

Representation of Afrophobia Violence on X in South Africa

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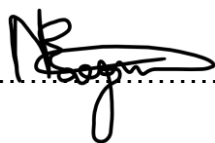
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Mmatjie Dorah Pudikabekwa.

DECLARATION

I, **Sigama Nakisani Princess**, declare that this research for a Master of Arts in Media Studies, *titled* **Representation of Afrophobia Violence on X in South Africa**, hereby submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university. That is my own work by design and execution, and all references and materials therein have been duly acknowledged.

Signature.......... Date...19/11/2024...

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ABSTRACT

Afrophobia refers to prejudice, hostility, discrimination, or hatred against individuals and cultures from Africa and the African diaspora. This represents a new form of racism in South Africa. This qualitative study examined the discursive construction of Afrophobia on X (formerly Twitter) specifically focusing on how African immigrants were represented on X, through explicating discourses employed in the representation of African migrants on X, and explaining the possible implications of such social media discourses on society. The study analysed discourses on Afrophobia on X with special posts and reposts on Operation Dudula, a South African pressure group between 2021 to 2024. The study employed an exploratory case study research design which is a methodology that enables an investigation into research questions that have not previously been studied in depth. A software architecture that uses the X application programme interface (API) was used to retrieve relevant posts and reposts that focused on Afrophobia in South Africa. The posts and reposts were further selected through a purposive sampling technique, thematically coded and interpreted using the deductive or inference approach. The study revealed that there were several discourses associated with the “othering” of immigrants of African descent, where they were stereotypically associated with terms such as “illegality”, “criminality”, “invasion”, and “alien”, “dispossession”. The study argues that such discourses of “othering” demonstrate how narratives, language and discourse have practical consequences, but also undermine South Africa's image on the continental and global stage. The study concludes that Afrophobia discourses in online communities potentially undermine South Africa's foundational values of Ubuntu and the country's Pan-Africanist project as well as its democratic cultural values.

KEYWORDS: Afrophobia; Discourse; Representation, Social media, Twitter; X; Violence

Table of contents

DEDICATION.....	ii
DECLARATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1: Introduction and background of the study	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Aim of the study	5
1.4 Objectives of the study	5
1.5 Research questions.....	5
1.6 Significance of the study	5
1.7 Chapter Outline.....	6
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	7
2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1.1. Afrophobia and false consciousness	7
2.1.2. Afrophobia and Black Consciousness	8
2.1.3. Nativism and Afrophobia	10
2.1.4. Xenophobia and Afrophobia.....	13
2.1.5. Afrophobia Ethnicity and Race Theory	14
2.1.6. Xenophobia and the Media: Global Perspectives	15
2.1.7. Xenophobia and the Media: An African Perspective.....	15
2.1.8. Media and Xenophobia in South Africa	16
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	22
CHAPTER 3: Research methodology	24
3. Research design.....	24
3.1 INTRODUCTION	24
3.2 Research paradigm.....	24
3.3 Research design	25
3.4 Research Method.....	25
3.5 Population and sampling procedure.....	26
3.5.1 Population	26

3.5.2 Sampling procedure	26
3.5.3 Sample size	27
3.6 Data Collection Method	28
3.7 Data analysis method.....	28
3.8 Ethical considerations	29
3.9 CONCLUSION	29
CHAPTER 4: Data presentation, interpretation and analysis.....	31
4.1 INTRODUCTION	31
4.2 Discourse of illegality and criminality	32
4.3 “They are taking our jobs and women”: discourse of dispossession.....	42
4.4 Discourse of threats of violence.....	47
4.5 Patriotic discourse	53
4.6 Invasion discourse.....	57
4.7 Solidarity and counter discourses	61
4.8 CONCLUSION.....	65
CHAPTER 5: Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations	67
5.1 INTRODUCTION	67
5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	68
5.2.1 Research Objective 1 sought to establish how African migrants are represented on social media X in South Africa.....	68
5.2.2 Research Objective 2 sought to establish possible reasons why African immigrants in South Africa were discursively represented in the way they are represented on X.	69
5.2.3 Research Objective 3 sought to explain the possible impact of such representation on South Africa’s pan African agenda.	70
5.3 CONCLUSIONS	72
5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS	74
5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	75
5.6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES	76
5.7 CONCLUSION	76
6. REFERENCES	78

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and background of the study

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In popular media, there are frequent portrayals of Black South Africans as being unfriendly toward foreigners, especially those who are immigrants from other African countries. Anchored on labels or terms such as “*makwerekwere*”, which is a derogatory word used to describe African migrants in the country, and “foreigner”, such sentiments have resulted in waves of violent attacks on African migrants, leading to the loss of lives and properties (Addae & Quan-Baffour, 2022). These actions have been described as “Afrophobic” and “Black on Black” Violence in South Africa, especially on social media (Addae and Kofi, 2022).

Afrophobia entails the stereotyping and hatred of foreigners from other parts of Africa and portraying them as criminals (Tarisayi, Manik, & Ribeiro, 2020), an action which has contributed to xenophobia being perceived as an unabating challenge or simply a Black-on-Black hatred. The representation of Afrophobia in South Africa presents significant challenges to the country's Pan-African agenda, which seeks to foster unity, solidarity, and cooperation among African nations.

However, xenophobia is described as dislike or prejudice against people from other countries. According to Raypole (2021), xenophobia is an extreme, intense fear and dislike of customs considered strange, unusual, or unknown.

At an international level xenophobia was evident in the United States of America (USA) from 2020, when people of Asian descent were blamed for carrying Covid-19 and spreading it in the USA. These xenophobic tropes, which circulated in the media and in public discourses, drew upon and revitalised historically entrenched narratives concerning Chinese people and communities (Zhang, 2021). South Africa has experienced a number of Afrophobia violence incidents before, such as the xenophobic incidents involving *Abahlali Basemujondolo*, a grassroots pressure group formed in 2005 to fight the Slums Act No 53 of 1934. The Act had been proposed by

the Durban city council that had given the local government broad powers to clear out shack settlements (Chance, 2018).

Although they did not use the term “Afrophobia,” *Abahlali* has arguably shown Afrophobia to be a form of false consciousness because poor South Africans target impoverished fellow Africans instead of directing their anger to the corrupt failing state that represses them nationally. Poor South Africans channel their anger towards their equally impoverished immigrant neighbours, especially from Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Solomon, 2019). In early September 2019, violent riots erupted in many parts of Johannesburg, South Africa. The riots and the attacks that ensued were targeted at foreign nationals from other African countries. There was worldwide condemnation of these attacks which left in its wake the loss of lives and destruction of properties running into several million rands.

For decades, South Africa has grappled with a tense immigration debate marked by hate, misinformation, and bouts of violence; and recently. A pressure group called “*Operation Dudula*” brought back the issue blaming immigrants for many of the country’s social ills (Peralta, 2022). Operation Dudula is a movement that led their first march on 16 June 2021 through Soweto, targeting people that they believed were foreign drug traffickers and businesses that they thought employed immigrants. It has caused xenophobic violence in South Africa because it blames undocumented immigrants for the rising crime levels. However, they describe themselves as patriots of South Africa, engaged in a war against illegal immigration and crime in the Republic of South Africa.

The recent wave of anti-immigrant protests by the Operation Dudula group claims to aim at reclaiming South Africa. Many posts and hashtags on X back this movement. There are recent reports that indicate that xenophobic violence and discrimination have increased exponentially, including those under the banner of Operation Dudula (Geneva, 2022). Further, Geneva (2022) observes that Operation Dudula has of late become a social media umbrella for the mobilizing of violent protests, vigilante violence, arson targeting migrant-owned homes and businesses and even the murdering of foreign nationals.

Operation Dudula organised violent protests, acts of vigilantism and other criminal acts during which nationals from other African countries were targeted. Consequently, the ongoing Afrophobia mobilisation has gone broader and deeper and has become the central campaign for other political parties in the country.

Some critics argue that ongoing social media campaigns against foreign nationals in South Africa have become a part of both government policy and the wider society. This has resulted in human rights violations, which have had an impact on the physical, emotional, and economic well-being of the victims, thereby as well as risks of unjustifiable detentions and torture. Violations that began online have now become physical, further undermining integrity and rights. This escalation increases the risk of wrongful detention, torture, and forced return.

Through the most recently used social media platform called X, previously known as Twitter, several people could join the movement because it allowed the leaders to share their motivation and narratives with the community. Subsequently, the assistance of social media's user-generated applications allowed the protestors to easily persuade society to take part in their riots. As a result, the movements on social media generated more attention and created a bigger space for digital activism than offline.

This study examines the representation of Afrophobic violence on social media, using X as a case study. This study focuses on Afrophobia and not xenophobia because of the assumption that violence and hatred against immigrants in South Africa is largely directed mostly at immigrants of African descent than other foreign nationals. However, conversations of xenophobia will be included because xenophobia is the fear of anyone who is considered a foreigner, and the hatred of Africans in one's country becomes Afrophobia. It is premised on the understanding that X has significantly influenced the discourses on the presence of foreign nationals in South Africa. This is because X enables activists to create hashtags for movements and trends to make people aware of issues of xenophobia. Current research shows that the media do not just transmit information to the public, but rather, they also reproduce certain ideologies and discourses that support specific relations of power (Chenz, 2020).

However, there are very few studies that have been devoted to examining the role played by social media in promoting Afrophobia. As a result, there is a knowledge gap with regards to how new media either propel or discourage Afrophobic attitudes, particularly in Africa. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap through an examination of the representation of Afrophobic violence on X, particularly how the media aid is creating perceptions about foreign nationals from other African countries. As Peralta (2022) notes, the way in which issues on migrants are framed is significant because it cultivates certain attitudes and behaviours among the South African citizenry about the ‘foreign’ other.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

South Africa is a “Rainbow Nation” that belongs to all who live in it, embracing unity and harmony among people from diverse backgrounds. The Constitution upholds the principle of equality, as stated in Section 9, which addresses non-discrimination. It ensures that neither the state nor anyone may unfairly discriminate against anyone based on race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, and other grounds. This protection extends to immigrants, who are entitled to the same fundamental rights as citizens, subject to certain limitations.

Section 10 of the Constitution guarantees that everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected. Additionally, Section 12 provides that everyone has the right to freedom and security, which includes protection from all forms of violence and safeguards against arbitrary deprivation of freedom.

However, in recent times some sections of the South African population have been accused of being intolerant of immigrants, particularly those from African countries Edozie (2021). Some have used social media platforms such as X to disseminate offensive information and hate speech aimed at African immigrants.

Previous studies have often lumped xenophobia and Afrophobia together, yet much of the hatred and violence, particularly online, are directed specifically at African nationals, while other foreign nationals, such as Chinese, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indians, do not face the same wholesale attacks or hatred. Only a few studies

have focused on how xenophobic and Afrophobic discourses are expressed on digital media, where people feel less constrained in sharing their sentiments about immigrants (Moyo, 2020). As a result, very little is known about the way in which social media promote hatred and violence against foreign nationals of African descent. The present study addresses this knowledge gap by exploring how X has become a powerful platform for influencing Afrophobia and promoting violent attacks instigated by xenophobic activists on the platform. Additionally, it highlights the importance of promoting positive narratives by amplifying the positive stories and contributions of African immigrants to South African society.

1.3 Aim of the study

This study examines the representation of Afrophobia on X in South Africa.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The study addresses the following research objectives:

- ❖ To establish how African migrants are represented on social media X in South Africa.
- ❖ To explain possible reasons why African immigrants in South Africa are discursively represented in the way they are represented on X.
- ❖ To explain the possible impact of such representation on South Africa's Pan-African agenda?

1.5 Research questions

- ❖ How are immigrants of African descent in South Africa represented on the social media platform X?
- ❖ Why are immigrants of African descent in South Africa represented in the way they are represented on X?
- ❖ How does such representation impact on South African's Pan-African agenda?

1.6 Significance of the study

The present study is important in that it is an addition to the existing knowledge on how the media influence attitudes and behaviours with regards to xenophobia. The study provides new insights on how social media platforms either contribute or discourage xenophobia. By delineating Afrophobia from the broader concept of xenophobia, the study brings insights into the way in which xenophobia is shaped by contextual factors. In addition, the study will create awareness among citizens on the hazards of xenophobia and Afrophobia, thereby contributing towards peacebuilding. The study will be useful to government and policymakers in the sense that it provides insights into possible interventions to curb Afrophobia on social media.

1.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the study, providing background on Afrophobia and xenophobia in South Africa. It also outlines the research problem, aims, objectives, questions, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on Afrophobia and xenophobia, exploring various perspectives on the topic, including global, African, and South African contexts. It also establishes the theoretical framework for the study, which is Michel Foucault's discourse theory.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology used in the study. This includes the qualitative approach, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed to examine Afrophobia violence on the social media platform X.

Chapter 4 presents the data, interprets it, and analyses it through the lens of the chosen theoretical framework. It explores the representation of African migrants on X, the reasons behind their discursive representation, and the potential impact on South Africa's Pan-African agenda.

Chapter 5 summarizes the study's findings, relating them to existing literature and examining their implications. It also provides recommendations for policy and practice, acknowledges limitations of the study, and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1. Afrophobia and false consciousness

Karl Marx developed the concept of false consciousness to describe the phenomenon in which the working class believes in values above their social and economic standards, which arise from societal inequalities. The working class tends to misinterpret their socioeconomic interest because of the manipulation by the ruling class, who seem to control the means of production, including the media. This influences the idea that the ruling class is always suitable, hence the exploitation, violence, and hate towards immigrants.

False consciousness cannot easily be overcome unless the upper class realises its power and the contradiction it makes to society for social change and cohesion. The concept of false consciousness contributes to Afrophobia because it can be made worse when individuals adopt the dominant ideology that attributes economic and social issues to immigrants or other African outgroups, rather than the general issues within the socio-economic structure. The misattribution aligns with the Marxist notion of false consciousness, where the actual sources of societal problems are hidden by ideologies that benefit the ruling class.

Afrophobia is perceived as a socially observable phenomenon; historical and contemporary expressions of Afrophobia in South African social media are examined and compared with cross-cultural behaviours on negative attitudes toward immigrants. These attitudes manifest through individuals who hold beliefs contrary to their best interests and spread those ideas to the broad audience of social media. However, the hate is further characterised by the dominant ideologies within the society that shape their perceptions and beliefs making them unaware of their proper social and economic conditions.

The fear or hatred of people perceived as foreign or different blinds South Africans to their social and economic prosperity. This manifests as prejudice, discrimination, or even violence against an individual based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion (Gruyter, 2021). Afrophobia often arises from economic, social, or political insecurities and can be worsened by false consciousness. South Africans blame immigrants for economic hardships, not realizing that the real issues lie in broader systemic problems. Afrophobia and false consciousness highlight how societal structures and ideologies can shape individual beliefs and behaviours in ways that perpetuate inequality and division.

2.1.2. Afrophobia and Black Consciousness

Black Consciousness is an idea and social movement that originated in South Africa in the late 1960s, influenced by the anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko (b. 1946 – d. 1977). The movement focused on fostering a sense of pride, self-worth, and cultural identity among Black South Africans who had been systematically oppressed and dehumanised under apartheid. Black Consciousness sought to empower Black individuals by encouraging them to take pride in their heritage, challenging the prevailing narratives imposed by white supremacy, and unite against their oppression.

The Black Consciousness Movement aimed to raise awareness among Black people about their collective identity and ability to effect social and political change. It emphasized the importance of mental liberation as an ancestor to physical and social liberation. Steve Biko and his comrades believed that the most effective way to undo apartheid was by addressing the internalised racism and inferiority complex that many Black South Africans experienced. This adopted oppression was viewed as a significant barrier to unity and resistance.

A critical aspect of the movement was its critique of white liberalism and insistence that Black people needed to lead their struggle for liberation without relying on white allies. This perspective was rooted in the belief that true freedom could only come from within the oppressed community itself, as white liberals were seen as part of the system that maintained the status quo.

Black Consciousness also incorporated elements of Black theology, which reinterpreted Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed. Biko argued that

Christianity should support the liberation of Black people, and that it was a sin to remain passive in the face of oppression.

