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# **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS: THE EFFECTS OF XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENTAL FAILURES**

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**Abstract:** The study examined how poverty and unemployment conditions of black South Africans played a part in post-apartheid xenophobic violence and crisis of development in South Africa. A qualitative research approach and explanatory research design was adopted for the study. One research question and one research hypothesis guided the study. Data was also collected through interviews, textbooks, archival materials, journals, internet, government gazettes, periodicals, newspapers, conferences and seminar papers, magazines, etcetera for the analysis of the variables under investigation. The research interview questions were content validated by an expert in the field of social research while discriminatory method was used to ascertain the reliability of the data collection instruments. Qualitative tool such as the narrative analytic technique was adopted for the data analysis. The study reports that poverty and unemployment conditions of black South Africans played a part in post-apartheid xenophobic violence and crisis of development in South Africa. The study concluded that the poverty and unemployment condition of black South African Youths is a contributory factor to xenophobic violence in South Africa. The study advocates that there is an urgent need to create policies and programmes that will address the issue of high rate of poverty and unemployment among the South African youths.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Unemployment, Black South Africans, Post-Apartheid, Xenophobic Violence, Crisis, Development.

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### **Introduction**

The policy frameworks that have shaped the South African growth path are not simply neo-liberal rather, they constitute a complex mix of free market and social democratic elements (Seeking & Natras, 2015). These elements are organized around a nationalist project of modernization through global economic integration that seeks to use the benefits of globalization and economic growth within a broadly redistributive project (Seeking & Natras, 2015); this project was not informed by an understanding of the downsides of economic integration. The ANC's redistributive programme focused on the centrality of racial rather than class divides, and the largely urban based, middle class policy makers of ANC had little real understanding of the realities facing black rural South Africans and urban migrants.

The neo-liberal policy innovations and protective re-regulation were deployed in a package intended to serve the interest of nationalist modernization and redistribution. In the last years of Apartheid era, the extensive system of regulatory and fiscal protection that had sustained commercial white agriculture from the 1940s onward was already in the process. Under the ANC, this was accelerated partly in order to ensure access for South African products to overseas markets, but also in the hope those inefficient white farmers, who supposedly owed their survival to Apartheid era market distortions, would be shaken out of the system, creating opportunities for emergent black farmers (Hall, 2017). At the same time, a sweeping package of legislative measures was passed to protect the labour rights and entrench the tenure rights of farm workers (Du Toit & Ally, 2020). The effects, however, was the opposite of what was intended. In the aggregate, access to over sea's market did benefit South African agriculture; but these benefits were largely captured by those who had already leveraged in the system and who were able to compete in global markets (Du Toit & Ally, 2020). The most important consequence of process of agricultural liberation was not to drive white commercial farmers out of the market but to encourage rapid and far reaching processes of agro-food restructuring, and to intensify already on-going dynamics of market concentration and vertical integration (Bernstein, 2015). Markets in fertilizers, agro-chemicals, agricultural services and grain storage rapidly became characterized by high degrees of concentration and oligopolies (ACB, 2015).

Similar changes soon took place downstream among food processors and retailers (Igumbor et al, 2018). The growth of market power in input and output markets in turn encouraged concentration in the productive sector itself. Both in over sea's market and locally the growing importance of economics of scale within the value chain governance created strong pressure towards scale; creating an environment in which survival as a productive enterprise required farmers to get big or get out (Mather, 2019). Over the course of 20 years, the total number of farming units operating in the South African commercial sector were reduced almost by half dropping from around 60,000 in 1994 to 35,000 in 2013 (Okuniola et al, 2016). Food production is increasing dominated by a small number of large consolidated farms and food processors; in 2015, it was estimated that some 80% of the food in South Africa's retail outlets are produced by the 20% of the farmers (Cousins, 2016).

The dynamics resulted in an overall reduction of the employment creation capacity of South African agriculture. The legislation created to protect workers' rights and farm worker tenure did little to hold back the tide. In fact, they seem to have exacerbated those tendencies, as farmers responded to labour market re-regulation by retrenching all but the most essential workers from their permanent on-farm labour force and pre-emptively

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evicting workers to prevent the establishment of long-term tenure rights (Du Toit & Ally, 2020). In the first ten years after Apartheid, there were 940,000 forced evictions from commercial farmlands, and a total of 2.3 million farm dwellers were displaced-people pushed off the land, not by the racist processes of Apartheid dispossession but by the normal dynamics of capitalist economic growth (Wegerif, 2016).

