability and intensified competition over resources. Ultimately, this study argues that contemporary xenophobia in South Africa represents a reproduction of colonial hierarchies within a postcolonial context, where exclusion is no longer based on racial divisions between white and black populations, but instead occurs within African communities themselves. This phenomenon, often referred to as “black-on-black violence,” highlights how historical systems of domination continue to be internalized and reproduced.

Theoretically, this study contributes by emphasizing the importance of integrating postcolonial theory and discourse analysis in understanding xenophobia beyond purely material explanations. Nevertheless, this study also acknowledges its limitations, particularly in terms of data collection methods. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ more in-depth approaches, such as ethnographic or participatory methods, to capture lived experiences more comprehensively and to better understand social dynamics at the community level within postcolonial societies.

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