The legacy of Black Consciousness remains significant today, influencing contemporary discussions on race, identity, and social justice in South Africa and globally. The movement's focus on mental liberation, cultural pride, and political activism continues to inspire new generations of activists and thinkers.

The relationship between black consciousness and Afrophobia, particularly in South Africa, is complex, and it dates from history. Historically, South Africa has had strong pan-Africanist sentiments, which promoted solidarity among African nations against colonialism and apartheid. After apartheid, South Africa has experienced a rise in Afrophobia, a type of xenophobia aimed at other Africans. This trend goes against the earlier ideals of pan-African unity. It has also fueled hatred towards other Black Africans on social media platforms.

The implementation of apartheid policies intensified the isolation of Black South Africans from the rest of the continent, fostering a sense of South African exceptionalism. This historical isolation has, in part, contributed to the current manifestations of Afrophobia. Gordon (2024) argues that this xenophobic sentiment disrupts the long-standing traditions of pan-African solidarity and reflects a deeper ambivalence within South African black intellectual history.

The local fight against the challenges posed by settler colonialism and, later, Apartheid in South Africa made it hard for Black activists to maintain a unified pan-African stance. Apartheid's use of segregationist language and policies aimed to separate Black South Africans from the broader African community, driven by a fear that they might be radicalized by their counterparts from other nations. While White racist systems of isolation failed, over time, they created in some Black South African intellectuals a sense of South African political exceptionalism that has persisted to date, informing some of the current Afrophobia (Ochunu, 2021).

The emergence of Afrophobia in post-apartheid South Africa has surprised scholars and observers of Pan-Africanism because it contradicts a longstanding tradition of Black South African thought that has historically supported a diverse spectrum of Pan-Africanism. The intellectual history of South Africa showcases some of the clearest

expressions of solidarity among Africans that transcend geographical boundaries. South Africa, after all, is also the land of Ubuntu, the much-cited African communal philosophy of coexistence, interdependence, and human solidarity (Gade, 2011)

Black consciousness aims to foster a collective identity among black people, encouraging pride in black culture and solidarity against oppression. Pioneered by figures like Steve Biko, the black consciousness movement emphasizes mental liberation and the rejection of internalized racism. It calls for unity among black people to combat the socio-economic and political systems that perpetuate their marginalization (Abdul, 2019).

However, Afrophobia undermines these principles by perpetuating divisions based on nationality or ethnicity, rather than uniting people of African descent against common oppressors. It reflects a form of self-hate and internalized racism that black consciousness seeks to eradicate. As noted by scholars and activists, overcoming Afrophobia requires a renewed commitment to the principles of black consciousness, emphasizing education, solidarity, and a pan-African identity that transcends colonial-imposed boundaries (Tshaka, 2016)

2.1.3. Nativism and Afrophobia

Nativism in South Africa refers to a political attitude prioritising the interests of native inhabitants over those of immigrants. This sentiment often fuels xenophobia, particularly against African immigrants.

The relationship between nativism and Afrophobia is deeply intertwined, with both phenomena reinforcing each other in various socio-political contexts. Nativism, which is the policy of defending the interests of native-born or residents against those of immigrants, often manifests in a keen sense of national identity that can easily translate into aggression towards foreign nationals, especially on social media. Afrophobia, specifically, refers to the fear or dislike of people from Africa or of African descent.

Abidde and Matambo (2021) highlight the complex interplay between nativism, immigration, and discrimination in contemporary African contexts, particularly emphasising how these dynamics can fuel Afrophobia. They argue that nativist

movements often emerge from a desire to protect national identity, culture, and economic interests, leading to exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. This sentiment can be especially pronounced in regions with historical tensions, where foreign nationals are scapegoated for local economic challenges and social issues.

In South Africa, historical and socio-political factors have fostered a unique form of nativism that has resulted in widespread Afrophobia sentiments and violence. The apartheid regime's policies of segregation and isolation not only discriminated against Black South Africans but also entrenched a perception of other Africans as "foreigners" and threats to scarce resources and social stability. This perception persists today, influencing contemporary political rhetoric and public sentiment (Ochunu, 2021).

Moreover, the post-apartheid period saw the rise of ultra-nationalist immigration policies and rhetoric that are remnants of apartheid statecraft. These policies and their justifications continue to depict African immigrants as burdens or sources of trouble, further entrenching Afrophobia attitudes (Ochunu, 2021).

Additionally, the economic challenges and social inequalities in countries experiencing high levels of nativism often lead to the scapegoating of African immigrants. Politicians and elites may exploit these sentiments for political gain, using Afrophobic expression to divert attention from systemic issues within the socio-economic structure.

The interplay between nativism and Afrophobia is not only a product of historical legacies but also a reflection of contemporary socio-political dynamics where national identity and economic anxieties converge, leading to near exclusionary practices and violence against African immigrants on the internet.

Economic instability and competition for resources are significant drivers of nativist and Afrophobic sentiments. In South Africa, economic challenges and high unemployment rates contribute to resentment towards immigrants, often perceived as competitors for jobs and public services. This economic competition fuels xenophobic attitudes and activities alongside foreign nationals, predominantly those from other African countries. Pineteh (2017) argues that, in a nation experiencing rising unemployment, particularly among the black majority, African migrants are often held responsible for the joblessness of local South Africans. Notably, as transnational

migration increases, the idea that migrants compete for limited resources has become prevalent globally. This narrative portrays foreigners as competitors for jobs, casting African migrants as adversaries who are robbing citizens of their inherent right to work (Landau, 2011).

Media also play a crucial role in shaping nativist and Afrophobic attitudes. Politicians may exploit xenophobic sentiments for electoral gain, framing immigrants as scapegoats for broader social and economic issues. Mainstream and social media platforms amplify these messages, sometimes spreading misinformation and fake news that worsen tensions. The relationship between political expression and media coverage can create a feedback loop that normalises xenophobic attitudes and behaviours.

Social media has become a powerful tool in spreading xenophobic narratives. Platforms like X allow for rapid dissemination of fake news and inflammatory content, which can incite violence and discrimination against immigrants. Social media can significantly influence public perceptions and behaviours, making it a critical area for intervention to counteract Afrophobia. The historical context of apartheid and systemic racism in South Africa also contributes to current nativist and Afrophobic sentiments. The legacy of racial segregation and discrimination has left deep social divisions that continue to influence attitudes towards immigrants. Addressing these historical injustices is essential for fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society (Nkabane, 2021).

Social media platforms like X increase nativist and Afrophobic attitudes by providing a space for like-minded individuals to share and reinforce their views. These platforms often function as echo chambers where misinformation and fake news spread rapidly. Social media can disrupt the spiral of silence, allowing previously suppressed Afrophobia and nativist opinions to surface and gain traction. For instance, in South Africa, social media has played a significant role in spreading fake news and xenophobic narratives, contributing to a rise in Afrophobia attacks (Laor, 2023).

There is a mutual relationship between nativists and social media. Social media not only disseminates but also shapes mainstream media agendas by bringing radical opinions into the broader public discourse. This interaction can legitimise nativist and

Afrophobia sentiments, giving them an impression of mainstream acceptance. Social media platforms can challenge the spiral of silence by enabling the expression of marginalised opinions, which can then influence social media posts and public opinion.

2.1.4. Xenophobia and Afrophobia

South Africa has experienced sporadic outbreaks of xenophobic violence directed at Africans from other countries on the continent. Some analyses of these incidents place them within the context of South Africa's 'Rainbow Nation' socioeconomic initiative, which has not succeeded in distributing wealth to the marginalized and disenfranchised Black majority (Claassen, 2017). The blame placed on African 'foreigners' is connected to the negative feelings that arise from frustrations, as well as the human inclination to attribute fault to a nearby, perceived Other.

Afrophobia is a means of identifying prejudice focused at a particular group that dehumanises the individuals and denies their humanity, dignity, and personhood (Michael, 2015). The term Afrophobia, although not commonly used so far, allows for a focused examination of the negative sentiments and attitudes directed at black individuals or those of African descent worldwide (Michael, 2015). This can lead to restricted access to quality education, healthcare, housing, and social welfare, as well as discrimination in the justice system, including racial profiling and elevated instances of police brutality. The results of this discrimination lead to diminished political engagement and opportunities, which perpetuate these inequalities (ibid). Afrophobia encompasses the hostility, dislike, scorn, and hatred that is expressed both explicitly and through institutional and legal frameworks towards individuals with roots in sub-Saharan Africa or those within the African diaspora (Nkabane, 2021). The relationship between xenophobia and Afrophobia has been extensively explored in a similar description of terms. Both phenomena are rooted in fear and prejudice towards outsiders, but Afrophobia specifically targets people of African descent (Umejei (2020).

Afrophobia in South Africa, for instance, can be traced back to the apartheid era and its aftermath (ibid). During apartheid, the regime's isolationist policies created a sense of exceptionalism among Black South Africans, which has persisted and influenced contemporary attitudes towards other Africans. Post-apartheid, this has manifested in a fear of economic competition and cultural dilution, leading to violence against African immigrants (Ochunu, 2021).

Mpofu and Moyo (2020) have discussed how media representations and political rhetoric exacerbate these fears. They argue that xenophobic and Afrophobic sentiments are often manipulated by political leaders to deflect attention from domestic issues such as unemployment and poverty. This scapegoating aligns with the broader social and economic insecurities the local population faces. Language also hints at broader social and economic conflicts linked to illegal mining, migration, and community security concerns (Misango, 2009).

The academic discourse also points out the role of historical and structural factors in perpetuating Afrophobia. For instance, apartheid-era laws and practices created a stringent and racist immigration system that has continued to shape post-apartheid policies. This has led to perceiving African immigrants as threats rather than societal contributors (Ochunu, 2021).

2.1.5. Afrophobia Ethnicity and Race Theory

Afrophobia refers to the fear, hatred, or prejudice against people of African descent, and it encompasses various forms of discrimination, bias, and systemic racism directed towards individuals or communities based on their racial or ethnic background. This term is often used to highlight the specific experiences of anti-black racism that people of African descent face globally.

In the context of race theory, which examines how race and racism function in societies, Afrophobia is a manifestation of systemic racism. Race theory explores how racial categories are socially constructed, how they intersect with power dynamics, and how they influence individuals' experiences and opportunities (Winant, 2015). It seeks to understand and critique how racism operates at both interpersonal and structural levels, affecting everything from laws and policies to everyday interactions. Race theory examines the historical roots of racism and discrimination against African-descended people, tracing the development of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices over time.

It analyses how institutionalised racism perpetuates unequal treatment of African-descended individuals in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and criminal justice systems. Race theory often employs an intersectional approach, recognising that Afrophobia intersects with other forms of discrimination based on

gender, class, sexuality, and other identities. This approach acknowledges that individuals experience multiple and intersecting forms of oppression. Ndlovu (2018) argues that Race theory also examines resistance movements and efforts to challenge Afrophobia, exploring strategies for social change and racial justice.

Afrophobia and race theory are interconnected through their focus on understanding and addressing the complexities of racism, discrimination, and inequality faced by African-descended individuals and communities.

2.1.6. Xenophobia and the Media: Global Perspectives

Xenophobia is a phenomenon presently infusing migration discourse worldwide (Tarisayi, 2020). Most of these Xenophobic behaviours manifest through social media platforms that are available to a wider group of people globally. Tarisayi, Manik, & Ribeiro (2020) argue that Xenophobia does not only happen in African countries; it is a worldwide pandemic that sometimes happens in the form of racism. Whilst issues of xenophobia have been growing scholarly attention in the Global North, the causes, nature, and magnitude of xenophobia in countries such as the Global South remain underrepresented in the media.

Following the conclusion of apartheid in 1994, South Africa emerged as a desirable place for individuals from various African nations, including Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe (Tarisayi, Manik, & Ribeiro, 2020). Most of the migrants that move to South Africa are asylum seekers who move to other countries to look for work or better standards of living. Conversely, xenophobic violence in major cities of South Africa has become a regular feature since the first major incident in 2008 (ibid). These major Xenophobic incidents were evident in the media, where South Africans wanted the Government to do away with all undocumented foreigners.

2.1.7. Xenophobia and the Media: An African Perspective

Some African media reports persist in highlighting concerns about the use of derogatory and offensive language aimed at foreign nationals, particularly African migrants, in the context of xenophobic incidents (Yakushk, 2009).

The media inclines to cover reports on some nationalities using comprehensive stereotypes, for instance, the depiction of all Nigerians as drug dealers and as

fraudsters, or that they engage in marriages with South Africans to acquire permanent residence. For example, one newspaper headline read: “Pretoria Mayor singles out Nigerians as drug dealers and pimps” (IOL, 26 May 2017). The hatred towards some African migrants in South Africa derives from the stereotypical idea that these foreigners are promoting crime and social injustice, based on how they are portrayed in the media at large. One voice on social media can change the entire community's perception of how to accept migrants in South Africa, and it, therefore, leads to violence.

Consequently, there have been multiple instances of Nigerians being killed after being accused of drug trafficking, with even innocent individuals becoming victims, as noted by Chabalala (2018). Recently, eight police officers faced charges for the murder of a Nigerian man, Ibrahim Olamilekan Badmus, in 2017. This case illustrates how these foreigners are often portrayed as targets of xenophobia, according to Mgogo and Osunkunle (2020). In relation to this study, incidents of hate crimes have been observed on Twitter, where Afrophobia activists incite violence against targeted individuals. This can lead to fatal outcomes or severe injuries, with some foreign nationals tragically being set on fire.

2.1.8. Media and Xenophobia in South Africa

The media is essential in shaping how society views people by presenting them based on common beliefs. It influences what people discuss and how they think about various issues (Chari, 2010). People tend to trust and internalise the information disseminated by the media, viewing it as credible and informative. Frequently, the media reports on Zimbabweans entering South Africa without proper documentation, prompting government efforts to repatriate them. Therefore, some South Africans take matters into their own hands, mistreating undocumented foreigners based on the narratives they encounter in mainstream media.

The media plays a crucial role in covering human rights abuses, both through traditional outlets and social media (Hermann and Cornelius, 2011). With the rise of various social media platforms where users share the latest news, the public has the option to engage with or dismiss this information. Consequently, these platforms have

become reliable sources for news. The sharing of images and videos on social media allows for the rapid spread of information.

Umejei (2020) notes that the rise of digital technology has led to a surge in misinformation and disinformation, which directly impacts the truthfulness and credibility of media. According to Wasserman and Schiffer (2013) and Chen (2010), the presence of false information surrounding xenophobic violence in South Africa contributes to retaliatory attacks against both African migrants and local South Africans. The public often disseminates xenophobic content on social media platforms, fuelling sentiments aimed at driving African migrants out of South Africa. Misinformation and disinformation about attacks on migrants in the country spread rapidly through social media, inciting further hatred, and prompting more South Africans to join in riots against foreign nationals (Umejei, 2020).

As noted by Odii, Ngene, & Okoye (2019), xenophobia in South Africa, much like other global crises of a similar nature, has notably garnered significant attention on social media. Various countries' mainstream media, along with social media platforms, have been filled with alarming reports regarding the xenophobic attacks occurring in South Africa. The coverage of these incidents on social media evokes a range of emotions and controversies among different groups. Nevertheless, the broader implications of how these events are represented on social media remain somewhat ambiguous and warrant further exploration (Odii, Ngene & Okoye, 2019).

Recent news reports indicate a rise in xenophobic violence and hostility, particularly associated with "Operation Dudula," a social media initiative that has expanded into a larger mobilization movement (Geneva, 2022). Comments from senior government officials aimed at immigrants have increased violence, and the government's response has not been enough to stop it or hold people accountable for their actions (Geneva, 2022).

Additionally, xenophobia directed at low-income African migrants and refugees has persisted as a constant issue in South African politics over the years. Structural factors contributing to this phenomenon include ongoing regional conflicts, a competitive job

market, limited housing, intense competition in township retail, and pronounced gendered cultural disparities (Holdt, 2011; Amisi, 2011).