Less evident than evictions and retrenchments were the implications of agro-food concentration for the non-farm economy. Upstream and downstream value chain concentration tends to undermine the formation of local multipliers diminishing the ability of agricultural development to support local employment. A recent DFTD-ESRC Growth Research Programme (DEGRP) Study on the growth potential of agricultural development in South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe found that in contexts of value chain concentration, the enterprises that link rural economies to urban context tend to have a markedly enclavic character while spatially extensive value chains do create external connections between rural localities and distant markets; these links tend not to be locally embedded (Du Toit & Neves, 2020). Large scale industrial-style plantation agriculture, for instance, is typically, characterized by backward and forward linkages that bypass local markets. Production, consumption and investment expenditure tends to be captured by distant players, with even specialized agricultural services not being provided by local entrepreneurs. Downstream links are also spatially extensive with few marketing opportunities for local entrepreneurs and vendors (Neves & Hakizimana, 2015).

A similarly depressing impact on local employment generation follows from the penetration of rural landscapes by large, national or international supermarket retailers with tightly governed, highly integrated and centralized distribution network; not only does this encouraged a race to the bottom in local markets, crowding out local entrepreneurs and shopkeepers but their supply chains often bypass local producers (Peterseen, 2021). In many of South Africans rural areas, therefore, including those that feature relatively dynamic forms of large-scale commercial farming, primary agriculture makes a relatively small contribution to local employment, while the local non-farm economy is de-linked from agriculture; and dependent on fiscal transfer and service industries (Neves & Hakiziimena, 2015).

Despite all that have been written about xenophobic violence and crisis of development in South Africa, the situation keeps reoccurring. In order to contribute a contemporary literature in the area, this study examines how poverty and unemployment conditions of black South Africans contributes to post-apartheid xenophobic violence and crisis of development in South Africa.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Reoccurrence of xenophobic violence in South Africa, during which hundreds of xenophobic related riots and violence are experienced has become a source of concern for the country and global community at large. Recent studies showed that migrants across South Africa face many difficulties ranging from work harassments to business threats to outright violence and intimidation. The hostility and violence directed at foreigners have become integral features of everyday life in cities like Johannesburg, Pretoria, Port-Elizabeth and Cape Town, making it difficult for the targeted populace to freely carry out their business and or other employment endeavours. This has made life of black South Africans and migrants more difficult and expanding the case of unemployment and poverty situation in the country.

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In addition, Crush (2018) documented a daily pattern of violence perpetrated against foreign black migrants by South Africans residing in Cape Town informal settlements, whereby refugee communities were forced off their dwellings and their property looted by South Africans. Attacks on black African immigrants were reported in Mashumelele in Cape Town in 2006 and Mother-well in Port-Elizabeth in 2007; shops owned by Somalis were burnt and looted, and shop-keepers killed because of business competition (Camaroff, 2016). These incidences seem to have increased the case of poverty and unemployment in the country with the tendency of affected people being driven into crimes and violence. It is based on the foregoing that wonders if the poverty and unemployment conditions of black South Africans plays a role in post-apartheid xenophobic violence and crisis of development in South Africa?

### **Research Question**

1. How does poverty and unemployment condition of black South Africans interface with xenophobic violence in South Africa?

### **Research Hypothesis**

1. Poverty and unemployment condition of black South Africans is fuelling xenophobic violence in South Africa

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Poverty and Unemployment condition of Black South Africans that might be contributing to Xenophobic Violence**

A sociological analysis of the nature of inequality in South Africa fifteen years after the coming of democracy reveals a class structure strikingly similar to that which pertained at the end of Apartheid; at the top was an upper class consisting of 17% households that together commanded 55% of income; below them is an intermediate grouping, the 46% of households that belong to the lower middle class and the organized industrial working class; this is another 35% of household income. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the households belonging to a fragmented and marginalized underclass- precarious workers, farm labourers, the landless rural poor, and those surviving at the fringes of the informal economy. Together, these groupings making up some 35% of South African households that earn about 10% of household income (Seekings & Natrass, 2015).

