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No. 66: Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: Denialism, Minimalism, Realism

Jonathan Crush

Balsillie School of International Affairs/WLU, jcrush@wlu.ca

Sujata Ramachandran

Southern African Migration Programme

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THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN MIGRATION PROGRAMME

XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN
SOUTH AFRICA: DENIALISM,
MINIMALISM, REALISM

GROWING INFORMAL CITIES PROJECT

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XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN
SOUTH AFRICA: DENIALISM,
MINIMALISM, REALISM

JONATHAN CRUSH AND SUJATA RAMACHANDRAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent xenophobia has become a regular feature of South African life. Everyday animosity frequently spills over into violence against individual migrants and refugees and their economic enterprises. Some of these incidents reach the scrutiny of the media and officialdom, but most remain invisible and unremarked. The fact that most of the violence occurs in marginal urban locations of informal settlements, townships and inner-city suburbs in South Africa has prompted intense debate over the nomenclature and identification of the underlying causes. Explanations for the large-scale anti-migrant violence that swept the country in May 2008, and continues in more isolated and sporadic fashion through to the present day, fall into three general categories: “xenophobia denialism”, “xenophobia minimalism” and “xenophobia realism.”

The denialists reject the argument that xenophobia plays any role in violence against migrants and refugees. The South African government, initially bewildered by the unexpectedness and ferocity of the May 2008 violence, settled on an official position that the deaths, destruction and displacement were the work of criminal elements in the affected areas. This argument that attacks on migrants and refugees are simply acts of criminality, not xenophobia, is now state orthodoxy. Xenophobia denialism has also shaped official South African responses to criticism from the international community. Violence perpetrated by the police and South African citizens continues to be explained away by politicians as criminal acts by isolated, anti-social elements. The government’s position has been echoed by some researchers and political commentators who suggest that only a very small group of individuals engage in such acts and that these are not symptomatic of wider prejudice against migrants within South African society.

Another form of denialism shifts the blame from xenophobia to the state’s dereliction of its duties, particularly its failure to control borders. According to this view, the problem is that the state has not seriously engaged with the “foreign threat.” It is difficult to see how South Africa’s draconian border and immigration controls can be considered either soft or lenient. The post-apartheid state has intensified border and immigration enforcement and, even at the height of the 2008 violence, officials were deporting displaced victims they claimed had entered South Africa illegally. State agencies have typically focused on identifying irregular migrants among victims of violence and deporting them, reinforcing the biases and prejudices that fuelled the violence to begin with.

The xenophobia minimalists also eschew it as an explanation for violence against migrants and refugees, seeing it instead as an epiphenomenon or symptom of a deeper malaise. This is a particularly prevalent tendency amongst neo-marxist scholars seeking a materialist explanation for the violence, which they view as the outworking of structural economic

inequalities and the capture of the African National Congress by neo-liberalism, with the consequent inability of the state to effect a fundamental transformation and redistribution of wealth and resources in the country. The minimalists essentially argue that although xenophobia might exist, it is an epiphenomenon that does not get at the root causes of violence. One strand of minimalism sees the violence as a signifier of a broader, deepening social crisis in South Africa tied to intense competition for scarce resources such as jobs, shelter and services. According to this view, the effects of the inadequate post-apartheid transition have been felt most acutely in marginal urban locations where much of the violence has occurred and where difference has become the site around which the palpable anger and frustrations of those left out has been expressed.

Certainly, the spatial incidence of violence in May 2008 was strongly correlated with the geography of poverty. But this simply begs the question of why not all poor areas (including many in which migrants and refugees resided) erupted or why poor South Africans were not attacking each other with similar ferocity. The economic insecurity of the offenders may account for their extreme anxiety and heightened dissatisfaction, but it does not explain why only certain groups were and are singled out for deadly assault. Furthermore, if economic competition between poor residents and migrants is the underlying cause of aggressive hostility, it does not explain why wealthy and privileged groups, who do not face direct or even indirect competition from these migrants, also espouse these prejudices. When vicious attacks on migrants are conceived primarily as the outcome of material realities and economic competition between citizens and “foreigners”, then the frames of reference are automatically loaded against the latter. Seen in such terms, resentment and antipathy towards migrants and other outsiders become inevitable aspects of the social landscape, justifying stringent controls over immigration, and exclusion (or at best very limited inclusion) of migrants. This distinction invigorates the very idea that the presence of migrants and refugees poses a perpetual threat to “legitimate insiders”.

