XENOPHOBIA AND THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE OTHER

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Abstract

The United Nations Report on Migration in 2019, observes that the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow over the past seventeen years, reaching 272 million in 2019, up from 258 million in 2018, 248 million in 2015, 220 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000. Between 2000 and 2005, the international migrant stock grew by an average of 2 per cent per year. During the period 2005-2010, the annual growth rate accelerated, reaching 2.9 per cent. With the growth in the number of migrants, issues such as xenophobia have emerged on the front pages of human relationship at the international level, raising questions such as: How does my relationship with another affect my humanity? Does the issue of origin and identity affect and supersede the question of equality and dignity? Is the migrant less human than those who are not migrants? Is it possible to strike a balance between "what is good" and the "politics of fear"? The present work carves it niche by studying the phenomenon of xenophobia within the ecology of African philosophy of migration. For the purpose of this study, the complementary approach, which marks the identity of African philosophy, would be employed. Contrary to popular perspectives, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scape-goating theory would be patronized as a sociological theory for dissection of prejudice in a period of change and social transition.

Keywords: Xenophobia, African, Philosophy, Migration, Complementarity, Ecology

Introduction

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of philosophy reveals that for centuries, philosophers from Kant to Walzer have raised questions about the freedom of movement, state coercion, liberty, citizenship and belonging. Recent discourses in the area of Migration have continued to attract the attention of philosophers of different schools of thought and affiliations. And gradually, philosophers are beginning to find points of convergence between philosophy and migration. The questions that these thinkers have attempted at borders on identity, ethics and anthropology. Questions such as: what do these situations tell us about human dignity and the value of human life? How does my relationship with another affect my humanity? Does the issue of origin and identity affect and supersede the question of equality and dignity? Is the migrant less human than those who are not migrants? Is it possible to strike a balance between "what is good" and the "politics of fear"? On what values

would a fairer migration policy be based'? How can thinking help to break down existing paradigms of 'us and them'? Are there inconsistencies and inhumanities in the current approach to migration? These are fundamental questions that go beyond the twitter and facebook responses to the phenomenon of migration, usually responses of a pragmatic fashion or after the usual persuasive political rhetoric, instead of one that delivers with philosophical insight (Kanu 2019).

In the 1950s, when African states started gaining independence from their colonial masters, their antidote to the destructive Balkanisation of their continent under colonialism was pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism was a movement which began in the 1920s that emphasized the unity and strength of Africans and people of African descent around the world. Thus, it held that Africans had a common history and that their destiny belonged together. In Africa, it was championed by leaders such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, among others. This pan-African movement notwithstanding, a new spirit has emerged in Africa: xenophobia. The present work carves out it's niche by studying the phenomenon of xenophobia within the ecology of African philosophy. In the face of the rising phenomenon of xenophobia, what can the African philosophical perspective contribute to the on-going discussions? For the purpose of this study, the complementary approach, which marks the identity of African philosophy, would be employed. Contrary to popular perspectives, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scape-goating theory would be patronized as a sociological theory for dissection of prejudice in a period of change and social transition. However, what is xenophobia?

Xenophobia: Questions of Meaning, Theory and Causes

The word **xenophobia** is taken from the Greek words *xénos*, meaning 'the stranger' and 'the guest' and *phóbos*, meaning 'fear'. Thus, Smelser and Baltes (2001) speak of xenophobia as 'fear of the stranger', but usually the term is taken to mean 'hatred of strangers'. It is also within this parameter that Klaude (2001) understands xenophobia as "an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population" (p.2). However, at the International level, no universally accepted definition of xenophobia exists, though it can be described as attitudes, attributes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

There is a close link between racism and xenophobia. In fact, they are two terms that can hardly be differentiated from each other (UNESCO 2019; Kanu 2019a). However, while xenophobia and racism often overlap, they are distinct phenomena. Whereas racism usually entails distinction based on physical characteristic differences, such as skin colour, hair type, facial

features, etc., xenophobia implies behavior based on the idea that the other is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation (UNESCO 2019). The difficulty in differentiating the two concepts or experiences is often based on the fact that differences in physical characteristics are often taken to distinguish the 'other' from the common community. It is often difficult to differentiate between racism and xenophobia as motivations for behaviour.