A significant number of this underclass is composed of poor and landless people who had migrated to towns and cities; sometimes in search of jobs but increasingly do seek access to some of the benefits and services the state offered. Many of these are farm workers and ex-farm workers living on the commercial farm lands, informal shanty-towns and RDP settlements around smaller urban centers. The greatest concentration of poverty, however, is still to be found in the former Bantustan areas. Here, an analysis of indices of multiple deprivations shows that the spatial distribution of poverty achieved by Apartheid has persisted almost unchanged, with massive differentials in welfare coinciding with former homeland boundaries (Nobel, 2019). A major reason is undoubtedly the failure of government land reform to provide subsistence farmers with security of tenure, agricultural support and access to informal markets, water and lands; while agriculture still makes a small but vital contribution to livelihood, most of this population has been reduced to what Beinart calls a "Pensionarat", dependent mostly on remittances from urban areas and social grants (Bank & Minkley, 2019).

Crucially, the limited livelihood prospect of all these marginalized populations-the rural pensionarat, displaced farm workers, and mobile per-urban migrants- are all shaped by the formal and informal links that continue to

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connect urban and rural economies. One important part of this dynamics is constituted by the spatially extensive value chains, distribution networks and payment systems that allow players in the urban economy to colonize economic opportunities, access market and lock in customers in the rural areas (Philip, 2020); but an equally important role is played by the distributed networks of informal sociality that underpin resources flow between urban and rural households (Du Toit & Neves, 2020). These economic forces have played a central role in what can perhaps most accurately be dubbed a process of jobless de-agrarianization; a stalled agrarian transition by which rural people are steadily being driven out of agrarian and land-based livelihood, without being able to access opportunities in the non-farm economy (James, 2022).

Corroborating the elicited primary data, Jeff (2018) uses the scapegoat theory in which he explains that the feelings of discontent and frustration due to deprivation and poverty in relation to lack of resources and jobs, causes anger in the locals. Filled with this anger and frustration, the indigenous blacks South Africans who make up the majority of the population, tend to look for targets to blame. In this situation, black African migrants, who make up a minority of the population, become the ready-made and easiest scapegoats for the indigenous black South Africans' frustrations, difficulties and animosity. This is especially true when one considers that they are viewed as threats and as contributing to the plight of indigenous black South Africans and their precarious socio-economic state. In addition, unemployment and poverty, there is the issue of service delivery, which is linked to socio-economic causes.

The post-apartheid realities have been a long way from the expectations of the people. This is exemplified by the 2015 Living Conditions Survey (LCS) performed by the South African Development of Statistics, which indicated that over half of South African adults (49.2%) living below the upper-bound poverty line (UPBL) (South African Department of Statistics, 2020). Similarly, Zondi (2018) argued that way in which indigenous black South Africans inhabitants on the outskirts of towns, in response to intolerable socio-economic conditions such as cries against overcrowding and bad settlements, unemployment, poverty and neglect, blame outsiders for their plights. This explains why of the population of South African adults living below the poverty line, Gauteng and the Western Cape had the lowest proportions of adults living in poverty (South Africa department of Statistics, 2020). The provinces with the highest numbers of adults living in poverty line are, according to the Living Conditions Survey by SADS (2020) are Limpopo (67.5%), Eastern Cape (67.3%), Kwazulu-Natal (60.7%) and Northwest with (59.6%). For these four provinces, significantly more than half of their populations were living in poverty. Gauteng and Western Cape therefore ranked highest in poverty rate with 29.3% and 33.2% respectively (South Africa department of Statistics, 2020).

Coupled with this finding, the unemployment rate in South Africa has expectedly increased to 29% in the second quarter of 2019 from 27.4% in the previous period. As reported by Trading-Economics in South Africa, it was the highest jobless rate since 2003 as the number of unemployed rises from 455,000 to 6.65 million. With this new unemployment rate of 2019, South Africa now falls in the category of countries with the highest unemployment in Africa with Congo (46.10%), Namibia (33.4%), Angola (29.0%), South Africa (29.0%), Mozambique (25.04%), Lesotho (23.60%), and Nigeria 23.10% in first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh positions respectively (Trading-Economics, 2019). Intriguingly, the hotbeds and launch rates of xenophobic attacks in South Africa had the highest rates of poverty and unemployment. Xenophobic attacks have been more common



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in towns and suburbs in provinces such as Gauteng, kwazulu-Natal, Northwest, West cape and Eastern Cape than in other areas with superior living conditions assessments and employment rates.