Similarly, the crises of governance and frustrated hopes in South Africa, particularly at local levels, have little if anything to do with the presence of migrants. These connections need to be constructed more carefully to avoid reproducing the very prejudices that need to be confronted. One cannot deny that there is rivalry between locals and migrants. However, migrants represent a very small minority in terms of South Africa’s total population, and the detrimental effects of this economic competition have been seriously overstated.

Both xenophobia denialism and xenophobia minimalism ignore or sideline the evidence that most South Africans hold extremely negative views about migrants and refugees and want the state to exercise greater coercive power to purge the country of their presence. The realists suggest,

by contrast, that xenophobia is a pervasive phenomenon throughout South African society and that there is a predisposition to resort to violence on the part of a considerable number of South Africans. This viewpoint is based on systematic representative sampling of the South African population as a whole. The Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP) has been monitoring the perceptions and attitudes of South Africans towards migrants and refugees since the late 1990s. These periodic surveys provide unequivocal evidence of deep-rooted and pervasive hostility and animosity towards migrants and refugees in the country.

Three general findings are of relevance to our argument: (a) the nature and strength of myths about migrant and migration; (b) the level of public endorsement of coercive state measures to keep migrants out of the country and to remove those who are present; and (c) the degree of willingness to resort to coercion and violence against migrants.

In this paper, we argue that xenophobia realism is the best way to make sense of the phenomenon of extreme xenophobia, that is, the translation of hostile attitudes into violent actions. We conceptualize extreme xenophobia as a heightened form of xenophobia in which hostility and opposition to those perceived as outsiders and foreigners is strongly embedded and expressed through aggressive acts directed at migrants and refugees. South Africans hold migrants responsible for crime, bringing disease, and “stealing” jobs, services and resources and view them as being illegally in the country. Moreover, perceptions of a rapid increase in the number of migrants intensify the levels of threat attached to them. Rights and entitlements for residents are directly and in a discriminatory fashion linked to migration and citizenship status, drawing the boundaries between those who are seen to belong and others who are not. High levels of migrant antipathy lead to recurrent episodes of violence. The primary challenge for xenophobia realists is to explain why, if hostility is so widespread, violence tends to be more confined, targeted at poorer neighbourhoods in the cities. First, whether and where animosity translates into actions depends on community-specific dynamics such as the nature of local leadership, the absence of dispute resolution mechanisms and the character of policing. Second, all of the common myths about migrants are offered by residents to explain why the attacks take place. Migration myths are not epiphenomena or post-hoc rationalizations; they have powerful mobilizing and animating effects spurring those who believe them into acts of extreme xenophobia. Disowning the existence of xenophobia not only flies in the face of a large body of quantitative and qualitative research, it illustrates a continuing lack of political will to own the problem and act against one of the most destructive and anti-democratic forces in post-apartheid South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The plague of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa has been variously labelled the “dark side of democracy”,¹ a “new pathology”,² “apartheid vertigo”³ and evidence of the “demonic” nature of South African society.⁴ Such arresting images seek to represent a deeply troubling reality manifested in the hostility, discrimination and alienation endured by African migrants and refugees in the country.⁵ Everyday animosity regularly spills over into violence against individual migrants and refugees and their economic enterprises.⁶ Some of these incidents reach the scrutiny of the media and officialdom, but most remain invisible and unremarked. The involvement of state functionaries in violence against migrants has also been well-documented.⁷ One recent study suggests that there are striking parallels and inter-connections between police actions and popular violence against migrants.⁸ According to the study’s author, the police regularly engage in high-profile but ultimately ineffectual campaigns to purge cities of migrants. The public not only approves of these actions, but seeks to imitate them when police campaigns fail (as they usually do).

Police sweeps are seen by government as a perfectly legitimate tactic to rid the country of “illegal foreigners” (in the language of the Immigration Act). However, it can be less sanguine about egregious cases of police brutality when they come to wider public attention. For example, in 1998, six white officers of the South African Police Services (SAPS) East Rand Dog Unit set attack dogs on three Mozambican migrants who were badly mauled and then physically and verbally abused (Figure 1).⁹ The incident was recorded in a police “training video” and later televised nationally and internationally. Condemned by government as evidence of the persistence of racism in post-apartheid South Africa, and by the trial judge as a “callous, cowardly, brutal and cruel” act, all six officers were sentenced to jail terms of between four and seven years. Fifteen years later, in February 2013, eight black members of the SAPS arrested a 27-year old Mozambican taxi-driver, Mido Macia, handcuffed him to the back of a police van and dragged him through the streets of Daveyton near Johannesburg in full view of a large crowd of onlookers.¹⁰ Macia died in police custody several hours later. The official response to this case had echoes of the first fifteen years earlier. The assault and murder of Macia was perpetrated by black officers and could not be interpreted as evidence of racism in the police services. But, like the incident in 1998, it was not seen as xenophobic either. In both cases, the xenophobic content of the attacks was downplayed and they were instead portrayed as “isolated” incidents perpetrated by “rogue individuals” (Figure 2). To acknowledge that they were evidence of a deep-rooted, systemic and enduring problem would mean that the state would have to face up to the entrenched nature of xenophobia in the country rather than throwing the book at the few perpetrators who happen to be caught on video.