After the 2008 xenophobic attack in South Africa, their government blamed it on the criminal elements, opposition and sinister forces. At the time, the Minister of Intelligence blamed both criminals for playing a role in the attack, and foreigners for instigating the xenophobic violence. After the 2019 xenophobic attacks, Mozambicans and Nigerians who were the key targets were considered by the media as the cause because they were alleged the key perpetrators of illegal immigration and drug dealing. These perspectives notwithstanding, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scape-goating theory is employed as a sociological theory for the interpretation of the phenomenon (Allport 1961). The theory believes that it is frustration that leads to prejudice, mainly from marginalized local groups who identify foreigners as scapegoats. People displace their frustration onto convenient targets, thereby obscuring the actual causes of their anxiety. Hostile attitudes are formed in relation to unmet promises and limited resources, such as housing, education, healthcare and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999). Thus, a 'frustration scapegoat' is created, who is perceived as the key reason for the local population's continuous poverty and deprivation (Tshitereke 1999:4). Connected to this theory are the following causes:

a. the perspectives of Fungurai (2015) and Soyombo (2008) that xenophobic violence is caused by poverty and unemployment, especially amongst the youth. South Africa's unemployment rate has risen significantly. The unemployment rate in 1995, a year after transitioning to democracy, stood at 15%. In 2014 year-end unemployment rate was 24.3%. Recently, it has hit 34.6%.
b. xenophobia is also associated with jealousy on the part of locals in respect of job opportunities, foreigners agreeing to lower salaries and foreign business successes (Clark 2011:5; Khosa & Malitani 2014)
c. foreigners' attraction to local girls as they can afford to take care of them more than the local men (Dodson & Oelofse 2002:134; Mnyaka 2003)
d. the perception of foreigners as cheap laborers who 'steal' jobs from the locals (Nyamnjoh 2006:2; Steinberg 2010).

e. Charman and Piper (2012) espoused the belief that local shopkeepers whose businesses had suffered because of foreign competition become both hostile and bitter with foreign competition, thus leading to xenophobia.
f. using a plethora of derogatory names, characterized by stigmatization and stereotypes in reference to immigrants, have been used by the print media, which has had an influence on the human behaviour of groups of foreign Africans (Ngcamu and Mantzaris 2019).
g. The position of the government on immigrants; before the 2008 xenophobic attack in South Africa, it was alleged that the state organs were already geared towards hounding African immigrants while the highest leadership had declared it a state of emergency (Ngcamu and Mantzaris 2019).
h. New migration patterns that have developed as an effect of the gradual internationalization of the labor market during the post-colonial era (UNESCO 2019).
i. The increasing reality of globalization, gradually transforming us into cosmopolitans on a global conference table (UNESCO 2019).

Selected Xenophobic Activities in Human History

The discourse on selected xenophobic activities in human history is meant to concretize our understanding of xenophobia. The selected xenophobic activities would begin from the international dimensions, which would be narrowed down to concrete experiences of xenophobia in the African context.

1. Early Greeks (8 BCE - 2 BCE)

Early indices of xenophobia can be traced to the denigration of foreigners by ancient Greece as 'Babarians'. This was based on the belief that the Greek people and culture were superior to all others, and the subsequent conclusion that barbarians were naturally meant to be enslaved (Harrison 2002).

2. Early Roman (2 BCE – 5 ACE)

Xenophobic sentiments were also present among the ancient Romans who held notions of superiority over all other peoples. In the speech of Manius Acilius that: 'There, as you know, there were Macedonians and Thracians and Illyrians, all most warlike nations, here Syrians and Asiatic Greeks, the most worthless peoples among mankind and born for slavery' (Isaac 2006, p.317).