The media often promotes exclusionary narratives that foster harmful stereotypes against fellow Africans, framing them as outsiders rather than acknowledging their rights as co-nationals or fellow Africans (Nyamnjoh, 2010). The media plays a vital role in combating xenophobia and should avoid promoting hatred, animosity, or prejudice towards foreigners residing in the country. By delivering balanced news coverage, the media can fulfill its responsibility to report fairly and avoid bias against immigrants. Additionally, it is the media's duty to highlight violations to the appropriate authorities. Researchers like Hermann and Cornelius (2011) have consistently criticized the media's approach to reporting on xenophobia. In this context, the media has been held accountable for contributing to xenophobic issues through its reporting practices.

2.1.9. Social media and Xenophobia

Desmares (2017) detects that the media plays a critical role in shaping and responding to opportunities and challenges offered by migration and diversity. Social media serves as a significant platform for shaping public perception of migrants. Content portraying migrants can quickly trend and spread among large audiences, contributing to the manifestation of xenophobia within these online spaces. The accessibility and inclusivity of social media enable a wide range of individuals to engage with and perpetuate xenophobic narratives. Foreigners are often seen as threats to national security, economic stability, and social order (Landau & Misago, 2009).

Typical coverage of migration often promotes xenophobia, boosts support for anti-immigrant political parties and impacts the experiences of both migrant groups and their integration. On the other hand, balanced, accurate, unbiased, and respectful portrayals of migrants enhance public awareness and empower individuals to make informed political choices (Desmares, 2017). These decisions are influenced by the dominance of cyberbullying and online hate directed towards foreign nationals on social media. Individuals who hold xenophobic attitudes utilise these platforms to

express their desire to mistreat and discriminate against foreigners living in South Africa.

Social media plays a crucial role in the ethical management of migration. It indicates that, although the media in South Africa has a minimal impact on xenophobic sentiments, there has been a shift in how they cover stories related to African foreigners (Tapiwa, 2017). Consequently, the media ought to embrace social change strategies to promote social unity and urge the government to tackle existing social issues that affect both citizens and immigrants (Tapiwa, 2010).

Recent research highlights the complicated role of social media in influencing xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes. Studies show that social media can either increase or reduce xenophobic feelings, depending on factors like the content being shared, the makeup of users' social networks, and the wider social and political environment. According to Ogbouriki (2024) social media platforms, originally designed for open communication, have been co-opted to incite fear, hatred, and violence against vulnerable communities, particularly immigrants. The anonymity these platforms provide allows users to spread misinformation and hate speech, which can escalate tensions and lead to real-world violence.

Social media platforms often act as breeding grounds for hate speech and xenophobia. During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation and negative stereotypes about certain immigrant groups spread rapidly, intensifying xenophobic attitudes (Ahmed and Chen, 2021). For example, in Singapore, social media significantly contributed to anti-Chinese sentiments during the COVID-19 outbreak due to misinformation and enhanced perceptions of disease risk. This led to increased stereotyping and prejudice against Chinese immigrants, demonstrating how social media can increase fear and hostility towards out-groups during times of crisis (ibid).

Furthermore, social media often reinforces xenophobia through the negative representation and demonisation of refugees. Fake news and otherising narratives contribute to psychological distress among refugees and foster a public sense of compassion fatigue, ultimately leading to elevated xenophobic attitudes in host countries (Aldamen, 2023).

Social media also has the potential to reduce prejudice by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives and counter-attitudinal information. Users with larger and more diverse social networks on social media are less likely to hold xenophobic views, as interactions with diverse groups can reduce biases and promote acceptance of out-groups. This aligns with contact theory, which suggests that interaction with different groups can reduce prejudice (Ahmed and Chen, 2021).

Moreover, social media platforms can increase xenophobic violence by providing a space for the rapid dissemination of hate speech and incitement to violence. This often occurs through the spread of misinformation, which can trigger real-world attacks against minority communities. Comments sections on social media contribute to the radicalisation of users by allowing them to engage with like-minded individuals who reinforce xenophobic beliefs. This limited communication can escalate from prejudiced attitudes to violent actions as users become more inspired by the perceived support of their online community.

The spread of misinformation and fake news on social media is a significant factor in fuelling xenophobic violence. False narratives about immigrant communities or ethnic minorities can provoke fear and anger, leading to violent outbursts. Operation Dudula, for instance, provided numerous examples where misinformation about the crimes in South Africa led to xenophobic attacks against foreign Africans in South Africa. Scholars argue that the lack of adequate regulation and ethical oversight by social media companies contributes to the spread of xenophobic violence. Algorithms designed to maximise engagement often prioritize sensationalist and divisive content, inadvertently promoting hate speech and incitement to violence (Hertog & Shoji, 2023).

The psychological impact of xenophobic violence facilitated by social media includes discriminating fear and anxiety among targeted communities. This can lead to social division and increased mistrust between different groups within society. The normalisation of hate speech online can also numb the broader public to xenophobic violence, reducing the societal motion to address such issues effectively.

There is a lack of comprehensive longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of xenophobic content on social media on both perpetrators and victims, implementing

educational programs that focus on digital literacy to help users critically evaluate the content they encounter on social media should be implemented. These programs are aimed at teaching users to recognise misinformation and hate speech, reducing the likelihood of spreading xenophobic content.

Xenophobic messages frequently spread across multiple platforms, but the interactions between these platforms are not well understood. Comparative studies across different social media platforms are necessary to develop a holistic understanding of how xenophobic content increases and how it can be mitigated.

Noble (2018) points out that while people are becoming more aware of how algorithms spread xenophobic content, there is still little understanding of how to change or regulate these algorithms effectively. The goal is to stop the spread of such content without violating free speech. More research is needed to develop and ethically implement algorithms and AI that can identify and reduce xenophobic content while respecting the right to free expression.

The methods and theories that the scholars have used involve Media literacy theory, which underpins these interventions, emphasising the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to discern credible information from false narratives. The "*Resist Hate Speech*" initiative works to educate South African youths on identifying and countering hate speech online. Utilizing advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence to detect and remove xenophobic content from social media platforms. These systems are designed to identify hate speech patterns and automatically filter them out, Gillespie (2018) and Whittaker et al. (2018)

The effects of xenophobia violence in South Africa on social media present a significant challenge to Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, transforming online hatred into real world aggression that disrupts continental unity. This hostility undermines relationships between South Africa and its neighbouring countries, impacting cross border trade and weakening diplomatic connections. The principles of Pan Africanism, which promote African solidarity, are compromised when Africans fail to support one another as a united front, Adi & Sherwood (2003).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Michel Foucault's (1998) discourse theory. Michel Foucault argues that discourse has tangible effects, creating what he describes as "practices that systematically shape the subjects they address" (Armstrong, 2015). This means that discourse serves as a framework for organizing knowledge, influencing the formation of social and increasingly global relationships through a shared comprehension of its logic and the recognition of discourse as a social reality. Discourses are shaped by power dynamics within society, with this power establishing the rules and categories that determine how knowledge and truth are validated within a given discursive framework. These rules and categories relate to reasoning or knowledge, which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience, which comes before the discourse (Adams, 2017). Stephen Gill describes Foucault's concept of discourse as a set of ideas and practices with conditions of existence that are institutionalised but may only be partially understood by those they surround.

Foucault's discourse theory is a critical framework developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. It focuses on the relationships between power, knowledge, and social institutions. The theory suggests that discourses, which are systems of ideas, language, and practices, play a vital role in shaping power dynamics and social reality (Foucault, 1991).

According to Foucault (1998), discourses are not simply sets of ideas or theories, but rather structured ways of understanding and discussing a particular topic within a society. They encompass various elements such as language, beliefs, norms, and practices that influence how we perceive and construct knowledge about the world. According to Foucault, discourses are not neutral or objective, but cultural and historical products that serve specific power interests.

Foucault argues that discourses are not merely expressions of power, but also serve as instruments of power. They establish what is considered "true" or "knowledgeable" within a particular social context and regulate how individuals think, behave, and

perceive themselves and others. They shape our understanding of social identities, norms, institutions, and practices (Gaventa, 2003).

Moreover, Foucault (1998) suggests that discourses are closely intertwined with power relations. Power operates through discourses by defining what knowledge is valid, what behaviour is acceptable or deviant, and who has the authority to define and enforce these norms. Rabinow (1991) says that discourses create and maintain power hierarchies and control mechanisms that shape and regulate individuals' subjectivity, identities, and social interactions. Foucault also emphasizes the role of power/knowledge in disciplinary institutions such as prisons, schools, and hospitals. Through their specific discourses, these institutions produce and perpetuate specific knowledge and power dynamics that control and regulate individuals within them.

CHAPTER 3: Research methodology

3. Research design

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research methodology for examining the representation of Afrophobia violence on X in South Africa. This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed to investigate how Afrophobia violence is portrayed on this social media platform. It begins with a discussion on the qualitative approach adopted for this study, explaining why this approach is well-suited for capturing the complexities of social media discourse. Furthermore, it details the process of selecting relevant posts, as well as the criteria and procedures used to analyse content, language, and tone. By exploring the narratives and imagery surrounding Afrophobic violence on X, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the broader implications of social media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards Afrophobia in South Africa.

3.2 Research paradigm

As stated by Merriam (2023), a paradigm is a foundational philosophical and theoretical framework within a specific scientific field or discipline that shapes the development of theories, laws, generalizations, and the supportive experiments. When it comes to research, a research paradigm refers to a set of beliefs, perspectives, and biases that influence how the research process is conducted. It helps determine the way the research will be conducted. The researcher used the interpretivism research approach, which holds that there are multiple realities instead of just one.

This is the research paradigm used by most qualitative studies conducted in the social sciences. Interpretivism holds that because human behaviour is so complex, it cannot be studied by probabilistic models, such as those used under positivist paradigms (Jennifer, 2023). Using the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher explored the reality

experienced by the participants of X, focusing on understanding the context underlying their violent Afrophobia behaviour on X that influenced the hate. It is important to further note that due to the interpretivist approach, the findings of this study are valid solely within the specific circumstances of the research and are typically not generalisable.

3.3 Research design

The aim of this research is to examine the representation of Afrophobic violence on X. To achieve this aim, the exploratory case study was applied thoroughly as the research design and be utilized in gathering and analysing information to produce appropriate answers to the research questions.

Creswell (2014) emphasizes that the research design encompasses the specific procedures involved in the research process, including data collection, analysis, and report writing. Bromley (1990) characterizes a case study as a structured examination of an event, or a series of related events aimed at describing and elucidating the phenomenon of interest. Conversely, Yin (1989) describes a case study as an empirical investigation that explores a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

This study utilized an exploratory research design, which is a methodological approach designed to explore research questions that have not been extensively studied before, as noted by George (2021). Typically, qualitative and primary in nature, exploratory research can also take a quantitative form if conducted with a large sample. It is often described as interpretive research or grounded theory due to its adaptable and open-ended approach.

3.4 Research Method

Dawson (2019) notes that a research method serves as a fundamental principle guiding the research process. It shapes the overall approach to studying a topic and selecting appropriate methods. The qualitative content analysis method involves interpreting textual data subjectively by systematically classifying and coding

information to identify themes and patterns (Elo, 2008). This study uses a qualitative research method. The method provides contextualisation and interpretation of the collected data.

This research used various methods to collect data, including ethnography, cultural concepts, gender differences, and race. In this study, the focus is on how different ethnicities and cultures are affected on a social media platform. Qualitative data also makes an interpretation of what a researcher sees, hears, and understand. It, therefore, allows for a collective strategy such as analysing audios, visuals, and texts. The qualitative research can be more directly targeted at the research participant; here the target is the X accounts of Xenophobic movements. However, it is also difficult to get objective data because the qualitative research is based on a small sample size and the reposts.

The researcher chose this method because it is the most feasible to access barriers and other questions that cannot easily be answered through a quantitative approach. The qualitative method has enabled the researcher to explore the representational aspects of X on xenophobic violence and interpreting the content that is put on the social media X by the users through texts and posts on desktop.

3.5 Population and sampling procedure

3.5.1 Population

Polit and Hungler (1999) refer to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population of this study are all posts and reposts which are about xenophobic violence in South Africa. Posts and reposts are the population for this study because it is such content that will enable the researcher to address the research objectives.

3.5.2 Sampling procedure

Sampling procedure is the process of studying the population by gathering information and analysing that data. It is the basis of the data where the sample space is big. Purposive sampling is a method utilized in qualitative research where the researcher intentionally selects participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. In this approach, the researcher identified the characteristics or attributes deemed essential for the study and then selects participants who possess these qualities. This method allowed for a more targeted and focused analysis of the desired traits or behaviours within the population of interest. In this study the researcher purposefully selected posts on X that are related to Afrophobia and xenophobia in South Africa. However, it is important to note that while purposive sampling can yield valuable insights, there are potential limitations. Researchers may carelessly introduce bias by selecting participants who align with their own expectations or preconceptions, potentially impacting the study's validity (Dovetail, 2023).

3.5.3 Sample size

Zamboni (2018) describes sample size as a count of the individual samples or observations in any statistical setting, such as a scientific experiment or a public opinion survey. There are multiple methods for determining sample size, such as conducting a census, imitating the sample sizes used in related studies, consulting published tables, and utilizing established formulas. For this research, the chosen approach is to adopt a sample size based on a comparable analysis. However, this method has its drawbacks, as it carries the risk of replicating errors from the sample size calculation of the other study.

However, the strengths are that a review of literature in your discipline can guide typical sample sizes that are used (Glenn, 2003). In contrast, the criteria for this analysis focus on posts related to the activities surrounding the forced removal of immigrants by activists. We will use digital devices like smartphones and laptops to explore social media. Specifically, we will examine content on social media platform X and intentionally select posts and reposts that comment on immigrants of African descent in South Africa for this study. The purposive nature implies that posts and reposts must conform to a specific inclusion criteria thus: (i) Posts and reposts should

be at least 10 words (ii) Posts and reposts would have been published between 2021 and 2024 (iii) Posts should be on African immigrants (iv) Posts and reposts should be in English or any South African language. The selection and analysis of posts and reposts will continue until the researcher reaches saturation point or when no new themes are emerging from the textual data (Quantilope, 2024).

3.6 Data Collection Method

According to Creswell (2012), data collection is the process of gathering information systematically that enables one to answer research questions. Descriptive research design is the method applied to explore describe and infer the characteristics of messages. In this study, a software architecture that uses the X application programme interface (API) to collect or retrieve the posts sent to specific users was used.

Through the API information was coded from social media in the smartphone to the laptop so that it can be captured and analysed. The researcher then extracted the user IDs and the exact time stamps of the posts. The collected data would be characterised by the inter-arrival times between posts and the number of re-posts on the social media account. The data collected from X was searched from the keyword “Afrophobia” and “Xenophobia” on X.

3.7 Data analysis method

Textual data obtained from reposts was analysed through thematic content analysis. According to Caulfield (2019), thematic content analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is usually applied to texts, such as an interview, document analysis, and transcripts. Thematic content analysis will be used in this study because it enables the researcher to establish something about people’s views, opinions, knowledge, experience, or values from a set of qualitative data (Caulfield, 2019). Hence, thematic content analysis is applied when analysis focuses on people’s views and opinions about a particular phenomenon.

The researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. This is a proper method to use for this study because it assisted in establishing X users' views, opinions, and knowledge about xenophobia. Analysis of reposts will entail recording identifying, categorising, and recording emerging themes from the reposts and making sense of their meanings. The themes were discussed in a narrative form and selected reposts were used to reinforce arguments and for illustrative purposes.

3.8 Ethical considerations

According to Bhandari (2022), ethical considerations in research refer to the principles that steer the design and conduct of research. It is essential for researchers to follow a defined code of ethics when gathering data from individuals. Nchazi (2021) explains research ethics as crucial for safeguarding human rights against immoral violations and that it forms the foundation for the protection of recruited research participants.