Figure 1: East Rand Dog Unit, 1998



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Figure 2: Murder of Mido Macia, 2013



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The large-scale xenophobic violence that swept South Africa in May 2008 could not so easily be written off as the actions of isolated individuals, however. Mobs of South Africans with makeshift weapons rampaged through residential areas in a number of different cities for over a week. They targeted the properties and businesses of migrants and refugees in their communities causing widespread destruction. Individuals and whole families were attacked and in one particularly shocking incident, a Mozambican man was burned alive. The victims fled their communities en masse and took refuge in tent camps. An estimated 100,000 men, women and children were displaced, 30,000 residential properties were destroyed, over 600 people were seriously injured and over 60 were murdered. While the police did not directly participate in the looting and killing, critics have charged that they were largely indifferent to the mayhem. One commentator argues that “the relationship between policing practices and the mob violence was, from the start, a close, if mercurial, one.”¹¹

A recurring pattern of aggression against migrants and refugees continued after May 2008.¹² In 2009, for example, some 3,000 Zimbabweans were forcibly displaced from the farming region of De Doorns in the Western Cape.¹³ During 2012, 238 incidents were recorded by the UNHCR with 120 deaths and 7,500 persons displaced. In recent years, migrant entrepreneurs, particularly from Somali and Ethiopian refugee communities, have been widely targeted.¹⁴ An estimated 120 Somali and 50 Bangladeshi shopkeepers were killed in townships in 2012. The UNHCR estimates that 62 migrants were murdered in South Africa during the first six months of 2013 and around 130 separate episodes of attacks on foreign migrants were reported. This exclusionary violence resulted in the displacement of some 5,000 persons and left 73 persons seriously wounded. Violent xenophobia has thus become a regular feature of South African life. One migrant rights group notes that while xenophobic violence has not declined, many incidents are no longer being included in press reportage, conveying the erroneous impression that “xenophobia was no longer a problem.”¹⁵

The fact that most of the violence occurs in marginal urban locations of informal settlements, townships, and inner-city suburbs has prompted intense debate over the nomenclature and identification of the underlying cause(s). Explanations for the events of May 2008 fall into three general categories: what we call “xenophobia denialism”, “xenophobia minimalism” and “xenophobia realism”. The denialists reject the argument that xenophobia plays any role in violence against migrants and refugees. The minimalists argue that although xenophobia might exist, it is an epiphenomenon which does not get at the root causes of violence. The realists suggest that xenophobia is a pervasive phenomenon throughout South African society and that there is a predisposition to resort to violence on the part of a considerable number of South Africans.

In a previous study, we highlighted some of the key characteristics of contemporary forms of xenophobia.¹⁶ Drawing on examples from diverse national contexts in the global North and South, we broadened the definition of xenophobia from “dislike or fear of foreigners” to include other important dimensions. At the outset, xenophobia consists of highly negative perceptions of non-citizen groups on the basis of their citizenship and foreign origin. Xenophobia is disseminated through public discourses that repeatedly denigrate migrants and refugees by making them easy scapegoats for various problems and challenges faced by the receiving society. Xenophobia is not simply about negative attitudes held by citizens, politicians and state officials. Hostile and distorted perceptions of migrants and refugees usually combine with discriminatory practices and shoddy treatment of such groups by citizens and state institutions. Violence against migrants represents escalating and extreme manifestations of xenophobia.

In this paper, we conceptualize “extreme xenophobia” as a heightened form of xenophobia in which hostility and opposition to those perceived as outsiders and foreigners is strongly embedded and expressed through aggressive acts directed at migrants and refugees. The antipathy to migrants and refugees is acute and the threat perception attached to their presence is glaring and intense, influenced by many myths and biases. Citizens hold migrants responsible for crime, bringing disease, and “stealing” jobs, services and resources and view them as being “illegally” in the country. Perceptions of a rapid increase in the number of migrants intensify the levels of threat attached to them. Rights and entitlements for residents are directly and in a discriminatory fashion linked to citizenship, drawing the boundaries between those who are seen to belong and others who are not. High levels of migrant antipathy lead to recurrent episodes of violence.