3. Germany- Nazi Racial Policy

After the First World War, there emerged an increased use of anti-Semitism and other racial thoughts in political discourse in Germany, which culminated in the ascent of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933. The Nazi racial policy and the Nuremberg Race Laws against Jews and other non-Aryans represented the most explicit racist policies in Europe in the twentieth century. These laws

deprived all Jews as well as other non-Aryans from German citizenship. The official title of the Jews became: 'Subject of the State'. The Nuremberg Race Laws forbade racially mixed sexual relations and marriage between Aryans and Jews, Gypsies, Negroes or their bastard offspring. Such interracial relations became a criminal and punishable offence under the race laws known as 'racial pollution' (Burleigh 1991 and Milton 2001).

4. Saudi Arabia

Cases of xenophobia against labor workers who are foreigners, mostly from developing countries have been recorded in Saudi Arabia. Human Rights Watch (2004) observes that African and Asian maids have been persecuted, raped, exploited, under- or unpaid, physically abused, overworked, locked in their places of employment and discriminated. In many of these cases, Parekh (2006) and Gethin (2013) report that the workers are unwilling to report their employers for fear of losing their jobs or further abuse.

5. Trans-Sahara Slave Trade

The Arabs were engaged in the purchase of slaves, which were transported through the Sahara to North Africa and Arabia between the 8^{th} and 16^{th} centuries. It was principally between North Africa and the empires of Sudan. The misery of these slaves was enormous (Kanu 2013).

6. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

The end of 16^{th} century saw the decline of the Trans-Sahara Slave Trade and the emergence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which shifted attention from the desert to the coasts. The European slave trade was more sophistication than that of the Arab's. During this trade, about 12 million Africans were transported to Europe and America, where they lived very horrible conditions (Kanu 2013).

7. **Aliens Compliance Order of 1969**

Kofi Busia, the then Prime Minister of Ghana asked Nigerians and other African nationals in the country to leave Ghana. This was born out of the rising economic hardship in Ghana and the increase in the population of non nationals who were then about 20% of Ghana's total population. About 3 million non nationals left the country at the time as a result of the Aliens Compliance Order.

8. **Ghana Must Go of 1983**

In 1870, with the discovery of oil, Nigeria accommodated the Ghanians among other non nationals, who did so many jobs that Nigerians couldn't do at the time. In 1980, when the economy went bad, Nigerians blamed the Ghanians and other non nationals for their joblessness. Shehu Shagari gave them few weeks

to leave, and if they fail to leave, they would be tried. Power would also be given to Nigerians to deal with any of them after the dealine. During this period, almost 2.5 million none nationals left the country.

9. 1994 Genocide

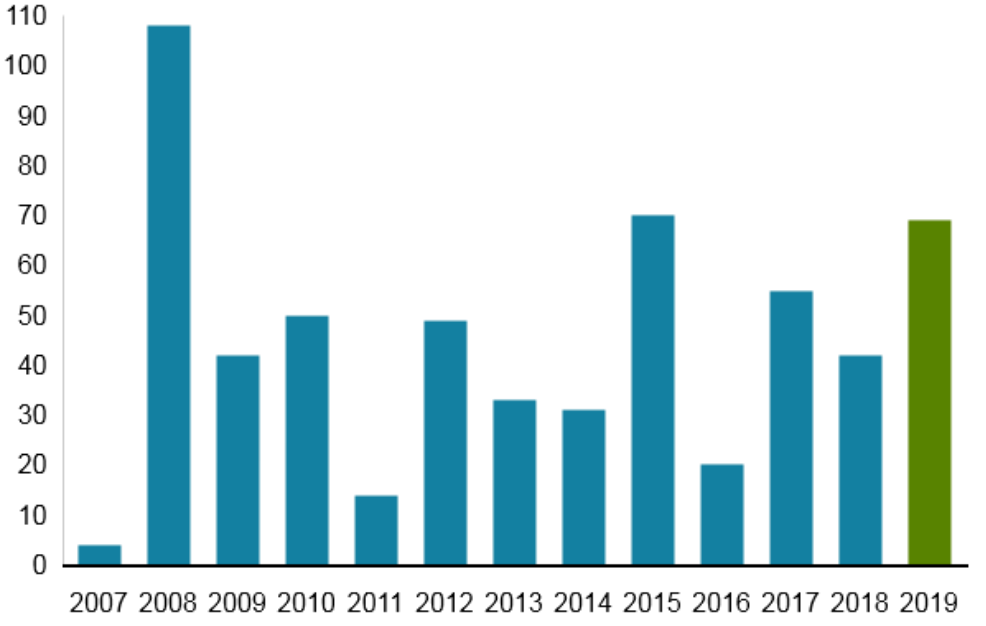
In just 100 days in 1994, about 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists who were 85% of Rwanda at the time. They were targeting members of the minority Tutsi community, as well as their political opponents. In 1959, the Hutus overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and tens of thousands of Tutsis fled to neighbouring countries, including Uganda. The Hutu extremists set up a radio station, RTLM, and newspapers which circulated hate propaganda, urging people to "weed out the cockroaches" meaning kill the Tutsis. The names of prominent people to be killed were read out on radio. This spread hatred and led to the death of many.