The present study does not involve human subjects as the data comprises of texts extracted from X posts but the identities of people who posted them will be anonymised. However posts that includes encrypted data was not used to ensure the security of data for participants. The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the relevant University of Venda committee for submission purposes. In addition, the researcher ensured that the data was interpreted as objectively as possible to avoid bias and an effort will be made to ensure that there is no plagiarism and that all references are duly acknowledged.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine the representation of Afrophobic violence on X in South Africa. To achieve this aim, relevant research design and research methods were chosen, and they were applied thoroughly in the research design and methodology utilized in gathering and analysing information to come up with appropriate answers to the research question. This chapter presented all the necessary methodology to respond to the research questions as well as the objectives.

This methodology served as the foundation for understanding how Afrophobic violence is portrayed on X and the broader implications this may have for public perceptions of Afrophobia in South Africa. The systematic approach outlined here enables a rigorous analysis of social media content, setting the stage for insightful findings in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, interprets, and analyses data collected through textual analysis. The data, gathered from the social media platform X in the form of posts that express Afrophobic sentiments from the Operation Dudula account dated between 2021 to 2023, was retrieved during May and June of 2024. The data is organized and analysed according to themes that align with the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The chapter is structured thematically, providing an integrated analysis based on six emerging themes, namely, as the discourse of illegality and criminality, the discourse of threats of violence, patriotic discourse, invasion discourse, solidarity, and counter-discourse.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the representation of Afrophobia on the social media platform X in South Africa. To achieve this, the study addressed key research questions, namely,

- How are immigrants of African descent in South Africa represented on the social media platform X?
- Why are these immigrants represented in this manner on X?
- How does this representation impact South Africa's Pan-African agenda?

These questions guide the thematic analysis of the collected data. The integrative approach adopted in the chapter enabled the researcher to address all the research questions stated in Chapter 1, by combining data presentation, interpretation, analysis, and integration of literature and theory simultaneously.

The chapter begins with an introduction, followed by a detailed analysis of the data categorised by the relevant themes, and concludes with some critical reflections on the study findings.

4.2 Discourse of illegality and criminality

A key discourse that emerged from the analysis of textual data obtained from X was that of “illegality and criminality” of African immigrants. Immigrants from other African countries were often indiscriminately described as “illegal” and/or “criminals”. For instance, South African activists on X, particularly those associated with Operation Dudula, held the belief that African immigrants, foreigners, and asylum seekers in the country are involved in criminal activities. They argued that many had either entered the country illegally or engaged in illicit business practices, which fuelled their desire to remove them from South Africa. Such stereotypical labels had the potential to foster hatred against immigrants of African descent, further setting them up for violent attacks.

Desmares (2017) argues that typical coverage of migration often contributes to xenophobic attitudes, bolsters the backing for anti-immigrant political parties, and affects the experiences of migration groups and their integration. On the other hand, fair, accurate, unbiased, and respectful portrayals of migrants can enhance civic awareness and empower citizens to make well-informed political choices. These narratives are evident in how Operation Dudula and similar groups post on their X accounts.

Immigrants were often accused of engaging in criminal activities, leading to targeted violence by some South African citizens, who advocated for the deportation of African immigrants from the country. These sentiments were exacerbated by the fact that some immigrants were found to be in the country illegally and engaged in criminal activities and were used as evidence to substantiate claims that immigrants of African descent were illegals bent on engaging in criminality. Others were arrested for operating illegal businesses such as drug trafficking and illegal mining.

Posts on X concerning these issues often contain violence, as some South African citizens, particularly those organised under Operation Dudula, aimed to combat crime using criminal methods. However, many of the allegations against African immigrants are not entirely true. Wasserman and Schiffer (2013) and Chen (2010) maintain that

false information on social media about the xenophobic violence in South Africa is one of the things that causes attacks in retaliation against African migrants and other South Africans. This is because narratives have the power to shape reality. Some scholars have demonstrated how affect is produced and circulated on social media through narratives, language and discourse (Dratwa, 2023). Dratwa (2023: 91) contends:

narratives are conceived as constitutional instead of only representational of social reality; the feelings and emotions that they constitute make up a good part of their “truth-telling” capacity -that is, narrative’s power to make us think that a message embedded in a certain story is true because we feel that it is true. In their affective dimension, narratives entertain a close relationship to the world of emotions, and through, their capacity to establish, maintain or traverse social boundaries, they create “emotional collectives” and “collective emotions”.

This clearly demonstrates that narratives, language, or discourse have practical consequences, and how those with power construct the “Other” matters the most because it shapes people’s perceptions and emotions. This means that the way in which African immigrants were constructed on X had the potential to trigger violence.

The fight against illegal immigration will never stop until the last illegal immigrant is back home. We don’t care abt your labels and insults, we are hard at work enforcing the laws of South Africa (9:45 AM · Mar 18, 2022).

In the above post, South African citizens are portrayed as patriotic citizens seized with the “enforcement” of the law by ridding their country of illegal immigrants who are undesirable elements in their midst. That the task of removing illegal immigrants has been deferred to ordinary citizens implies that the government was failing to do its job and highlights the possibility of lawlessness during xenophobic attacks because ordinary citizens were allowed to take the law into their own hands.

There were also posts on X that insinuated that migrants in South Africa were running businesses such as brothels, killing people, faking their documentation, poaching animals, and hijacking cars, thereby causing anarchy in the country. The irony, however, was that deferring enforcement of the country’s laws to ordinary citizens rather than law enforcement agencies engendered lawlessness in the country.

An example of an X post which insinuated that African foreign immigrants were criminals appeared on the X account of Operation Dudula thus: *“Nigeria the Land of 1. Drug dealers 2. Traffickers 3. Scammers 4. Fake pastors”* (14:00PM. Sep 15, 2022).

In this post, Nigerians are stereotypically constructed as illegals and criminals as implying that all Nigerians in South Africa are engaged in various types of crimes, thus providing a justification for their banishment from South Africa. To build a solid case for the banishment of African immigrants, criminality and illegality are presented as justification. This clearly demonstrates that discourse has practical effects. In other words, discourse does not only have power, but also has practical effects (Foucault, 1972). The discourse around Afrophobia, particularly targeting Nigerians in South Africa, significantly contributes to the marginalisation and exclusion of African immigrants by influencing societal perceptions about how African foreign immigrants should be treated in South Africa.

This negative discourse frames Nigerians, and by extension other African immigrants in South Africa as societal threats, involved in criminal acts, or as the cause of various societal issues, leading to their systematic exclusion from the national community. Such narratives dehumanise these individuals and perpetuate stereotypes that paint them as dangerous outsiders. Such discourses also go against the spirit and values of Ubuntu by Tutu (1999). He argues that,

Ubuntu is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong, I participate, I share (Tutu, 1999: 31).

The way Africans are often portrayed as the “Other” challenges the idea of “The African Renaissance.” Dr. Blade Nzimande describes this concept as “the rebirth of our continent, about reclaiming our heritage, our dignity, and our place in the world. It is a call for the unity of African people and the renewal of our values and cultures to shape our future” (Nzimande, 2001). This idea is closely linked to Pan-Africanism, a political and cultural movement that aims to unite African people, both on the continent and in the diaspora, in their fight against oppression, exploitation, and racism. Whereas the African Renaissance project promotes solidarity and the collective advancement of African nations (Adi & Sherwood, 2003), Afrophobia promotes exclusion and marginalisation of the African “Other”. Ubuntu (Botho) and African

Renaissance are at the core of South African society and its foreign policy endeavours. Labeling African immigrants as criminals or illegals allows for discrimination and justifies their exclusion from economic, social, and political life. By portraying African immigrants as a single group involved in illegal activities, this perspective rationalizes their exclusion, policing, and removal. This approach maintains a social order that undermines the Ubuntu philosophy and South Africa's Pan-Africanist goals.

Michel Foucault's (1969) concept of discourse is key to understanding the interplay between language, practices, and power relations. Foucault maintained that discourse shapes knowledge, sets the standards for acceptable behaviour in society, and influences people's thoughts and actions. In the case of the negative discourse about African immigrants in South Africa, it acts as a control mechanism, shaping societal views and treatment of these individuals. Foucault (1969) suggested in his archaeology of knowledge that discourse is not merely a form of communication but is intertwined with practices that arise from it. Therefore, portraying African immigrants under the criminality narrative facilitates the justification of oppressive measures against them, like deportation or denial of social services. This criminality and illegality discourse is not just descriptive but actively constructs African immigrants as threats, fostering a social reality where harsh measures like banishment and violence seem not only justified, but necessary for the nation's security and safety.

Therefore, those are supposed to be effective reasons for the Operation Dudula activists to get rid of African immigrants from South Africa using unlawful means. Yet the label of criminal or illegal was not just an exclusive preserve for Nigerian nationals but was also extended to other African nationals. Hence a post on Operation Dudula pointed out that:

SA is a crime scene. Somalians nationalised spaza shops, Nigerians run drug and prostitution rings, Zimbabweans steal rail and tower batteries, Malawians slave labour, Mozambicans run kidnapping rings, Lesotho syndicates run illegal mining, Serbians kill people here. We must stand up (3:41 PM · Mar 18, 2022).

In the post mentioned above, immigrants of African descent were grouped together as drug dealers, involved in prostitution, thieves, and kidnappers. This shows that there is no distinction between immigrants of African descent in South Africa. However, within these broad categories of criminality each nationality was apportioned a

particular speciality with Nigerians being associated with drugs, Zimbabweans with stealing rail and tower batteries and Basotho associated with running illegal mines ("Zama Zamas") while Serbians are associated with killing. The inclusion of Serbians as killers is particularly interesting given the assumptions that xenophobia in South Africa is exclusively directed at immigrants of African descent, hence the concern with Afrophobia in this study.

Nigerian drug dealer given sjambok Medicine by taxi drivers Day by day.. zimbie by zimbie... jollof by jollof... The whole country will Dudula!!! No keyboard smart black from Houghton estate or Midstream will stop us.. #Nigerians #dudula (14:05 PM. Dec 05, 2022).

The text above is prevalent with xenophobic implications, utilising stereotypes and differentiating language to single out Nigerians, while also recommending revenge actions. The statement "Nigerian drug dealer given sjambok Medicine by taxi drivers" strips the individual of their humanity, identifying them solely by a criminal stereotype that permits aggressive violence. The use of "sjambok," a heavy lash linked with coercive discipline, insinuates that violence is a suitable, or even warranted, reaction to the alleged threat posed by Nigerian migrants. Such discourse influences existing biases, associating Nigerian identity with illicit drug activities, thus stigmatising an entire community based on the deeds of a minority.

The phrase words "Day by day... zimbie by zimbie... jollof by jollof..." suggest a relentless, intensive effort to eliminate Nigerian immigrants, indicating a rising animosity intended to purify the country of those deemed foreign. The rallying cry "The whole country will Dudula!!!" invokes unity and solidarity in this activism, framing Dudula as a national or ethical imperative. By mentioning suburban places such as "Houghton estate" and "Midstream," recognised for their affluence, well-educated middle-class black populations, the post rebuffs any criticism from those advocating for more tolerant or compassionate treatment of foreign nationals of African descent. The phrase "keyboard smart black" refers to middle-class South Africans who are thought to be shielded from crimes allegedly committed by African immigrants. This highlights the connection between xenophobia and Afrophobia in a country known for its divisions based on race, gender, and class (Hiropoulus, 2019). By disregarding

differing views, this approach portrays critics of Afrophobia as out of touch with the harsh social reality of South Africa, which is marked by high crime rates.

The middle-class situation in South Africa stands in stark contrast to that of ordinary citizens living in poorer neighborhoods, who suffer greatly from crime. Many of these citizens have reached out to the Operation Dudula activists, asking for help in dealing with foreigners they believe are living illegally in their communities. They have also expressed their frustrations about the crimes they believe are committed by these African immigrants on social media platform X. *For example, the X post “I wish #OperationDudula could come to my hometown Lusikisiki! Arrived yesterday & by the evening a mob of Foreigners came shooting because they had a breakin THEY SHOT my younger BROTHER who was standing at our gate so traumatized!”(6:36 AM · Jul 9, 2022).* Criminality is rampant in areas inhabited by poor South Africans, and the crime is mainly perpetrated by African illegal immigrants.

“Foreigners Vow that they will never stop being ZamaZamas... arrogant disrespectful “neighbours” Seen opening a hole that was closed by the community. #OperationDudula #zamazama” (12:12 PM. Sep 4, 2022).

The post highlights a tense situation between illegal miners, known as "Zama Zamas," and local communities in South Africa. The Zama Zamas show defiance and disrespect by continuing their activities despite the community's efforts to shut down mining sites. Terms like "arrogant disrespectful 'neighbours'" reveal the frustration, resentment, and tension between locals and the foreign nationals involved in these illegal mining operations. This language suggests deeper social and economic conflicts related to illegal mining, migration, and community safety concerns (Misago, 2009). The post below is about an event concerning a Nigerian pastor who was compelled by an angry mob to ingest his own supply of *nyaope* before the South African Police Service (SAPS) arrest him.

“Nigerian pastor made to eat his own nyaope and arrested by SAPS,” (9:42PM Jan 19, 2023).

These can be understood as a manifestation of power dynamics, xenophobia, and social stigma. This act illustrates an abuse and violence and highlights the prejudiced views often held against foreign nationals in South Africa, particularly regarding Nigerian immigrants who are commonly linked to drug trafficking and other criminal

behaviours. Forcing the pastor to take the drug served as both a form of punishment and public humiliation, perpetuating negative perceptions of migrants and delivering a harsh, extrajudicial warning against drug-related activities. This treatment emphasises the intersection of law enforcement actions with societal biases, where marginalised individuals are more vulnerable to dehumanizing and harsh responses. The incident reflects broader challenges related to xenophobia and systemic bias within institutions meant to maintain justice and order.

In a similar case, a pastor was also arrested for murder. *“Fulgence Kayishema, has been arrested in South Africa enjoying life and charged with playing a leading role in the murder of more than 2,000 people in 1994”, (16:52. 2023 may 25).*

This post discusses a Rwandan man, 62 years old, who was arrested in South Africa after being a fugitive for 22 years. He is a suspect in the deaths of 2,000 people during a church massacre. In a related incident, on June 6, 2022, 158 undocumented immigrants from Lesotho were arrested in the Free State. They were detained during a law enforcement operation targeting illegal mining activities. The group was caught trying to enter South Africa in a convoy when police and South African National Defence Force officials stopped them at a roadblock on the R702/R26 border in Wepener. A shootout broke out during the operation, injuring one person, and law enforcement seized illegal firearms and ammunition. These types of criminal activities and the illegal ways of conducting business in South Africa often make headlines on social media, drawing attention from the public. Such stories can fuel Afrophobia, especially since illegal mining has become a significant issue in the country, leading to environmental harm and an increase in crime.

In a similar post:

“A 52-year-old Zimbabwean has been arrested on his way to smuggle a stolen vehicle out of South Africa through the Beitbridge Port of entry to Zimbabwe. The vehicle was reportedly hijacked last week in Pretoria” (12:37 PM · Jun 18, 2023)

This further reinforces the notion that immigrants of African origin were criminals.

Another post that focused on the arrest of immigrants is : *“8 Nigerias drug dealers were arrested in South Africa, Northern cape, A large group of Nigerians proceeded to assault police*

officers and damage police vehicles and the local police station in an attempt to prevent arrest of their brothers. No other country would allow this” (9:40 AM · Apr 21, 2024).

This post discusses an incident in the Northern Cape where eight Nigerian drug dealers were arrested. The situation escalated when a group of Nigerians attacked police officers and damaged police vehicles and a local police station to prevent the arrests. This event raised serious concerns about law enforcement and public safety, especially given the negative perception that associates Nigerians with criminal activity. This incident highlights the challenges South African authorities face in tackling drug-related crimes and maintaining public order, particularly when they encounter organized resistance from immigrant criminal groups. It also calls into question the effectiveness of current security measures and law enforcement strategies in handling aggressive reactions during arrests. Additionally, it emphasizes the urgent need for law enforcement to be firm, as allowing such behaviour could set a dangerous precedent for lawlessness and a lack of respect for the legal system.