In South Africa, extreme xenophobia assumes many connected forms that are not simply about the dislike of all migrants. Instead, contempt is reserved for certain kinds of migrants, especially those from other African countries. Migrants from African countries with common ethnic and cultural characteristics to South Africans (such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) are tolerated to a degree. But those from most other African countries are loathed by the majority of South Africans, with particular opprobrium reserved for Zimbabweans, Nigerians and Somalis. Extreme xenophobia promotes negative stereotypes, which view poorer migrants as “criminals” and “anti-social” elements; incorporates very strong elements of fear and anxiety over the presence of migrants and their presumed negative social and economic effects on the citizenry; asserts the superiority of South Africans and inferiority of migrant groups; and manifests in acts of violence and wanton brutality against migrants and refugees.

The policies and practices of state institutions reinforce extreme xenophobia by undermining rights and aggravating insecurity. In South Africa, this involves verbal abuse, harassment and extortion of migrants and refu-

gees by the police and officials in charge of immigration and other government agencies. Inflammatory speeches and comments about migrants and their activities by politicians and government officials harden mythologies. Policies actively diminishing rights and entitlements for migrants and refugees strengthen institutionalized discrimination and widen the gap between citizens and migrants. Failure to protect migrants' lives and property by police and other government personnel during physical attacks inevitably marks them out as "soft targets", worsening their vulnerability to citizen aggression. The prosecution of perpetrators is non-existent or inadequate, leading to a culture of impunity. As we show in this paper, xenophobic discourse frequently exaggerates numbers and homogenizes and typecasts unwanted migrants into a small number of categories. Until recently, they were generally referred to as "illegal aliens" but this term has fallen into disuse with the 2002 Immigration Act which rebranded them as "illegal foreigners."

In practice, South Africa's migrant stock consists of a complex variety of different groups. First, there are Europeans (mainly from the UK, Germany and Netherlands) who immigrated in the apartheid period. Immigration from Europe all but ended after the fall of apartheid. Second, there are migrants who come to work on South Africa's mines and farms under contract. This migrant labour system has existed for decades and has outlived the end of apartheid. Third, there are temporary migrants who enter the country of their own accord (mainly from neighbouring states and often irregularly) to work in sectors such as services, construction and agriculture or in the informal economy of South Africa's large cities. Fourth, there are professionals, skilled migrants and students who come on temporary residence or work permits and are increasingly from other African countries. Finally, there are forced migrants who come from some of Africa's crisis states in search of asylum (particularly the DRC, Somalia and Zimbabwe.)

XENOPHOBIA DENIALISM

Xenophobia denialism is exemplified by the official response of the South African state to the May 2008 attacks on migrants and refugees which refuted that they were motivated by xenophobia or that xenophobia even existed at all (Figure 3). As then President Thabo Mbeki publically stated in an address to commemorate the victims of the attacks, he had never met a xenophobic South African and anyone who called South Africans xenophobic was themselves guilty of xenophobia: "None in our society has any right to encourage or incite xenophobia by trying to explain naked criminal activity by cloaking it in the garb of xenophobia."¹⁷ The argument that attacks on migrants and refugees are acts of criminality, not xenophobia, became state orthodoxy long after the man himself was stripped of the Presidency by his own party. In 2010, for example, the Minister of Police

characterized attacks against migrants as “crimes of opportunity” where criminal or anti-social elements take advantage of the situation to engage in such misdeeds.¹⁸ After a Zimbabwean man was stoned to death in Limpopo in 2011, police spokesperson, Zweli Mnisi, echoed this view: “Once you start talking about xenophobia and Afrophobia, you are talking about semantics. It (the crimes against foreigners) is *crime disguised under xenophobia* [emphasis ours].”¹⁹ On another occasion, Mnisi is quoted as saying that “holistically speaking, South Africans are not xenophobic and many cases are merely crime.”²⁰

These views on the causes of violence against migrants and refugees come from the highest levels of the South African government. In mid-2013, for example, following an upsurge of violent assaults on Somali shop-owners, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, announced that “the looting, displacement and killing of foreign nationals in South Africa should not be viewed as xenophobic attacks, but opportunistic criminal acts that have the potential to undermine the unity and cohesiveness of our communities.”²¹ The Cabinet also issued a public statement on the violence calling on communities to be vigilant against “the possible resurgence of criminal violence targeting foreign nationals.”²² The statement continued that “Cabinet is cautious not to label this violence as xenophobia because preliminary evidence indicates that these acts may be driven primarily by criminality.”