10. The South Africa Experience

The overall population of South Africa is well over 50 million, however, there are an estimated 3.6 million migrants in the country. About 70% of its foreigners come from neighboring Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho. The remaining 30% are from Malawi, UK, Namibia, Eswatini, previously known as Swaziland, India and other countries.

The issue of discrimination and even violence against immigrants was already in South Africa before 1994. However, after majority rule in 1994, contrary to expectations, the incidence of xenophobia increased. Between 2000 and March 2008, at least 67 people died in what were identified as xenophobic attacks. In May 2008, a series of xenophobic attacks left 62 people dead. In 2015, there was another nationwide spike in xenophobic attacks against immigrants which prompted a number of foreign governments to repatriate their citizens. The 2019 experience of xenophobic attacks in South Africa has been referred to as the worst in South African history (*Nyamnjoh* 2014 and Budiman 2019).

Threats, attacks and killings against foreigners in South Africa



Source: Xenowatch, African Centre for Migration and Society 2019

Xenophobic violence incidents by Province, 1994-2018	
Gauteng	212
Western Cape	111
KwaZulu-Natal	67
Limpopo	40
Eastern Cape	33
Mpumalanga	22
North West	20
Free State	19
Northern Cape	5

Source: Xenowatch, African Centre for Migration & Society 2018

Xenophobia and Being in African Thought

The African philosophy of migration is anchored on the inherent principle of complementary in the African Cosmos. The African cosmos is an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Thus, 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to

suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. According to Iroegbu (1995), this African manner of being is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Mbiti (1970) classically proverbializes this relationship thus: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am" (p. 108). The African worldview, therefore, is governed by the principle of complementarity, which seeks the conglomeration, the unification, the summation of fragments. It maintains that by the coming together of the individual or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the brim purpose of their existence (Asouzu 2004).

This sense of harmony, community, complementarity and solidarity among the community of beings finds expression right from the philosophy of Tempels (1959). He argues that in Bantu Ontology:

> 'Beings forces' of the universe are not a multiple of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being. All creatures are found in relationship according to the law of hierarchy... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network. (p. 29).

Kagame (1951) agrees with Tempels that reality is force. It is not a force independent of the other, but forces that are in a relationship. He categorized reality into *Muntu* (human beings), *Kintu* (things), *Hantu* (place and time), *and Kuntu* (modality). In Jahn (1958), NTU becomes the rallying point of being, outside which no being can exist.

The nationalistic movements of the 20th century in Africa, now grouped into National Ideological School of African philosophy, was linked by their emphasis on belongingness. For instance, the Social negritude of Senghor which places the family at the centre of the social structure, thus, man as a person realizes his being in the family structure, and the society has meaning from what the family is. It was on this same principle of complementarity that Nyerere bases his principle of Ujamaa. The choice of socialism over capitalism by Awolowo and the promotion of Pan-Africanism by Nkrumah were based on the distinctive complementary character of African ontology.