This is similar to the following post where a Zimbabwean national was allegedly impersonating a South African police officer. *“ZIMBABWEANS IMPERSONATING POLICE OFFICERS! Imagine idiots that entered the country illegally on the back of crocodiles stealing police uniform and intimidating South Africans in their own country! This was in 2022. Just a reminder” (6:25 AM · Mar 13, 2024).*

The above X post addressed the incident that happened in 2022 involving Zimbabweans allegedly impersonating police officers in South Africa. This issue addresses complex issues around illegal crime and the perception of foreign nationals in the country. Reports of individuals who entered South Africa illegally, stealing police uniforms, and intimidating locals fuelled xenophobic sentiments and deepen mistrust between citizens and migrants. The use of aggressive language in describing the event, referring to the migrants as "idiots" or implying they entered "on the back of crocodiles," illustrates a narrative that frames foreign nationals as a threat to national security and social order. Such narratives can amplify social tensions, creating an environment where hostility toward foreigners becomes normalized and even justified in public discourse.

The power dynamics at play can be seen in the way language is used to construct the identities of both the Zimbabweans and South Africans. According to Foucault (1969), discourse shapes how society perceives and understands reality, often reinforcing power structures and hierarchies. The language used in the description of this event reinforces a discourse that criminalises and dehumanises the foreign nationals while legitimising the actions of those who oppose them. This framing serves to strengthen the authority of the state and the dominant group's claim to the nation, suggesting that illegal immigrants are undermining social order. By controlling the narrative around migration and crime, this discourse not only influences public opinion but also justifies stricter immigration policies and punitive actions against migrants.

This statement expresses frustration and anger towards foreigners, accusing them of taking advantage of South African hospitality and generosity: *“You have gotten so used to disrespecting South Africans and our generosity, You thank us with anarchy, march against our laws and democratically elected ministers . La hlanya”*, (11:04 PM · Mar 27, 2022)

The use of the term “disrespecting” South Africans implies that African immigrants do not show gratitude to their hosts showing gratitude but are instead engaging in disruptive behaviour such as anarchy and protesting South African laws and government officials. The statement presents a narrative where South Africans extend goodwill, but this is met with uprising and disregard by foreign nationals, escalating into a perception of betrayal. The language also includes “La hlanya,” a phrase in Sesotho meaning “you’ve gone mad,” which underscores the emotional intensity and disapproval and revulsion about African immigrants. Umejei (2020), says that the accessibility of digital technology has stemmed in an increase in misinformation and disinformation, with direct consequences for the truth and credibility of media.

Foucault’s discourse theory can be used to analyse the power dynamics at play here. Michel Foucault's idea of discourse revolves around the interplay between knowledge, language, and power within society. He suggested that discourses act as frameworks of thought and language that establish norms, truths, and acceptability’s in specific situations. Foucault posited that these frameworks drove societal norms and power dynamics, thereby affecting individuals' perceptions, actions, and comprehension of reality by governing the topics of conversation and the way they are approached Foucault (1972).

The statement constructs a discourse of victimhood where South Africans are positioned as generous hosts whose authority and sovereignty are being challenged by foreigners. This reinforces a power relationship where foreigners are expected to be passive recipients of South African generosity, yet they are depicted as violating this unwritten contract by engaging in political activism or protests. In Foucault's terms (1972), this discourse defines the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for foreigners and delegitimises their political agency, framing their resistance as madness or chaos.

Meanwhile the statement below is a complaint that the Nigerian nationals are using South African identities. *"Our South African IDs are no longer considered Secure by Visa issuing authorities across the world due to many reports of Nigerians smugglers being arrested having used the RSA system to get that Visa Google it yourself", (6:21 PM · Mar 28, 2022)*

This statement reflects a broader concern about the perceived diminishing value of South African identification documents on the global stage supposedly because they are abused by African immigrants. By attributing this decline in credibility to Nigerian smugglers, it frames foreign nationals specifically Nigerians as the source of the problem, linking them to fraudulent activities that compromise the integrity of the South African system. The post reflects frustration rooted in the idea that criminal elements are exploiting the South African identification system, leading to global authorities doubting the security of South African documents, which impacts the country's citizens negatively, especially in the visa application process.

Similarly, another X post, indicated that *"77 ILLEGAL MINERS WHO ARE FOREIGNERS WERE RESCUED AND ARRESTED IN ORKNEY, NORTHWEST As part of clamping down on illegal mining, a multi-disciplinary team comprising of the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Illicit Mining Team, 60 are from Lesotho, 13 from Mozambique and four are Zimbabwean nationals. Meanwhile, formal identification process of the four bodies is underway. The arrested illegal miners are expected to appear before the Orkney Magistrates' Court today, facing charges", (4:37 PM · Apr 19, 2022)*

The post discusses the recent arrest of 77 foreign illegal miners in Orkney, Northwest province, and highlights the ongoing problem of illegal mining in South Africa. This issue is often connected to foreign nationals and concerns about crime linked to immigrants. Most of the arrested miners are from Lesotho, Mozambique, and

Zimbabwe, showing the cross-border aspect of this activity. Illegal mining poses serious economic, environmental, and security risks to South Africa. The formation of a multi-disciplinary task force to address this issue shows the government's commitment to tackling these operations. As a result, activists are worried about the implications of such criminal activities.

4.3 “They are taking our jobs and women”: discourse of dispossession

Apart from the discourse of illegality and criminality, a consistent theme emerging from the analysis of X posts was the accusation by South African citizens that immigrants of African descent were taking jobs meant for locals as well as their women. This, in many ways echoes the discourse of dispossession wherein immigrants of African descent are constructed as “colonialists” who grab women and jobs.

Several posts on the X insinuate that all African immigrants who came to South Africa illegally or legally are not only seeking asylum, but to take jobs from South Africans who are languishing in poverty. Tarisayi (2020) argues that most of the migrants that move to South Africa are asylum seekers who move to other countries to look for work or better standards of living. This creates stiff competition for limited job opportunities between foreign nationals and locals, particularly in the context of rising unemployment in South Africa.

Holdt (2011) and Amisi (2011) suggest that factors such as regional conflicts, a saturated job market, limitations in housing, competition in township retail, and pronounced gender-based cultural differences may play a significant role in fostering xenophobia. Apart from competition for limited resources, African immigrants were also accused of taking advantage of South African women by using them for questionable business ventures and deals. Allegations are that Nigerians run trafficking syndicates, use women to sell drugs, and exploit South African women in prostitution rings, particularly in areas like Hillbrow, to accumulate wealth (Gifford, 2000).

Others are accused of using hair salons operated by South African women as fronts for money laundering schemes. The portrayal of women as requiring protection from men can contribute to a patronising viewpoint that hampers progress towards gender equality. Opponents of this view such as the Legal Experts (2024) urge for an

expanded narrative that highlights women's resilience and abilities, stressing the importance of changes in society and policies to foster a more equitable perception of gender relations. By concentrating solely on women as victims, there is a danger of overlooking the various aspects of gender-based violence that impact other demographics, including men and non-binary people.

Ikuenobe (2020) further emphasises the connection between the sexual exploitation of women and wider societal power imbalances, which often reduce women's value to their sexual or physical attributes. This combines xenophobia with patriarchal attitudes, doubly disadvantaging African migrant women who are discriminated against both as outsiders and as women in a society that treats their bodies as commodities. Such exploitation is often accepted within patriarchal systems that see women as assets to be managed or exchanged.

Certain posts reflect the growing hostility of South Africans toward immigrants involved in illegal activities, further fuelling anger toward all immigrants, even those who came to South Africa with genuine and legal intentions. The post below is illustrative of what I mean.

This post on X *“Breaking News!!! All foreigners banned from running hair & beauty salons in South Africa We are only getting started! #OperationDudula (10:21 PM · Mar 17, 2022).*

A harsh statement was made declaring that foreigners running hair and beauty salons in South Africa "shall be cancelled." At the same time, some entered the country illegally and cannot be tracked by the Department of Home Affairs, yet they still manage to secure jobs, often at the expense of South African citizens.

A common sentiment expressed in posts includes: *“Illegal foreigners can’t be checked on ITC, but they get employed. South Africans get checked and then sidelined. This is a mandate from the government to satisfy foreign appetite”.*

Statements like these increase resentment toward immigrants and can harm the relationships between the two nations due to the hatred they promote. Operation Dudula activists also took to X, demanding that only South Africans be hired at petrol stations, threatening to boycott any organization that employs more foreigners than

local citizens. This rhetoric further inflames tensions between South African citizens and the immigrant population.

Similarly there were posts such as: *“Operation Dudula members protest at petrol station, demanding only locals be hired” (2:32 PM · Aug 30, 2022)*. The Operation Dudula members, as well as other South African members, had to hold protests at certain petrol stations, demanding that only South Africans are hired. Apart from the divisions between South African nationals and immigrants of African descent, there also instances where African immigrants were constructed as fighting against each other. For example, an X post by Operation Dudula stated that:

“Zimbabwe and Lesotho illegal foreigners are fighting for SAn jobs and they are always playing victim; Zimbabweans are blaming #PutSouthAfricanFirst and #OperationDudula for getting Basotho to kill Zimbabweans. With Basotho the only thing I can tell Zimbabweans is nise kakeni (you are in shit)?” (1:40 AM · Mar 19, 2022).

The post underlines escalating tensions between migrants from Zimbabwe and Lesotho in South Africa, primarily due to job competition. It suggests that Zimbabweans are pointing fingers at movements such as #PutSouthAfricanFirst and #OperationDudula for fuelling violence between Zimbabweans and Basotho, accusing these groups of exploiting the conflict to sow discord among African migrants. The term "nise kakeni" has derogatory connotation, indicating animosity toward Zimbabweans and a disregard for their difficulty.

This statement advocates for anti-immigrant sentiments that are often intensified by groups advocating for the prioritisation of South African citizens in employment and services. Organizations like Operation Dudula have faced allegations of fostering xenophobic sentiments, thereby attributing the blame for the nation's economic and social challenges to foreign nationals. Landau and Nyamnjoh (2010) have discussed how these movements leverage prevailing economic grievances, directing them into xenophobic aggression against African migrants.

They argued that these movements exploit existing frustrations over unemployment, inequality, and poverty, redirecting these grievances towards migrants, who are often scapegoated as the cause of local economic hardships. This, in turn, perpetuates

stereotypes and exacerbates divisions within African communities in South Africa through the media. Chari (2010) argues that, the mass media influence what people talk about and how they think about those issues. Through discourse, the news media force attention on certain issues, and build images of certain personalities. And some of these personalities are hate and discrimination towards the immigrants in South Africa. However similar posts, have the same derogatory sentiments of exploitation:

Met a young lady from Zimbabwe yesterday & when I lied that I'm also from Zim she told me she paid R2000 for an ID, & already has a well paying job at one of the major manufacturing companies in Wynberg, Sandton. She's only been in SA for 4 months (1:24 PM · Mar 29, 2022).

The post describes an encounter with a young woman from Zimbabwe who had migrated to South Africa. It shows how easily she has blended into the local community. She reportedly obtained an identification document through fraudulent means and landed a well-paying job at a large manufacturing company in Wynberg, Sandton, all within just four months. This post reflects on the broader aspect of challenges and opportunities of the economic or social mobility accessible to newcomers in South Africa. It also touches on the aspect of honesty and the complexities of identity in the context of migration. A study by the Migrating for Work Research Consortium (2015) in South Africa, found that international migrants are more likely to occupy jobs that locals are unwilling to take, often in the informal sector. The data indicated that while international migrants tend to have lower unemployment rates compared to locals, they often work in precarious, low-wage positions without benefits.

Operation Dudula activists posted messages to remind South Africans of the kind of people they are dealing with, these being the immigrants. The statement “*In case you forgot what Nigerians do to our ladies #OperationDudula #nationalSjambokDay*” (4:51 PM · Sep 6, 2022), reminded South Africans of what the Nigerian nationals are alleged to be doing to South African females and that they should look forward to the national sjambok day, which was the day that they planned to beat the foreigners who did not want to be deported back to their countries. This shows how discourse informs action and attitudes in the sense that framing African immigrants as abusing South African women would result in negative attitudes towards such foreigners and consequently result in their banishing from South Africa.

However, posts such as the one below also touch on how South African woman are abused both on Social media and offline, all in the name of influencing.

“Aside of their drugs We also have to accept that they have turned our girls into prostitutes on insta in the name of “influencing” with drug money. Have you seen a Nigerian in an office? Cleaning toilets? Cashier? They’re always at the corner doing “coolhandshakes” (8:19 PM · Mar 28, 2022).

The statement reflects a form of xenophobic discourse, grounded in stereotypes about Nigerians. It connects two major themes, drug activity and the perceived moral corruption of women through social media, into a narrative that dehumanises Nigerians by painting them as societal parasites. This language creates an "us" versus "them" divide, portraying Nigerians as inherently deviant and dangerous. The mention of "drug money" and "prostitution" draws upon moral panic and suggests that this community's involvement in certain illicit activities is widespread, reinforcing negative stigmas. The image of Nigerians performing secret handshakes serves to amplify the idea that they operate outside of mainstream, respectable society, further entrenching "Otherness". This imagery emphasises how they are seen as outsiders, establishing a cultural and social divide between "us" and "them." Such representations not only intensify the view of Nigerians as foreign or other but also enhance societal divisions, encouraging exclusion and bias against them as a separate and untrustworthy group.

Such narratives can be seen as a form of power that shapes social realities through language (Foucault, 1969). Foucault argues that discourse is not just a way of communicating, but a tool that constructs the subject it describes, influencing how people perceive and act upon that subject. By perpetuating stereotypes, this discourse reinforces a negative identity for Nigerians, casting them as perpetual outsiders who are corrupting society, similarly, Nyamnjoh (2010) also explores the role of racism, ethnicity, and media representation in shaping perceptions of xenophobia in South Africa, highlighting how these elements promote harmful stereotypes against fellow Africans. It upholds the dominant group's power to define who belongs in respectable society and who does not, thereby maintaining a social hierarchy. In this way, discourse becomes a means of control, as those labelled by it are marginalised and regulated.

The media often promotes exclusionary narratives that foster harmful stereotypes against fellow Africans, framing them as outsiders rather than acknowledging their rights as co-nationals or fellow Africans. Nyamnjoh (2010, p. 37) states that:

The media are implicated in reproducing stereotypes that construct fellow Africans as 'others' who are undeserving of belonging, rights, and recognition. This fosters negative attitudes that see co-nationals as less deserving and often criminal.

This clearly illustrates how many South Africans often judge fellow African nationals based on stereotypes perpetuated by individual interests on social media. As a result, these individuals are often perceived as "others," frequently associated with criminality and blamed for various negative issues in South Africa.

4.4 Discourse of threats of violence

Another dominant discourse around African immigrants in South Africa which circulated on X was the threat of violence. This entailed hostile, aggressive, and harmful actions, words, and behaviour targeted towards people of African descent, facilitated or intensified by social media platforms activists or users. This violence manifested in several ways such as insults, racial slurs, and dehumanising comments targeting Black people and those of African descent. Memes which are pictures or ideas that portray funny depictions of images, imitating a person or violence are used to threaten immigrants.

In these instances, funny-looking pictures of cartoons are portrayed on X, depicting violence and what South Africans would do to the migrants, similarly to videos showing and mocking or perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Africans, which are frequently shared, further normalising the hatred. Individuals, especially public figures, content creators or activists who advocate for African or Black communities, often face targeted harassment, trolling, and coordinated campaigns meant to silence or intimidate them. Some posts go beyond insults to actively incite violence or encourage attacks against African communities, which can spark real life Afrophobia violence.

Some are even disinformation campaigns spreading lies or exaggerated news stories blaming African immigrants or communities for economic or social problems, fuelling

tensions and violence. Campaigns spreading disinformation targeting African immigrants in South Africa commonly involve untrue or overstated accusations that hold these groups responsible for various economic and social issues. These campaigns are frequently disseminated via social media, crafting stories intended to provoke xenophobic feelings and legitimise discrimination or violence towards individuals from other countries.

A key example is the utilisation of hashtags such as #PutSouthAfricanFirst and #OperationDudula, which spread unconfirmed reports claiming that African migrants are "taking jobs," straining public resources, or contributing to higher crime rates in South Africa. These campaigns often promote the belief that undocumented migrants are mainly responsible for the country's high unemployment rates and low wages among South African nationals, despite evidence showing that various economic factors have a greater impact. These groups commonly rely on social media to disseminate inaccurate or completely false news stories, thereby intensifying public frustration and hostility towards immigrants from nations like Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Mozambique.