Figure 3: Xenophobia Denialism



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Xenophobia denialism has also shaped official South African responses to criticism from the international community. In 2006, for example, the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism's (APRM) report pointed out that xenophobia was a serious issue for South Africa and urged the government to tackle it through concerted action.²³ After his country visit to South Africa in 2011, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of Migrants similarly urged the South African government to implement much-needed efforts to safeguard migrant rights, and improve their limited assimilation into South African society.²⁴ A review of the government response to the APRM report argued that official efforts to address xenophobia were weak and diluted further by attempts to reject its very existence.²⁵ Xenophobic violence perpetrated by agents of the state and South African citizens continue to be explained away by politicians as criminal acts by isolated, anti-social elements.

The government's position on xenophobic violence has been echoed by some researchers and political commentators. An article from the Institute of Security Studies, for example, notes that "these acts are indeed criminal activities: robberies under the guise of xenophobia."²⁶ Others have suggested that only a very small group of individuals engage in such acts and that these episodes are not symptomatic of prejudice against migrants at large within South African society:

We must ask ourselves whether xenophobia is perhaps a label we have slapped on a phenomenon that has been inadequately analyzed or understood. Are our beliefs around xenophobia just lazy thinking? Do we really collectively hate outsiders to the extent that we are willing to murder them, loot their businesses and homes and go so far as to set them on fire...Were we a truly xenophobic nation then the phenomenon would manifest across all sectors of the population – across different races, different classes, and different neighbourhoods.²⁷

In other words, according to this view, South Africa can only really be considered a "xenophobic nation" when all sections of society engage in violence against migrants and refugees.

A variant of this argument deploys the term "innocent violence" to suggest that in the "profoundly and multi-variously lawless" spaces of urban South Africa, anti-migrant sentiments coalesce seamlessly with "a mix of motivations and multitude of rationales" to produce violence.²⁸ The "nightmare of a struggle for survival" has been turned into the violent exclusion of those who are even more defenceless than indigent citizens. This suggests that the principal motivation for the violence was looting, and "outsiders" were "the most convenient target, not because they were especially hated." The perpetrators supposedly chose to cloak their criminality in anti-migrant terms in order to gather local support for their actions.

Another form of denialism was articulated by the Human Sciences Research Council which shifted the blame for the violence of May 2008 from xenophobia to the state's dereliction of its duties and, in particular, its failure to control the country's borders: "It is essential that government move urgently and effectively to protect South Africa's borders and points-of-entry. No migration policy or strategy aimed at alleviating xenophobic tensions can be contemplated if the national borders are porous and people can come and go as they please."²⁹ In this view, violence against migrants is the natural consequence of a failure by the state to control migration. Others have also blamed the failures of the South African government to participate in "effective physical monitoring and control of its land borders." The problem, according to this view, is that the state has not seriously engaged with the "foreign threat" and does not "see any reason to keep people out, not even when uncounted numbers of Zimbabweans are fleeing the insupportable situation in their country."³⁰

It is difficult to comprehend how South Africa's draconian border and immigration controls can be considered soft or lenient. Intensified border and immigration enforcement has been a priority concern for the post-apartheid state.³¹ At the height of the violence in May 2008, officials were still trying to deport displaced victims they claimed had entered South Africa illegally. State agencies have typically focused on identifying irregular migrants among victims of violence and then deporting them, reinforcing the biases and prejudices which fuelled the violence to begin with. Even the Parliamentary Task Team assigned to investigate the events of May 2008 recommended that displaced migrants from affected areas who were in an irregular situation should be deported.³² Rates of detention and deportation of migrants have been exceptionally high, comparable only to enforcement in Western countries such as the United States, that spend significantly more on deterrent measures. Deportation levels rose from 91,000 in 1994 to nearly 300,000 in 2008. Between 1994 and 2004, an average of 127,000 migrants were deported annually.³³

XENOPHOBIA MINIMALISM

A number of academic commentators argue that while xenophobia may exist, it cannot be invoked to explain violence against foreigners by South Africans. One study contends that the term "xenophobic violence" assumes a taken-for-granted hostile opposition between foreigners and South Africans even though the aggression has been leveled at citizens too in particular areas.³⁴ The term supposedly holds a "certain descriptive plausibility" but ultimately fails to evaluate in a compelling manner the processes at play and, more importantly, how to handle them. Thus the relationship between South Africans and non-South Africans cannot be

understood purely as one of unyielding antagonism under all circumstances.³⁵ Another suggests that violence against migrant shopkeepers cannot be seen as xenophobic because South African shopkeepers are equally at risk.³⁶