The poverty rate of South Africa's nine provinces differs significantly, as do those of the urban and rural areas of the country. In 2005/2006, the poverty rates in the various provinces ranged from 24.9% in Gauteng and 28.8% in the Western Cape to 57.6% in the Eastern Cape and 64.6% in Limpopo (Stats SA, 2020). The three Provinces with the highest poverty and unemployment rates (Kwa-Zulu-natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo) are also relatively populous (IES, 2015); they housed 47.4% of the South African population. The incidence of poverty was much higher in the rural areas of South Africa. The poverty rates households and individuals in the rural areas were 54.2% and 67.7% respectively- more than double of the corresponding rates for urban areas; hence, 57.1% of all poor households and 59.3% of poor individuals were rural dwellers despite the fact that the rural areas housed below one-half of the South African population (Igwe, 2016). Paula (2022) posits further that South Africa's apartheid past imparted a strong and stubborn racial character to the country's poverty level and distributions of income and wealth. In 2005 and 2006, more than a decade after democratization, the incidence of poverty among black and coloured individuals remained dramatically higher than that among whites. One implication of the particularly heavy incidence of poverty among blacks is that the black group's share of poor individuals markedly exceeded that predicted by its population share.

Living condition and access to services are areas in which considerable disparities exist between the poor and the non-poor. Indeed, the lack of access to services experienced by the poor often contributes to the difficulty entailed in moving out of a state of poverty. The portion of households that lived in informal and traditional dwellings decreased steadily from the first to the fifth quintile. It remained significant up to the fourth quintile, in which almost one-fifth of households used such housing (Stats SA, 2020). The reality that almost 2/3 of the households in the first quintile had access to main electricity supply and that this percentage increased further to reach 96.6% in the richest quintile confirms the success of electrification programme during the past decade. Access to piped water was less common; however, being restricted to, slightly more than 40% of the poorest quintile and less than half of all poor households. At the lower bound poverty line, only 46.8% of households had access to pipe water (Stats SA, 2020). This implies that the poor spend a considerable amount of time travelling to fetch water. Another activity that imposes a heavy time burden on many poor households is collecting firewood; reliance on wood as an energy source remained common in the first quintile (where 37.5% of households use wood as their main source of energy for cooking, but decreased sharply in the higher quintile (Stats SA, 2020).

### **Research Methodology**

The study applied a qualitative research approach and adopted explanatory research design for logic and systematic examination of issues based on research prepositions and analysis of generated data. The study relied on qualitative type of data and consulted a lot of documentary sources for data. Data was also collected through interviews, textbooks, archival materials, journals, internet, government gazettes, periodicals, newspapers, conferences and seminar papers, magazines, etcetera for the analysis of the variables under investigation.

The research interview questions subjected to content validation by an expert in the field of social research. He examined the design in terms of importance and appropriateness of the contents before the final draft of the instrument. On the other hand, for reliability of the instrument, the researcher adopted the item discriminatory

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method on selected xenophobic violence in South Africa. This ensured that the relationship between the key variables of the study were properly examined and confirmed reliable. Qualitative tool such as the narrative analytic technique was adopted for the data analysis. This ensured a detailed description and interpretation of observed events and interactions in the study.

### **Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussions**

**Research Question 1:** How does poverty and unemployment condition of black South Africans interface with xenophobic violence in South Africa?

#### **Respondents' Views on how poverty and unemployment conditions has impacted on xenophobic attacks by black South Africans on African migrants**

In reaction to this question, the respondents interviewed acknowledged government's efforts in addressing the issue of poverty and unemployment in the country by providing some social safety-net such as grants and provisions of free basic services in terms of water and electricity. They stated that progress made on addressing poverty and unemployment in South Africa by the government appears to have stalled; despite a decline in poverty between 2006 and 2011, poverty and unemployment levels had once again risen by 2015; from a low of 53.2% in 2011, by 2015, over half of all South Africans (55.5%), 30.4 million people, were living in poverty. This is according to the upper bound poverty line of R992 per person per month in 2015 prices (Statistics SA, 2020). In same vein, another respondent aptly stated: "Poverty is highest among young people, with 63.7% of children under 17 years and 58.6% of 18–24-year-olds living in poverty, compared to 40.4% of 45–54-year-olds".

Poverty in South Africa continues to reflect the historical and contemporary racial divisions in the country. According to Igunmbor (2018), in 2015 only 4.1% of white South Africans were classified as poor, compared to 20.5% of Asian/Indians, 56.8% of coloured (a South African term referring to those of mixed-race parentage) and 70.75% of black South Africans.