Wasserman & Schiffer (2013) along with Chen (2010) suggest that the dissemination of incorrect information on social networks plays a significant role in fuelling xenophobic violence in South Africa. According to them, these digital platforms serve as breeding grounds for both misinformation and disinformation, sparking a vicious cycle of fear, resentment, and subsequent attacks not just on African immigrants but also among South Africans. The speedy distribution of false or exaggerated reports regarding crimes supposedly committed by immigrants exacerbates existing biases and leads to violent acts against these communities, thereby heightening societal discord.

Such misinformation often accuses African migrants of being the root cause of economic woes, criminal activities, and scarcities in resources, which in turn triggers public indignation and sometimes, violent reactions. Wasserman and Schiffer discuss how these distorted narratives can drive communities towards vigilantism and xenophobic violence. Chen (2023) sheds light on how digital platforms play a significant role in escalating these feelings by making it harder to correct or stop the spread of such misinformation once it becomes widespread. He argues,

... that social media users who frequently engage with social media platforms are more likely to counter misinformation because they perceive the potential negative impact on others. He further adds that the complexity of social media's role, as increased exposure can both raise awareness of misinformation's risks and, paradoxically, desensitise users to its effects over time (Chen, 2023, pp. 105-122).

Users of social media platforms, particularly X, often take the information they encounter at face value, including misinformation and false narratives. This tendency poses risks to individuals who may be misrepresented or harmed by these inaccuracies. Tackling this problem requires more than just regulating misinformation on social media; it also necessitates enhancing digital literacy so individuals can more effectively assess the information they come across on the internet.

This shows that social media has become a powerful tool for communication, including for those who engage in harmful and threatening rhetoric against immigrants. In South Africa, platforms like X are being used by individuals and groups to spread violent threats against immigrants, particularly those residing illegally in the country. These threats are not just limited to expressions of hostility but include the promotion of physical violence intended to instil fear and force immigrants to leave.

Activists behind anti-immigration movements use these platforms to rally others, sharing messages that emphasize a desire for the deportation of immigrants, especially Zimbabwean nationals. Statements such as *"we are going to kill you if you do not leave South Africa"* or *"you are not wanted"* are aimed at intimidating immigrants and conveying that their presence is unwelcome. They use dehumanising slurs and aggressive language to emphasise their attitudes. However, Landau and Misago (2009) analyse the dehumanization of immigrants in South Africa by examining the social, economic, and political factors that fuel xenophobic sentiments and violence against foreigners. They argue that,

foreigners are increasingly portrayed as threatening other invaders who undermine national security, economic well-being, and social order (Landau & Misago, 2009, p. 40).

Such violence is not simply random but is ingrained in societal structures and shaped by narratives that frame immigrants as threats to economic stability, public safety, and social harmony. The authors highlight how immigrants are often scapegoated for problems like unemployment, crime, and competition for resources. This portrayal serves to strip them of their rights and humanity, casting them as "outsiders" responsible for the difficulties encountered by South African citizens. The process of dehumanization is further perpetuated by political discourse and media representations, which often characterize immigrants as criminals, drug dealers, or illegal job seekers, *ibid.*

For instance, this post *"There will be war before Zimbabwe thinks it can take over this country. All blood shed shall be solely the fault of Zimbabweans, ZanuPF and the lights of Simba Go fix your kak land since you are so educated #OperationDudula"* published on (10:24 AM · Apr 15, 2022) by the Operation Dudula claimed that the ruling ZANU-PF party in Zimbabwe was the reason for the violence, warning that if Zimbabwean immigrants do not leave, they could face lethal consequences. The post conveys a strong and confrontational stance towards Zimbabwe, its governing party Zanu-PF, and individuals such as Simba Chitando, the lawyer who was representing Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP) holders in South Africa; though he is mentioned unclearly. It manifests a sense of frustration, likely directed at any perceived meddling or actions by Zimbabwe concerning another nation.

The post suggest that should any conflict or war emerge, responsibility should fall squarely on Zimbabwe and its leaders, suggesting that their involvement would directly provoke such hostilities. The notion that "before Zimbabwe thinks it can take over this country" suggests that African immigrants are aliens who are invading South Africa. The comment "go fix your kak land since you are so educated" critiques the apparent failure of Zimbabweans, especially those who are well educated, to resolve their own domestic problems before intervening in the affairs of other countries especially South Africa. The post blends in nationalistic pride, animosity towards perceived foreign intervention by Zimbabwe, and a willingness to engage in conflict should such intrusion occur, demonstrating an uncompromising position against any attempt at dominance or influence by Zimbabwe. Another common phrase, *"So you got your sjambok ready?"* (25:33 PM. Sep 20 2022)

refers to preparing weapons for a planned event called “National Sjambok Day,” in which South Africans are urged to target townships where illegal immigrants live and take matters into their own hands by forcibly removing or deporting them. The question "So you got your sjambok ready?" brings up a deeply troubling reference to the sjambok's historical and symbolic role as a tool of oppression and control during the apartheid period in South Africa wherein blacks used to be sjamboked by white apartheid law enforcement agents for various transgressions. Originally a heavy whip made from animal hide, the sjambok was infamously used by authorities during the apartheid era in South Africa to oppress and brutalise Black South Africans, acting as a symbol of state-sanctioned violence and repression. The fact that the same weapon is now used against fellow blacks demonstrates the perpetuation of colonial apartheid modes of government in the post-apartheid era, and the extent to which the apartheid system created an identity crisis among blacks.

In contemporary times, this term's use, particularly directed at immigrants, highlights a distressing continuation of violence and dehumanisation. Instead of its historical use by state forces against South African nationals, it is now being employed by certain individuals or groups in South Africa against African migrants. This change in usage signifies how xenophobic attitudes have repurposed historical instruments of oppression to target new victims, thereby continuing a cycle of violence.

The sjambok's current use against immigrants represents a redirection of societal frustrations and anger towards those perceived as foreigners, who are often wrongfully blamed for economic and social problems. This ongoing situation indicates that the legacy of apartheid's divisive and violent strategies still affects contemporary conflict resolution approaches in South Africa, targeting marginalised groups with similar methods of aggression. Such practices worsen divisions within African communities, hindering unity and solidarity across the continent. During the apartheid period, the South African police extensively utilised plastic sjamboks for crowd control. In contemporary South Africa, the sjambok still appears in incidents of violence and is sometimes used in political and social disputes, underscoring its enduring significance in the nation's collective memory and culture. It has evolved into a symbol representing both resistance and oppression, illustrating its intricate role in the history of South Africa, Sisibo (2015).

In addition to targeting Zimbabweans, some South Africans are also directing their anger at Nigerian immigrants, especially those accused of not paying their utility bills.

For example, a social media post below claimed that Nigerians owe R600,000 in unpaid electricity bills and demanded proof of payment. If they fail to comply, they face threats of being “whipped” as a form of punishment.

“The arrogance of Nigerians saying our own South African officials are invading Nigeria need to pay its electricity bill! @CityPowerJhbwe will follow up. We want that R600k Proof of Payment No disrespectful foreigner will be comfortable in RSA.” (3:27 PM · Jan 20, 2023)

This statement reflects a strong nationalistic sentiment and expresses hostility towards foreigners, particularly Nigerians. The mention of South African officials invading Nigeria while calling for proof of a large electricity bill of R600k is meant to compare perceptions of South African responsibility with the perceived crime of Nigerians.

The language, especially the term disrespectful foreigner, reveals a discourse of exclusion, suggesting that foreigners, specifically Nigerians, should not feel comfortable in South Africa. This aggressive framing echoes elements of Afrophobia, where national identity is constructed in opposition to the foreign nationals. The statement also evokes economic issues, using the electricity bill as a symbol of mismanagement or irresponsibility, indirectly blaming foreigners for societal or governmental issues.

Michael Foucault (1969), discourse theory argues that power operates through discourses systems of knowledge and language that shape how individuals and groups are viewed and treated in society. In this instance, the discourse surrounding Nigerians in South Africa involves power relations rooted in historical and socio-political contexts. The activist language reinforces a hierarchical structure in which foreigners, particularly Nigerians, are portrayed as threats or burdens. This power dynamic perpetuates exclusionary practices and justifies discriminatory attitudes towards foreign nationals, particularly within public discourses concerning national resources, economics, and identity. The “no disrespectful foreigner” invocation is an example of how discourse shapes societal attitudes towards outsiders, reinforcing power imbalances.

This use of social media to coordinate xenophobic violence reflects how platforms intended for open communication can be manipulated to spread fear, hatred, and incite violence against vulnerable communities. The anonymity and widespread reach of social media enable such threats to escalate quickly, leading to dangerous real-world consequences. According to Ogbouriki (2024) social media platforms, originally designed for open communication, have been co-opted to incite fear, hatred, and violence against vulnerable communities, particularly immigrants. The anonymity these platforms provide allows users to spread misinformation and hate speech, which can escalate tensions and lead to real-world violence.

South African citizens were responding to the violence by Operation Dudula, in a xenophobic way. posts like, *“To all the nurses and Docs in our inbox thanking us.... We shall continue the good fight for you”* (09:19. 2022 sep 02) was an appreciation to nurses and doctors that sent the Operation Dudula messages on Twitter inbox about the foreigners that came to their clinics to seek help, immigrants who are using the South African health facilities for free and those that come to commit crimes or are illegally given treatments at hospitals. Operation Dudula promises to fight for them against any trouble caused by foreigners in health facilities.

Posts like *“Dear ANC... You cannot extend National Sjambok Day on December 31, 2022. Starting January 1, 2023, no Zimbabwean will walk these streets freely. On June 31, 2023, we will confront the Nigerian drug lords”* (10:00 AM, September 21, 2022) suggest a strong discontent with the ruling party, the ANC. The post is a direct communication to the African National Congress (ANC), expressing dissatisfaction and making specific demands. It references "national Sjambok Day," scheduled for 31 December 2022, suggesting a day of action or protest that the activists insist cannot be postponed. The message warns of consequences starting 1 January 2023, particularly targeting Zimbabweans' freedom to move, and sets a deadline of 31 June 2023 to address issues related to Nigerian drug lords. This implies significant tension and dissatisfaction with how the ANC is handling issues related to immigration, crime, and drug trafficking, using provocative language to demand immediate and decisive action.

4.5 Patriotic discourse

Social media discourses against migrants of African descent in South Africa were very much punctuated by a significant amount of patriotic posturing particularly signified by the slogan “South Africa First”. Patriotism is defined as “the love, devotion, and sense of attachment to one's country” (Mchugh, 2024). It involves a deep respect for the nation's values, traditions, and culture, as well as a commitment to its well-being and progress. Patriotic individuals may express pride in their country's achievements and history, and they often feel a sense of responsibility to contribute positively to its future. It manifests through acts of service, national pride, and support for the country's institutions, but it can also vary in intensity and expression across different cultures and individuals.

However, some scholars, such as Aitana (2016), argue that patriotism can sometimes manifest itself through nativist discursive tropes whereby nativism refers to the political and social belief that prioritizes the interests, culture, and rights of native-born populations over those of immigrants or foreign-born individuals. Nativists often oppose immigration, advocating for policies that restrict or limit the influence of newcomers, which can sometimes lead to Afrophobia or discrimination against people perceived as outsiders, it is often rooted in a desire to preserve a nation's identity, culture, or economic interests in the form of threats from foreign influence (Shrag, 2010).

Schrag (2010) highlights that nativism is typically fuelled by a desire to preserve a nation's identity and is deeply embedded in societal views on immigration. These perspectives are not unique to modern times but have historical roots, as reflected in historical resistance to various immigrant groups under the guise of maintaining cultural purity or economic stability. He further argued that,

...“this pattern of “othering” persists today, where xenophobic sentiments can become institutionalised in restrictive immigration policies, often fostering discrimination against immigrants viewed as outsiders and, in some cases, resulting in Afrophobia and related prejudices” (Schrag, 2010, p10).

Certainly, the mindset of “othering” often arises after Afrophobia activists object to certain policies regarding immigrants. These attitudes can lead to societal decisions fuelled by hatred and violence against immigrants, who are wrongly accused of criminal activities or depicted as wanting to take over South Africa.

Misago (2010), argued that since the development of South Africa was assigned in 1994 to be the beginning of a new era, the country's black majority thought that their economic misfortunes would be reformed as a result, but today South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world.

The country is marked by an extended history of regular experiences of violent conflicts such as violent crime, violent service delivery protests, communal violence, vigilantism within its townships and informal settlements" (Misago, 2016; p,89).

Within this context, the foreigner has become a political scapegoat however xenophobia and intolerance have indeed become a recurrent reality in South African politics (Thakur, 2010)

Abidde and Matambo (2021) highlight the complex interplay between nativism, immigration, and discrimination in contemporary African contexts, particularly emphasising how these dynamics can fuel Afrophobia. They argue that nativist movements often emerge from a desire to protect national identity, culture, and economic interests, leading to exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. This sentiment can be especially pronounced in regions with historical tensions, where foreign nationals are scapegoated for local economic challenges and social issues.

Nkabane (2021) argues that the legacy of racial segregation and discrimination has left deep social divisions that continue to influence attitudes towards immigrants. South Africans display nativism driven by a strong love for their country and the fear that illegal immigrants may take over what they have worked hard to achieve. Many believe that immigrants are a threat to their resources, jobs, and culture. This sentiment is intensified by the historical struggles they endured, particularly during the apartheid era, which makes them fiercely protective of their nation. Social media, particularly platforms like X, have become a battleground where South Africans voice their frustrations about immigrants, expressing the belief that foreigners are invading their country and demanding their removal in the name of patriotism.

This post " *You will never take this Country zimbies!!!*"(10:53 PM · Mar 16, 2022) is specifically directed at Zimbabwean nationals, declaring that they will never succeed in taking over South Africa, no matter how hard they try. Similarly to the post below

that argues that illegal immigrants will continue to be a problem unless they are all sent back to their countries.

The post below also strengthens a similar notion that illegal immigrants should go back to their home countries.

The fight against illegal immigration will never stop until the last illegal immigrant is back home. We don't care abt your labels and insults, we are hard at work enforcing the laws of South Africa (9:45 AM · Mar 18, 2022).

The text expresses a strong stance against illegal immigration, emphasising an unwavering commitment to enforcing immigration laws in South Africa. It reflects an attitude of determination to continue the fight against illegal immigration until every undocumented individual is repatriated. The message also indicates a disregard for public criticism or labels that might be directed at those enforcing these laws, suggesting that the focus remains squarely on legal enforcement rather than public perception. This approach underscores a prioritisation of legal frameworks and national regulations over the complex social and humanitarian issues often associated with immigration debates.

On the other hand, those who oppose xenophobia and advocate against the deportation of illegal immigrants are also targeted in social media posts with posts such as “Whether you preach #NoToXenophobia illegal foreigners will leave our country. South Africa is not a dumping site for rejects from other countries. We will not be dictated by foreigners #PutSouthAfricansFirst #OperationDudula” (11:13 AM · Apr 14, 2022).

The statement reflects a strong nativist sentiment that positions South Africa as a nation primarily for South Africans, emphasizing a rejection of immigrants perceived as “rejects” from their countries. The hashtags #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #OperationDudula signal a call to action against illegal immigration, framing it as a threat to national identity and resources. This rhetoric feeds into existing xenophobic attitudes, portraying immigrants as burdens rather than contributors to society.

Another post targets Zimbabweans immigrant, insisting that they have overstayed their welcome and must now return home. Some posts commend movements like Operation Dudula and South Africa First activists for their actions against illegal

immigrants and foreign businesses, claiming that they are protecting jobs and resources for South Africans. They argue that these efforts are not xenophobia but patriotism, as they aim to uphold the law and restore South Africa to its former beauty.

The Humans Rights Watch (2020) argues that the Zimbabwean activists have accused South Africans of acting like Nazis, but South Africans argue that they have never invaded Zimbabwe or other African countries. They insist that their goal is simply to secure their borders and ensure that only documented immigrants with good intentions are allowed to stay in the country.