Other minimalists take a similar view. The Council of Anthropologists of Southern Africa suggests that “contrary to the current South African and international political consensus, the presence of people who are deemed to be ethnically, racially or nationally different is not at the core of the problem.”³⁷ Another study argues that xenophobia is “more symptom than cause” of a profound social disorder, pointing instead to what it calls a wide range of intersecting conditions (“the causal high-pressure systems” in South Africa’s post-apartheid trajectory) that manufactured the violence of May 2008.³⁸ An edited book released shortly after May 2008 proposed that “xenophobia is too easy a label” to encapsulate this “shocking moment” in the nation’s history, making the term a convenient alibi for a “much more profound social and political malaise.”³⁹ The volume’s editors go on to assert that xenophobia was a “secondary symptom” rather than the primary cause of the violence.

One strand of minimalism sees the violence as a signifier of a broader, deepening social crisis in South Africa tied to the incomplete (some would say botched) post-apartheid project of equality and access for the disenfranchised black majority and intense competition for scarce resources (such as jobs, shelter and services). According to this view, the effects of the inadequate transition have been felt most acutely in marginal urban locations where much of the violence has occurred and where difference has become the site around which the palpable anger and frustrations of those left out has been expressed. One contributor to the aforementioned book argues that a “simple focus on xenophobia”, conceived as hatred along lines of identity derived from differences in citizenship status, is misleading because it fails to engage with the complex underlying social determinants.⁴⁰ Rather, in a situation where “poor people viciously attacked other poor people”, violence must be understood as rooted in intensifying class inequalities due to unequal economic growth that have produced “experiences of relative deprivation” and “perverse cultures of entitlement.”⁴¹ That is, the unmet mounting expectations of indigent South Africans made them strike out at those who were spatially and structurally closest to them.

Another chapter – entitled “Behind Xenophobia in South Africa” – elaborates the relative deprivation argument, suggesting that the relationship between violence and the economic circumstances of poor people is not that their poverty compelled them to viciously target others, but the “sense of unfairness engendered by inequality, of being discriminated against” produced fierce antipathy towards those seen, accurately or inaccurately, to enjoy more than them.⁴² A study of the response of civil society

to the violence of May 2008 also argues that xenophobia is an epiphenomenon with underlying structural causes: "Within the processes of uneven and combined development of both capitalism and civil society...deep structural forces are responsible for xenophobia."⁴³

Certainly, the incidence of violence in May 2008 was strongly correlated with the geography of poverty. But this simply begs the question of why not all poor areas (including many in which migrants and refugees resided) erupted or why poor South Africans were not attacking each other with similar ferocity. The economic insecurity of the offenders may account for their extreme anxiety and heightened dissatisfaction, but it does not explain why only certain groups were and are singled out for deadly assault. Furthermore, if economic competition between poor residents and migrants is the underlying cause of aggressive hostility, it does not explain why rich and privileged groups who do not face direct or even indirect competition from these migrants also espouse these prejudices especially when their lives are not touched negatively at all.

By focusing on xenophobia as an "irrational fear of foreigners" (as many dictionary definitions characterize the phenomenon), some argue that blame has been unfairly laid on the indigent, desperate offenders, diverting attention away from the government, state practices and other broader processes. One study, for example, contends that the failure to address the needs of the urban poor through real and continuous improvements to informal settlements, creates "vulnerable, precarious and dangerously combustible conditions" where "competition for very scarce and increasingly downgraded resources will intensify", compromising the lives of both "foreigners" and indigent South Africans.⁴⁴

When vicious attacks on migrants are conceived primarily as the outcome of limited material realities and economic competition between citizens and "foreigners", then the frames of reference are automatically loaded against the latter. Seen in such terms, resentment and antipathy towards migrants and other "outsiders" become inevitable, inescapable aspects of the social landscape, justifying stringent controls over immigration, and exclusion (or at best very limited inclusion) of migrants. Needless to say, this distinction further invigorates the underlying rationale for xenophobia, the very idea that the presence of migrants and refugees poses a perpetual threat to the legitimate insiders.