Mbiti (1970) in his work on African religion and philosophy also speaks of African ontology as complementary:

> The anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another. (p. 16).

Gyekye (1987) in his work on Akan philosophy avers that the individual depends on the community:

> The individual's life depends on identifying oneself with the group.… It is also the ground of the overriding emphasis on the individual's obligation to the members of the group; it enjoins upon him or her the obligation to think and act in terms of the survival of the group as a whole. In fact one's personal sense of responsibility is measured in terms of responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group. (p. 156).

Iroegbu (1995) describes being in African ontology as belongingness. In response to the questions, 'what makes being, being?', 'what does it mean to be in the world?' Iroegbu argues that it is belongingness, thus *Being* is *Belongingness*. What then is belongingness? Belongingness is a special noun from the verb 'to belong'. It means to be part of, Daisein-with or to be a member of a group. Thus Nkemnkia (1999) write that in African ontology, the self is the other:

> The meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the Other or Others. In fact it is meaningless to ask oneself "who am I" without having a complete knowledge of the Other, from whom, in the final analysis, one expects the answer. When we say 'I', in reality one means 'You', that is, the Other. By saying 'We' one is essentially saying 'man'. If this is how things stand, then each 'I', is always mediated by 'the Other', who is none other than 'oneself'. In this dialectic each one of us contains exclusively the Other. (pp. 111-112).

Thus, being is located within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality.

On the Question of 'Otherness'

Life in African ontology is a life of *sharedness;* one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole (Kanu 2015c). A relationship in which case the two or more coming together make each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. To put the other away removes the balance of being. Kanu (2015d) avers that this presupposes a tailor-made-cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shape and size, peculiarities and particularities of a being. Thus, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part. Ewulu (2010), therefore, writes that:

> If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation… I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'. (p. 189).

As a result of the dynamics of the relationship between the *I* and the *thou*, the Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe,* which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m* which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being). This is the concept also employed in reference to relationships and reciprocity: love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc. Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself. From the African perspective, there is a link between the self and the other. This is because the self carries with it the mark of otherness. If reality is one with itself and consistent with itself, that is, different from others, then its uniqueness is always in reference to the other. In the *I* and *the other* relation, both participants exist as polarities of relation. I am, as it were, in the other and the

other is in me. He is my piece as i am his piece. That which is different from me is 'my piece' or 'my other'. That which is different from us is part of us.

From the foregoing, one can argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me *ibe m,* and, in turn, the identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other.

Conclusion

This research is an African philosophical response to the problem of xenophobia in Africa, which suggests a human relationship in terms of the *I* and the *Other*. It strongly contends that the future of Africa lies in the dialogue between the *I* and *otherness*. In fact, the relationship between migrants and host communities is understood as a dialogical move, which results to increasing expansion, growth and development. To conceptualize the self without the other would be an illusion, as Levinas (1969 & 1981) observes, the other is always irreducibly present as it is implied in the self. The interaction or dialogue between host communities and migrants in Africa leads to a better self-knowledge and understanding.

The self as metaphysical unity forms a thesis that is negated by the diversity of the other, which stands to the self as an antithesis, however, with dialogue and relationship emerges a synthesis, a complementary whole, a situation where the self sees itself as part of the whole, and sees the other as part of the self. Wenger (1998) sees the dialogue between the self and the other as the beginning of change and growth- for in the process of encounter and dialogue, the other changes my ethical being and I change that of the other. The other facilitates the self and grounds the being of the self. As the self relates with the other, the self is not only taught but it also learns from the other; for in the other, the self sees what it is not. Thus, identity is a mark of incompleteness which requires the other and the active participation in the other's identity structure. The idea of complementarity is not in any way a move towards saying that reality is one, or to undermine the need to make a distinction between the self and the other. The fact that reality is interconnected does not in any way mean that reality is one; interconnectedness is not sameness. Any form of inability to identify distinction, is a conceptual weakness. Distinction does not negate separateness.

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