This post, *“South Africans who are paying rent to foreigners MUST STOP, paying that money. Do Not exit that house, it is yours, not a foreigner’s house. People from Tembisa, ivory and neighbouring area. DO NOT PAY REANT TO A FOREIGNER. Invite Dudula, it will assist”* (12:00 PM. Mar 22 2022) was directed to South Africans who rented at places owned by foreigners that, they should not pay rent because South Africa is theirs, and that if they happened to be kicked off the house, they should not leave, because they now own those houses. If there is any problem, such as being evicted from their rented homes, they should invite Operation Dudula, to assist them to not move. In this sense South Africans are told not to pay any rent to any foreigner.

For example, a post by Operation Dudula on (14:23 PM. Jun 20 2022) stated that Zimbabweans had overstayed their welcome in South Africa and it was time to go back home. *“Dear Zimbabweans, you have clearly overstayed your visit,”* was directed at foreigners who are of Zimbabwean origin.

This post captures a prevailing sentiment of exclusion directed towards African migrants in South Africa. It implies a lack of legitimacy in their presence, framing their status as temporary visitors rather than integral members of society. This language reflects broader nativist attitudes that positions Zimbabweans and other African migrants as unwelcome intruders rather than as fellow Africans seeking refuge from socioeconomic challenges, Ndlovu (2020).

4.6 Invasion discourse

South Africa was, in many instances, characterised as a country under invasion from African immigrants, with South African citizens pushing back these invaders. The notion of an invader invokes the idea of a person who invites themselves to a place, occupies that place without permission and refuses to leave. Invasion also implies the act of entering a place, often forcefully, to take control, usually involve aggression or hostility. Regarding immigration, most individuals arriving in South Africa do so as asylum seekers or refugees seeking employment and a chance at permanent residency. However, some xenophobia activists disagree; they believe these immigrants threaten to seize resources and view their presence as an invasion of their country.

Pineteh (2017) suggests that, in a nation facing rising unemployment, particularly among the black population, African migrants are unjustly blamed for the joblessness of local South Africans. Interestingly, as transnational migration increases, the idea of competition over limited resources has become widespread globally. By depicting foreigners as individuals who take away jobs, this narrative positions Africans as adversaries, portraying them as noncitizens who are robbing citizens of their rightful access to employment (Landau, 2011).

Such views about Africans overlook a provision in the South African constitution that clearly states, “South Africa belongs to all those who live in it,” and the country’s immigration laws have granted many African migrants the right to integrate. Although the constitution and immigration regulations afford legal protections to foreigners, the portrayal of Africans as criminals, job seekers, and illegal immigrants in media and political discussions serves to marginalise outsiders, Pineteh (2017).

According to some posts on X, South Africans were demanding their space back by calling for the deportation of African nationals, as they did not belong in South Africa. Some of the posts encouraged fellow South Africans to unite in expelling those residing in the country illegally, feeling a sense of superiority over them. This dynamic can be understood through Michel Foucault’s (1991) theory, which explores the relationships between power, knowledge, and social institutions. Foucault (1991) argues that discourses systems of ideas, language, and practices shape power dynamics and social realities. The negative ideas that some South Africans hold

toward African immigrants influence how they justify and express violence towards other cultures.

“Foreigners are ready to fight SAns #OperationDudula in their own country because we have a useless government that fails to protect RSA citizens, fearing they will be called xenophobic. We are led by sell outs” (8:55 AM · Mar 8, 2022)

The post expresses strong dissatisfaction with the South African government's handling of issues related to foreigners in the country. It suggests that the government's inaction or perceived failure to protect the rights and safety of South African citizens is due to a fear of being labelled xenophobic. The hashtag “#OperationDudula” references movement or operation, which seems to be a response by citizens or groups within South Africa to take matters into their own hands regarding the issue of foreigners in the country. The post also contains a harsh critique of the leadership, describing them as “sell outs,” implying that they believe the leaders are betraying the interests of their own people. This statement indicates a level of frustration and a call for more assertive action from the government to address the concerns of its citizens regarding foreigners and the perceived impact on the country.

The post below reveals aggressive nationalism that positions Zimbabweans as opponents rather than fellow Africans.

“There will be war before Zimbabwe thinks it can take over this country. All blood shed shall be solely the fault of Zimbabweans, ZanuPF and the lights of Simba Go fix your kak land since you are so educated #OperationDudula” (10:24 AM · Apr 15, 2022)

The threat of violence against Zimbabweans is harshly articulated, suggesting a belief that they are attempting to take over South Africa, which reflects deeply ingrained xenophobic sentiments. This rhetoric aligns with the nativist discourse prevalent in movements of #OperationDudula, which calls for prioritizing South Africans over immigrants and often portrays foreigners as intruders responsible for local economic and social issues.

In situations where South Africans express fear that their country is being overtaken, they sometimes respond by posting hostile messages aimed at foreign nationals and other immigrants who are trying to defend their presence in the country. South Africans might say things like,

" We are not gonna negotiate with people who came here via crocodiles or hidden inside the trucks. The time of emotional blackmailing us it's over they will go back everyone of them."(1:39 PM · Mar 18, 2022).

The statement "We are not gonna negotiate" demonstrates lack of compromise or taking seek middle ground on the crucial matter of illegal immigration, indicating a strict stance on immigration matters that favours stringent control rather than open dialogue or consideration of specific cases. The use of dramatic descriptions like arriving "via crocodiles or hidden inside the trucks" vividly portrays the extreme measures some immigrants might take to skip the borders, alleging that they come through crossing the rivers with crocodiles or at the back of delivery trucks.

This language conveys the urgency of the situation and possibly paints these individuals as either a threat or as acting out of desperation, challenging conventional norms. The phrase "the time of emotional blackmailing us it's over" conveys a belief that arguments appealing to empathy or humanitarian values have been used manipulatively. This shows a frustration with efforts to influence public sentiment through emotional means, indicating a preference for a more logical, practical approach to handling immigration.

Finally, the declaration that "they will go back every one of them" affirms a hard stance on deportation and rigorous immigration laws. This statement suggests an unwavering policy that intends to return all unauthorised entrants without exception.

In connection with these sentiments, activists from Operation Dudula thanked the community and law enforcement for their role in intercepting illegal Malawian immigrants.

Thank you, community, and Metro Police, we were able to intercept the illegal Malawians We cannot do this alone South Africans...help or you will one day wake up in a country you cannot recognise #OperationDudula (14:20 PM. Sep 15 2022).

They emphasize that they couldn't have achieved this without the support of South Africans and the collective effort to "clean up" the country and resist what they see as an attempt by illegal immigrants to take over. The activists call on these immigrants to return to their home countries and work to improve them instead.

Statements such as, " *Guys please go fix home.... Please we want to breathe nyana for 12 months le tla boa* " (9:58 PM · Mar 16, 2022) demonstrate a deep desire for immigrants to depart from South Africa, granting locals the chance to better their own living conditions. The term "fix home" suggests a plea for immigrants to concentrate on improving their own nations, hinting at the notion that their presence in South Africa is seen as a hindrance to the local populace's progress and well-being. The statement "we want to breathe nyana" signifies a craving for some respite, showing that locals feel burdened by the prevailing socio-economic issues that immigration appears to exacerbate.

The concluding phrase, "*le tla boa*," which means "and you will come back," implies an anticipation that there could be an opportunity for immigrants to return once the situation has improved, underscoring the view that the needs and priorities of the residents should be foremost during this time. In essence, the statement articulates a desire for room and stability, highlighting the importance of allowing locals the opportunity to prosper without the added strain of immigration.

4.7 Solidarity and counter discourses

Another prominent discourse regarding African immigrants in South Africa that emerged on X was one of solidarity and counter discourse. This included posts from various South Africans expressing unity with migrants and foreigners, alongside messages of support and anti-xenophobic sentiments.

The social media activists are not only present online but offline as well, they use the online platform to recruit and spread the word to other South African nationals to join part and help clean South Africa, however others view the objectives as xenophobic and disheartening because that is where the violence emanates from.

In terms of solidarity, some South Africans express support for immigrants who choose to return to their home countries to fight for change. For example, there is support for Nigerians fighting against African immigrants in Nigeria, with South Africans backing the idea that these foreign nationals should leave. Some Nigerians, in response to posts accusing South Africans of xenophobia, have stated that South Africans should avoid visiting their countries, as they will retaliate. South Africans responded rhetorically, reinforcing the notion that they don't visit or interfere in other countries

and are not interested in seeking jobs abroad. This sentiment could fuel further anti-immigrant movements, including Operation Dudula, which aligns with other countries' anti-immigrant sentiments.

Statements like, *"We support all the Zimbabweans who are in Zimbabwe fighting for Zimbabwe Not the uneducated cowards who are in South Africa #ShutDownZimbabwe"* (9:35 PM · May 5, 2022), illustrate a strong sense of nationalism, making a clear distinction between those actively oppose what they see as oppression within their nation and those Zimbabweans residing in South Africa. It champions solidarity with individuals perceived as brave and dedicated to bettering their nation, while simultaneously casting those in South Africa in a negative light, suggesting they lack courage or the will to face their country's issues head-on. This sharp contrast indicates a feeling of betrayal or disappointment towards those who might be seen as shirking their duties or not contributing to national reform.

The hashtag #ShutDownZimbabwe underscores the immediacy and gravity of the call for action, possibly signalling a push for protest or mobilisation against Zimbabwe's current political climate. In essence, the message highlights the tension surrounding national identity, duty, and the intricate dynamics of migration, praising those who stay as heroes while disparaging those who leave. It reflects the frustration of those pushing for change in Zimbabwe, proposing that true patriotism lies in tackling problems domestically rather than escaping them by moving away.

In addition, there is criticism of the ANC for allegedly promising to care for the entire African continent, which some activists argue, that is why the party is opposed to stricter border controls.

Someone once said ANC promised the entire continent of africa to take care of them somehow..hence they are against close safe controlled borders..that's is why I.migrants can arrange a march or strike in SA..bo ramaphosa must tell us the truth what they promised this ppl, (4:45 PM · Jun 2, 2022).

The post voices doubts regarding the African National Congress (ANC) and its approach toward immigration, hinting at the possibility that the party has informal

agreements in place to aid migrants from throughout the African continent, thereby influencing its position on maintaining open borders. The term "against close safe controlled borders" suggests the idea that the ANC might be putting political ties or commitments above the welfare of South African citizens, leading to a sense of neglect among the locals who believe their concerns are being sidelined. It is pointed out that "migrants can arrange a march or strike in SA," drawing attention to the notion that migrants have considerable organizational abilities and support, which could potentially come at the expense of local workers or citizens. The call for President Cyril Ramaphosa to "tell us the truth" amplifies the call for clarity on the ANC's immigration strategies and any secret agreements with other countries, mirroring wider worries about leadership, the distribution of resources, and the concept of national identity.

On the other side, some political parties and movements in South Africa advocate for the rights of immigrants, including illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, and tourists. They argue that Africa belongs to all Africans, and that these individuals have a right to live and work in South Africa. These movements are often labeled as "sellouts" by anti-immigrant groups, who question why they support the presence of illegal immigrants.

"XENOPHOBIA IS OVERRATED! 'of EFF says xenophobia is overrated... until all South Africans are finished", (6:36 AM · Mar 10, 2024)

Operation Dudula has accused parties like the EFF of downplaying xenophobia, claiming that "xenophobia is overrated." They assert that only after the entire African continent is free of immigrants will people realize the negative impact these individuals have had on South Africa.

The comment made by an Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) representative that "XENOPHOBIA IS OVERRATED!" is a critique to common narratives about xenophobia in South Africa. This assertion implies that the concerns surrounding xenophobia are blown out of proportion, which could disregard the real experiences of individuals who have been discriminated against or subjected to violence due to their nationality. By claiming xenophobia to be "overrated," it suggests that such concerns distract from the more immediate social and economic issues facing South Africans,

proposing that internal challenges should be prioritised over xenophobia. The mention of "until all South Africans are finished" reflects a belief that the local issues, like unemployment, poverty, and social inequality, are of such magnitude that they hide the struggles faced by immigrants. This approach seeks to rally EFF support by focusing on local substantive matters, while also sparking controversy and discussion on the interplay of race, nationality, and social justice in South Africa.

Moreover, the anti-xenophobic movements activists, tried necessary to advocate for the immigrants in South Africa, for example, this post addresses the Operation Dudula on why they are only attacking black Africans.

Why are you only targeting fellow black African people like you. Why are you not going to Indian, white and Chinese places too. Are you scared of them? There are many illegal Indians, Europeans/Afrikaanas and Chinese. Go there and do the same...
(12:15 PM · Mar 18, 2022).

Critics of Operation Dudula who are members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) a political party, including members of anti-xenophobic movements, have raised concerns about why xenophobic activists are only targeting black African immigrants. They ask, "Why are you only targeting fellow black people?" These critics challenge Operation Dudula and similar groups to also focus on Indian, white, and Chinese communities who may have gained citizenship or entered the country illegally. They question whether these activists are afraid to confront these other groups and argue that they should not focus solely on black African immigrants if they are truly concerned about illegal immigration. Gruyter (2021) argues that the fear or hatred of people perceived as foreign or different blinds South Africans to their social and economic prosperity and that it manifests as prejudice, discrimination, or even violence against an individual based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion.

The statement below criticizes a perceived attitude among middle-class South Africans, who are portrayed as more tolerant of crime committed by foreigners, like Zimbabwean cable thieves, because they have the privilege of traveling and experiencing global diversity.

“Apparently if we travel more we’ll learn to tolerate crime committed by foreigners. According to middle-class SAns, the reason we have an intolerable attitude towards foreign criminals like Zim cable thieves is cause we dont travel. Theres lots of Dr Pashys in SA middle-class” (9:58 PM · Jun 12, 2023)

The sarcastic tone suggests frustration with the idea that travel leads to an acceptance or normalization of criminal behaviour. The mention of "Dr. Pashys" likely refers to individuals seen as overly liberal or idealistic, who downplay local concerns about foreign nationals committing crimes. This viewpoint points to an underlying tension between different social classes in South Africa regarding issues of crime, immigration, and foreign nationals' impact on local communities.

From a Foucauldian discursive analytic perspective this statement reflects a struggle over which narratives dominate public perception of crime and immigration. The middle-class discourse shaped by exposure to global environments and possibly more liberal attitudes clashes with a more localised discourse of crime and economic pressure felt by working-class or less mobile citizens. By emphasising foreign criminals, this reaffirms an “US” versus “THEM” binary where the foreigner is associated with crime and moral decay while the citizen is a paragon of virtue. Foucault views power as diffused through societal institutions and language highlights how these conflicting discourses shape policies, social attitudes, and power relations, further perpetuating exclusionary or xenophobic attitudes towards certain groups.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed how the collected data was interpreted and analysed. The data under examination, which includes posts from the Operation Dudula account on social media platform X that expressed Afrophobia sentiments, from 2021 to 2023. Relevant themes that were analysed in this chapter are, the discourse of illegality and criminality, the discourse of threats of violence, patriotic discourse, invasion discourse, solidarity, and counter-discourse.

Under these relevant themes, the main findings reveal that participants of X, who are activists affiliated with Operation Dudula, believe that immigrants have come to South Africa not only to disrupt their lives but to take over the country itself. They associate the surge in criminal activities with immigrants, blaming them for issues such as crime,

the trafficking of South African women for drugs, and the loss of jobs and land. These activists have turned to the social media platform X to express their frustrations and feelings towards immigrants in their country. Intimidating threats have surfaced, with some calling for violent measures reminiscent of the sjambok punishment used during apartheid to discipline South Africans. The immigrants face derogatory labels and dehumanization. Nonetheless, there are opposing movements, such as the EFF, which are strongly against this anti-immigrant sentiment among South Africans. The next chapter, which is the final chapter provides a summary of study findings, conclusions, recommendations, study limitations and directions for future studies.