Similarly, the crisis of frustrated hopes and the crisis of governance that South Africa is currently undergoing, particularly at local levels, have little if anything to do with the presence of migrants, which in itself suggests that these connections need to be constructed more carefully. Otherwise, we may end up reproducing the very prejudices that need to be confronted. One cannot deny that there is some degree of rivalry between locals and migrants and there may well be undesirable aspects attached to it. However,

migrants represent a very small minority in terms of numbers and as share of the total population in the country, leading us to believe that the detrimental effects of this economic competition have been seriously overstated.

XENOPHOBIA REALISM

National opinion surveys and in-depth qualitative interviews with groups of South Africans and migrants conducted over the best part of two decades lead to the inescapable conclusion that xenophobic attitudes are highly prevalent in South Africa amongst all social, economic, racial and class groups. The Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP) has been monitoring the perceptions and attitudes of South Africans towards migrants and refugees since the late 1990s.⁴⁵ These surveys provide unequivocal evidence of deep-rooted and pervasive hostility and animosity towards migrants and refugees in the country. Three general findings are of relevance to our argument: (a) the nature and strength of myths about migrant and migration; (b) the level of public endorsement of coercive state measures to keep migrants out of the country and to remove those who are present; and (c) the degree of willingness to resort to coercion and violence against migrants.

First, with regard to migration myths, South Africans clearly believe that the country is being over-run by migrants and refugees who pose a very direct threat to their interests as citizens. The actual numbers in the country are a source of considerable controversy. There is a consistent tendency for politicians, officials and the media to exaggerate the numbers for alarmist effect.⁴⁶ Inflated figures for “illegal foreigners” are always in the millions and acquire a life of their own once they enter the public realm although they have no sound statistical basis.⁴⁷ For example, the oft-repeated figure for the number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa is 3 million while more considered estimates put the number at less than 1 million. For obvious reasons, the numbers of irregular migrants in the country are difficult to gauge. But given the ease with which people from neighbouring states can enter through regular channels, and the documented preference of migrants for temporary rather than permanent stay, these numbers are unlikely to be anywhere close to the inflated numbers of popular mythology. With regard to documented migration, the 2011 South African Census recorded 1.6 million non-citizens in the country (or just 3.2% of the total population). In Gauteng (the industrial heartland of the country), the figure was 7.1% but in every other province at least 96% of the population were citizens (Table 1). The figure for non-citizens includes many who immigrated during the heyday of white immigration from Europe during the apartheid era.⁴⁸ In 2011, South Africa issued a total of 106,173 temporary residence permits (of which 20,173 were for work purposes). Just 10,011 permanent residence permits were issued (2,060 for work).⁴⁹

Table 1: Number and Proportion of Citizens and Non-Citizens in South Africa, 2011

Province	No. citizens	No. non-citizens	% citizens	% non-citizens	% unknown
Western Cape	5,650,462	180,815	96.0	3.2	0.8
Eastern Cape	6,437,586	57,938	98.4	0.9	0.7
Northern Cape	1,125,306	10,128	98.8	0.9	0.3
Free State	2,663,080	50,599	97.8	1.9	0.3
KwaZulu-Natal	10,113,978	111,254	98.1	1.1	0.8
North West	3,439,700	120,390	95.9	3.5	0.6
Gauteng	11,952,392	848,620	91.9	7.1	1.0
Mpumalanga	3,983,570	103,573	96.8	2.6	0.6
Limpopo	5,322,134	138,375	96.9	2.6	0.5
Totals	50,688,208	1,621,692	96.1	3.2	0.7

Yet, 90% of South Africans recently interviewed by SAMP said that there are “too many” migrants in the country.⁵⁰ Forty-four percent agreed with the statement that “many foreigners living in South Africa are illegal immigrants.” More than half of all respondents (63%) agreed that migrants diminish the resources available for citizens. Around 60% felt that migration leads to unemployment for citizens. One in two agreed that migrants contribute to growth in crime rates. Conversely, acceptance for the benefits associated with migration was much lower. Only one-third of citizens acknowledged that migrants have a beneficial effect on skills shortages experienced by South Africa.

Focus groups conducted by researchers immediately before the 2008 violence exposed elevated levels of anti-migrant antipathy, much sharper than in any other previous round of focus group interviews.⁵¹ Only one participant among the focus group members articulated anything positive about migrants living in South Africa. Respondents across race and class lines tied migrants to all sorts of social problems including unemployment, crime, housing shortages and poor service delivery. Humanitarian assistance provided by the South African government to those displaced by the violence was perceived as “preferential treatment” for migrants. They repeatedly asserted that South Africa was facing a migration crisis due to the “massive influx” of African migrants and endorsed strict immigration controls.