The capitalist system in contemporary South Africa continues to reproduce inequality across all areas of social and economic life, despite the demise of apartheid. Income inequality in South Africa remains high and is driven predominantly by wage inequality. Indeed, as Igunmbor (2018) shows, wage inequality accounts for 91% of overall income inequality in South Africa; inequality in educational system in South Africa is not exclusive to tertiary institutions but exists in basic education and vocational training too. This is compounded by the fact that South Africa has extremely high returns to tertiary education, leading to a cycle of privilege reinforcing inequality (Igwe, 2016). In addition, there is evidence that tertiary education largely excludes the poor and very poor; over 80% of students who qualify to apply to study at degree level came from the top two income deciles (Igunmbor, 2018).

Conversely, those who are excluded from higher education are often restricted to low paid, precarious jobs and in most worrisome cases leading to unemployment. This respondent expressed her view that exclusion of the poor black South Africans from gaining admission into tertiary education and basic education made it difficult for them to secure gainful employment; majority of black South Africans, especially, young ones, ended up doing low-paid and precarious jobs. According to Francis (2019:9) the labour market remains at the core of South Africa's socio-economic challenges. In 1994, the narrow unemployment rate was 20% rising to 26.7% in 2000 and falling to 23.5% by 2007 (International Labour Organization, 2017). By 2017, however, the unemployment rate had risen

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to 27.7%, the highest level so far in the current decade (Statistics SA, 2020). Current political uncertainty and poor economic growth are predicted to drive the narrow unemployment rate even further, towards 30% in the coming years (Manon, 2020).

**Hypothesis 1:** Poverty and unemployment condition of black South African Youths is fueling xenophobic violence in South Africa

### **Poverty and Unemployment Conditions of Black South African Youths and xenophobic violence in South Africa**

Given the above-mentioned factor fuelling xenophobic violence in South Africa, other factors such as poverty and unemployment conditions of black South African youths may be regarded as a cardinal and significant factor. The end of Apartheid era in the early 1990s and the first democratic elections in 1994, thrust South Africa into an exciting political era, but left it encumbered with vast inequalities across the race groups and extensive and deep poverty (Francis, 2019:5). In some respects, South Africa has made significant progress in reducing poverty. One of the key policy interventions in this regard has been the wide-spread- roll-out of a social assistance programme in the form of society grants, coupled with a highly redistributive fiscal policy; while there is not provision for the working age population, grants are provided to careers of children under the age of 18, the disabled and pensioners.

A World Bank report in 2020 found that 70 percent of social grant spending, and 54 percent of spending on education and health were directed to the poorest half of the population.

According to the findings, social grants and the provision of free basic services (such as water and electricity) lift the incomes of approximately 3.6 million South Africans above US \$2.50 per day (Purchasing Power Parity), which resulted in the rate of extreme poverty being cut by half, to 16.5% from 34.4 between the end of apartheid and 2011 (World Bank, 2020). Comparing current poverty statistics to those at the turn of the twenty-first century, Leibbrandt (2018) find that there is general consensus that money-metric poverty has declined in South Africa. They note that various cross-sectional studies of poverty using household survey data have chronicled a decline in the poverty headcount that is largely attributed to the role of state support of household incomes (Leibbrandt, 2018:2). Indeed, they found that access to state social grants was the main cause of individuals existing poverty.

### **Conclusion**

Xenophobic attacks against black African nationals in South Africa are very unique because of its looting, exploiting, killing, vandalism and selective nature. The mangled attitude of violence of the South Africans against selected fellow Africans mostly African migrants is stemmed from critical issues, some of which are poverty and unemployment among the frustrated and grieving populace. Undoubtedly, the xenophobic violence against other African nationals living in South Africa is becoming a cog in the wheel of development in South Africa. The rate of tourists from other African states has dwindled, thereby affecting the revenue accrue to the government. The lives and properties of some South Africans, black African nationals and other have always been targeted for destruction. These issues are directly and or indirectly linked to poor and unemployed citizenry. The study concludes that the poverty and unemployment condition of black South African Youths is a contributory factor to xenophobic violence in South Africa.



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### **Recommendations**

In line with findings of the study advocates that there is an urgent need to create policies and programmes that will address the issue of high rate of poverty and unemployment among the South African youths. Youth empowerment programmes should be put in places so that the less privileged black South African youths will be equipped with basic skills for a living. Free educational programmes should be created. This will give the black South Africans an opportunity to acquire sound education that will prepare them for development challenges ahead.

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