CHAPTER 5: Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to investigate the discursive construction of Afrophobic violence on platform X in South Africa, specifically focussing on the narratives and social dynamics that influence online perceptions of African immigrants. This chapter summarises findings that emerged from the content and discursive analysis of X posts on the Operation Dudula, placing them in the wider context of Afrophobia and digital discourse within the South African online community. The chapter also examines the implications of these discursive constructions and provides recommendations for policy and practice, outlines the study's limitations, and proposes areas for future research. It opens with a summary of the key findings from the study, relating them to the existing literature on Afrophobia and social media representations by addressing the key objectives namely,

- To establish how African migrants are represented on social media X in South Africa,
- To establish possible reasons why African immigrants in South Africa are discursively represented in the way they are represented on South Africa and
- To explain the possible impact of such representation on South Africa's pan African agenda.

This is followed by a discussion on the practical and theoretical implications, which leads to several recommendations aimed at fostering unity and combating online hate speech and promoting Pan-Africanism. The chapter wraps up with a reflection on the study's limitations and a call for further research to expand on these insights, along with the concluding remarks for the chapter.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.2.1 Research Objective 1 sought to establish how African migrants are represented on social media X in South Africa.

Findings from the study revealed that African migrants were misrepresented as the “Other”, mainly as ‘illegal’, ‘criminal’, ‘invaders’, ‘inhuman’, threatened with violence. Because of this ‘Othering’ immigrants of African descent were blamed for the numerous problems that South Africa was facing, such as crime, poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, foreign nationals were accused of selling drugs, opening fake churches, women trafficking, as well as the killing South African women. They were constructed as non-human or “zombies” which created justification for their ill-treatment and targeted for violence. The identified crimes were of selling drugs, opening fake churches, women trafficking, and killings are also done by South Africans, not only foreigners.

Discussions on X often constructed African migrants through exclusionary lenses that characterise them as dangers to local economic stability and societal order. Mpofu (2021) and Crush and Tawodzera (2014) note that African migrants are commonly labelled as “job stealers” and “criminals,” reinforcing stereotypes that suggest they are inherently disruptive and drain local resources. Mpofu (2021) points out that popular hashtags and trending topics often focus on crime or competition for employment, casting African migrants as scapegoats for broader systemic issues such as unemployment and poverty.

Crush and Tawodzera (2014) highlight that language, like “they take our jobs” and “bring crime” fortifies a divisive “us versus them” mentality. This construction of discourse not only depicts African migrants as threats to the economy and society but also fosters public animosity and division.

Mpofu (2021) contends that inflammatory language, such as terms like “*kwerekwere*” (a derogatory word for foreign nationals), is commonly used in online spaces, reinforcing narratives of exclusion. Monyakane (2023) argues that social media not only amplifies these narratives but also creates echo chambers where xenophobic rhetoric goes unchecked, normalizing negative perceptions and enabling collective

hostility toward African migrants. This digital hostility further marginalizes African immigrants and deepens societal divisions, highlighting a pressing need for interventions that counter such narratives and promote positive representations.

5.2.2 Research Objective 2 sought to establish possible reasons why African immigrants in South Africa were discursively represented in the way they are represented on X.

The study revealed that some South African citizens believed that foreigners were a threat to the country since they were perceived as job taking jobs of locals and were 'abusing women'. However, these negative attitudes were all influenced by some of the narratives peddled online.

This shows that African immigrants in South Africa often face negative representations due to a mix of socio economic, historical, and political influences. High rates of unemployment and poverty foster such negative views about African immigrants because of competition for resources which results in narratives that depict them as economic threats (Crush & Ramachandran, 2015). It could also be argued that the legacy of apartheid has created strict divisions within African identity, fostering a sense of "otherness" that continues to exist today (Matsinhe, 2011). Stereotypes where African immigrants are labelled criminals or unskilled workers exacerbates their marginalisation, often intensified by media representations and social media discussions that influence public perceptions. Such representations perpetuate a xenophobic atmosphere, making it difficult for African immigrants to be accepted and socially integrated within South Africa (Landau, 2011).

Nigerian immigrants have been accused of failing to pay utility bills, with these claims typically rooted in stereotypes rather than factual evidence. These stereotypes, along with widespread misinformation, feed a narrative that promotes violence and discrimination. Furthermore, the notion of "othering" has marginalised African immigrants from fully engaging in South African society, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion, violence, and threats of deportation because of the stereotypes that are ladled against the immigrants. This atmosphere creates a perilous situation where foreign nationals face ongoing victimization and the looming fear of being expelled.

Frantz Fanon's work, particularly in "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), sheds light on intra-community conflicts among Black individuals, arguing that colonialism fosters feelings of inferiority. This leads Black people to perceive themselves and others through a distorted lens shaped by harmful, racist ideologies. Fanon's perspective indicates that such internalised racism and a fractured identity, rooted in colonial legacies, contribute to divisions within Black communities.

Foucault (1972) posits that the discourse of Afrophobia, rife with stereotypes and narratives of otherness, cultivates a societal atmosphere that perpetuates negative views and discriminatory actions against African immigrants. This rhetoric exacerbates sensations of exclusion and dehumanisation, reinforcing biases and legitimising systemic discrimination. As a result, it upholds existing power disparities, lending credence to certain perspectives while marginalising others. Foucault argues that language, through consistent negative depictions, creates a perceived reality that impacts both personal behaviour and institutional policies (Foucault, 1972).

5.2.3 Research Objective 3 sought to explain the possible impact of such representation on South Africa's pan African agenda.

This study reveals a significant obstacle to the Pan-African ideal of unity and collaboration among African nations. The hostility and derogatory attitudes displayed by locals toward African foreign nationals on X contribute to an atmosphere of division rather than togetherness. Mpofu (2021) contends that these platforms provide a means for rapid dissemination of Afrophobia rhetoric, which normalises hostility and erodes efforts toward social cohesion. This digital hostility not only marginalizes African migrants but also undermines broader goals of unity and solidarity within South African society, highlighting the need for counter-narratives that promote inclusivity and mutual respect.

The animosity has escalated from mere online bitterness to actual physical violence, prompting many foreign nationals to feel unsafe and, in some cases, return to their countries of origin. Such divisive feelings starkly oppose the core principles of Pan-Africanism, which promote African solidarity, mutual respect, and the acknowledgment of a shared heritage and destiny among all Africans. The effects of Afrophobia violence in South Africa present a significant challenge to Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, transforming online hatred into real world aggression that disrupts

continental unity. This hostility undermines relationships between South Africa and its neighbouring countries, impacting cross border trade and weakening diplomatic connections. The principles of Pan Africanism, which promote African solidarity, are compromised when Africans fail to support one another as a united front, Adi & Sherwood (2003).

For many foreign nationals, South Africa has become an unsafe environment due to xenophobic and Afrophobia attitudes exhibited by certain groups. The idea that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it” is diminished when Africans are regarded as outsiders in the country. This hostile atmosphere puts a strain on diplomatic relations and diminishes the strength of South Africa's collaborations with other African nations, ultimately harming the economic and cultural exchanges that have historically fostered African unity.

The representation of Afrophobia in South Africa presents significant challenges to the country's Pan-African agenda, which seeks to foster unity, solidarity, and cooperation among African nations. Matsinhe (2011) notes how Afrophobia disrupts the ideals of African solidarity by fostering discrimination and exclusion toward African immigrants. Negative attitudes towards African immigrants, often depicted as threats to local resources or safety, create division and distrust between South Africans and their counterparts from other African countries. This not only exacerbates xenophobic sentiments but also undermines South Africa's position as a leader in African integration and collaboration. Such divisive narratives erode the principles of mutual respect and shared identity central to the Pan African vision, ultimately threatening diplomatic relations, trade, and cultural exchange across the continent. Additionally, Afrophobia perpetuates harmful stereotypes that run counter to the inclusive and cooperative spirit of Ubuntu (Botho) and Pan-Africanism, making it increasingly difficult for South Africa to cultivate a cohesive African community that prioritises collective progress and shared values.

The portrayal of Afrophobia on platforms like X can result in tangible repercussions, including restricted social and economic prospects for African immigrants, as well as an atmosphere of fear and hostility. By establishing a prevailing narrative that sidelines

African identities, Afrophobia discourse hinders the potential for intercultural comprehension, peacebuilding, and inclusion (Foucault 1972). Foucault argues that discourses function as frameworks of knowledge and language that shape our perceptions and understanding of reality, affecting power dynamics and societal norms. These discourses define what is deemed "true" or acceptable in a society, thereby regulating and constraining potential ways of thinking and behaving. They establish categories for individuals and groups, often reinforcing existing power structures within society (Foucault, 1972).

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the discursive construction of Afrophobia violence on X, highlighting how social media can both mirror and perpetuate societal biases. By focusing on X, the study uncovered common narratives that categorise African immigrants negatively, which often fosters a hostile and divisive digital environment. This study's emphasis was on the uniqueness of Afrophobia compared to general xenophobia, as it encompasses specific biases tied to perceptions of African identity and their sense of belonging within South African society. Nyamjoh (2006) argues that, Afrophobia differs from general xenophobia by specifically addressing biases associated with perceptions of African identities and exclusionary attitudes prevalent in South African society. While xenophobia broadly refers to a dislike for all foreigners, Afrophobia specifically targets individuals from African nations. This discrimination is often fuelled by racial and cultural prejudices, alongside assumptions about economic burdens. Nyamnjoh (2006) further points out that Afrophobia is grounded in historical, economic, and cultural dynamics that promote an "us-versus-them" mentality among African communities.

In this context, African immigrants are frequently viewed as competition for scarce resources, threatening national identity. This distinction is crucial as it highlights a particular type of discrimination that goes beyond just being anti-foreign to include racial and cultural exclusivity. The results highlighted recurring themes that evolve around competition for resources, cultural differences, and questions of national identity, namely, the discourse of illegality and criminality, the discourse of threats of violence, patriotic discourse, invasion discourse, solidarity, and counter-discourse, which are prevalent in online Afrophobia discourse. These narratives not only cause

harm, but also risk legitimising violence and discrimination, thus contributing to a divided online community. Moreover, contextual elements such as economic challenges, political discourse, and sensational media reporting were identified as factors that worsen these narratives and heighten tensions in digital spaces.

This study has demonstrated that the Afrophobia attacks that happen in South Africa are to a certain degree influenced by social media discourses such as those that take place on platforms such as X, which are user-friendly and allow for interaction on options such as the comments sections. It has also been shown in the study that the representation of Afrophobia violence is prevalent on social media, platforms such as X. However, there are certain media stories from South Africa that criticize using derogatory and occasionally abusive terminology to refer to foreigners, particularly African migrants, during Afrophobia incidents (Yakushko, 2009). In these instances, social media platforms, especially X is used to drag communities in South Africa to join riots and become activists of the Afrophobia movements. This is, however, influenced by the ways in which foreigners are represented on social media by South Africans, the way some South Africans victimise them and stereotypically representation of them.

Through the posts gleaned from X from 2022 to 2023, findings from this the study confirm that, X is one of the social media platforms with potential to propagate Afrophobia discourses and violence against immigrants of African descent. This is possible because X is an accessible public sphere wherein the South African community gather and debating on negative and positive impacts of foreigners in South Africa.

The study further highlights the need for policy measures that encourage responsible discourse on social media and promote positive narratives regarding African immigrants. In partnership with policymakers and civil society, social media platforms should aim to establish content moderation practices that are attuned to local and cultural contexts. In summary, this study deepens the understanding of Afrophobia in South Africa and underscores the influence of digital platforms in shaping public perceptions. These findings are anticipated to assist in the fight against Afrophobia, promoting social unity and nurturing a more inclusive and harmonious South African society.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

While the X social media platform serves as a popular communication tool that facilitates user-generated content and rapid information sharing, it must also implement measures to regulate the types of messages shared. Inflammatory posts or comments should not be allowed to spread; such messages, along with spam, cyberbullying, and other offensive content, should be filtered out, and accounts responsible for them should face deactivation. Even though X has guidelines against harassment, violence, and other harmful content, action is not taken unless flagged by users or marked by content creators. If the government is genuinely against violence towards foreigners, it needs to take proactive steps to protect these individuals rather than further victimizing them.

Social media can also serve as a platform for uniting individuals around issues of shared concern, allowing people to sign petitions and engage in meaningful dialogue. It's essential that these platforms foster a constructive national conversation regarding public sentiment towards foreigners, enabling the government to respond effectively. However, the South African government must also bear some responsibility for the rise of Afrophobia sentiments, as it has permitted the presence of illegal immigrants while insufficiently addressing the resulting tensions, which have led to conflicts between South Africans and foreigners (Ramachandran (2014)).

The government could also Integrate Anti-Afrophobia Education in Schools by collaborating with educational institutions to introduce topics on Afrophobia, compassion, and cultural understanding in school programs, promoting awareness from an early age. Furthermore, public awareness initiatives can aid in changing perceptions, enhancing empathy, and decreasing biased attitudes toward immigrants. By challenging prevalent stereotypes and reducing hostile language, South Africa has the potential to exemplify the Pan-African ideals of unity and ubuntu (humanity towards others). Embracing these values not only strengthens local communities but also enhances Africa's resilience, enabling the continent to progress together amidst social

and economic challenges, ultimately moving towards a more cohesive and united African future.

In addition, workshops for journalists focused on responsible coverage of migration and violence, as the media's portrayal significantly influences public perception are needed. Community programs and workshops for young people that promote empathy, intercultural conversations, and the breaking down of stereotypes, especially on social media platforms are also another way of fostering cross-cultural understanding. Matos and Zick (2021) suggested that social media campaigns that promote empathy and intercultural dialogue can help to counteract the spread of xenophobic content online.

This ongoing situation has provoked public unrest, and some political entities exploit these Afrophobia incidents as part of their campaign strategies. To address the issues raised by activist groups like Operation Dudula, a collective national dialogue on platforms like X can be beneficial. Ultimately, social media should not be a catalyst for Afrophobia violence, but rather a tool for raising awareness and generating solutions to the challenges facing the country. By utilising platforms like X to exchange ideas on combating xenophobia, we can work towards a more harmonious society.

South Africans and other African communities need to replace animosity with understanding, recognising the unique contributions that each African national makes to the continent's overall development. Adopting a Pan-African viewpoint could transform the discourse on social media platforms like X, encouraging narratives that emphasise cooperation and a shared identity while celebrating the continent's diversity and the positive roles of immigrants.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations to this study, the first is that the study relied on literature and social media textual posts to explain the phenomenon of Afrophobia and how it is represented on X. The study is only based on textual analysis of X posts, it does not cover other social media platforms. Future studies could involve ethnographic interviews with citizens who post messages on social media platforms such as X to get deeper insights on their motives for posting the kind of messages which they post

and the attitudes expressed therein about towards African immigrants and not to other races.

5.6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Future studies could use larger samples of social media posts to have a more nuanced understanding of Afrophobia in online media communities. Such studies could include other social media platforms such as Facebook and TIK TOK because they also have a huge number of followers and influence on society. Future studies could include interviews for wider participation of different individuals who have experienced Afrophobia in order to have a broader understanding of Afrophobia discourses in the South African context.

Long-term studies could inquire whether interventions in digital discussions sustain social attitudes toward African immigrants to have a more holistic understanding of Afrophobia discursive practices online.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This study examined the discursive construction of Afrophobia violence on X and its impact on social cohesion in South Africa. The study revealed that negative attitudes and aggressive rhetoric aimed at African foreign nationals on social media foster an atmosphere of fear and division, where immigrants are often viewed as threats. Such narratives, intensified by social media, have tangible consequences, shaping public perceptions and potentially inciting violence. By situating these findings within the context of existing research, this study emphasised on the distinctive dynamics that Afrophobia poses in South African society and the pressing need for intervention to tackle these issues both online and offline.

The suggested recommendations covering policy measures, social media regulations, and educational programs by the government, aim to reduce the spread of Afrophobia narratives and encourage a more inclusive community, providing essential insights for policymakers, scholars, and social media platforms in addressing hate speech and fostering Pan-African unity. This chapter concludes with a call for ongoing research

and practical initiatives that confront Afrophobia and enhance social cohesion within a wider Pan-African context, as well as further studies with inclusivity on other social media platforms.

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