Ironically, the language and imagery used by citizens to justify the exclusion of outsiders is heavily influenced by the idioms of apartheid, such as the repetitive use of the term “influx control” by respondents.⁵² The media and officialdom frequently resort to aquatic metaphors and imagery when describing the “threat” posed to the country, as if migration was a kind of extreme natural event. “Foreigners” do not enter or cross borders into South Africa, they “flood” in “tidal waves” and “swamp” the country.⁵³ Figure 4 neatly satirises the common belief that Africa is a sea of poverty,

misery and chaos and that South Africa is a beacon of peace, stability and prosperity that is in imminent danger of being submerged by its neighbours.

Figure 4: Africa as a Supposed Threat to South Africa



Cartoon reproduced by kind permission of Tony Grogan of the Cape Times.

The SAMP survey showed that South Africans are strongly supportive of coercive state measures to stop the entry of migrants and refugees and to remove those already in the country, even suggesting that the state does not go far enough. Over a third (36%) agreed there should be a total prohibition on migrants entering South Africa to work and as many as 63% agreed that there should be “strict limits on entry.” Only 8% agreed that government should let in anyone who wanted to enter. Three in five South Africans favoured the construction of electrified fences on the country’s borders, a policy that was last implemented during the apartheid era. A slightly higher share (63%) would like the armed forces to be responsible for border enforcement, linking migration unambiguously to issues of national security. More than half of all South Africans were dissatisfied with the current immigration enforcement, and supported higher government budgets for it. Nearly half wanted all migrants to carry their identity documents with them at all times, another throwback to the pass laws of the apartheid regime when black South Africans were forced to carry similar documents or risk arrest and incarceration.

The South African government’s policy of arrest and deportation of migrants is widely supported by citizens, despite doubt (even within government) of its efficacy. In fact, many South Africans want the use of this punitive measure to remove all sorts of migrants. For example, one in two

South Africans wanted to banish migrants who are not working. One in three citizens wanted migrants with HIV and AIDS to be expelled. And one in four wanted all migrants, irrespective of their standing in South Africa, to be deported.

Table 2: South African Attitudes to Migrants and Refugees, 2010		
	Support (%)	Oppose (%)
Attitudes to immigration enforcement		
Army to patrol borders	63	10
Electrify fences on South Africa's borders	62	18
Allocate more money for border protection	53	17
Foreigners to carry identity cards at all times	49	20
Penalize those employing foreigners	33	33
Attitudes to deportations		
Deport migrants who have committed crimes	74	8
Deport migrants not contributing to economy	53	18
Deport migrants with HIV/AIDS	35	28
Deport all foreigners	24	47
Attitudes towards refugee protection		
Test refugees for HIV/AIDS	41	29
Grant asylum to those escaping war/persecution	38	23
Put refugees in special camps near the border	31	32
Grant permanent residence after five years	18	44
Increase refugee intake in South Africa	11	57

South Africans also do not want refugees to rebuild their lives in South Africa. Support for mandatory HIV testing for refugees finds favour among over 40% of citizens. Close to one-third wanted refugees and asylum-seekers to live in segregated camps near the border. Such a constrained approach to asylum poses a significant challenge for people who come to South Africa in search of safety. The reluctance to provide asylum to persons in need and to support refugee protection is rooted in the belief that a large number of persons seeking asylum in South Africa are not genuine refugees. Regrettably, the opinion of South Africans is almost identical to that of the ruling ANC which has claimed, without substantive evidence and in an immigration policy document that does not contain a single reference to xenophobia, that 95% of refugee claimants are bogus.⁵⁴

South Africans do not feel that migrants in the country should be entitled to various basic rights including legal protection, police protection, access to social services and anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for HIV. As Table 3 shows, close to 90% felt that citizens are always entitled to these rights. However, only half thought that these same rights should be

extended to migrants legally in the country. And just a third believed that refugees should always enjoy legal and police protection and access to social services. Less than 20% said that irregular migrants should be entitled to these protections. The majority also thought that these migrants should not be entitled to HIV treatment. What these findings suggest is a great reluctance on the part of most South Africans to extend basic rights (guaranteed by the South African Constitution) to migrants. The particularly negative response to rights for refugees and irregular migrants reinforces an environment in which coercive state measures to deny rights and enforce migration controls (such as deportations) meet with little opposition from the populace.

Table 3: South African Attitudes Towards Rights for Citizens and Migrants

	Citizens % always	Legal migrants % always	Refugees % always	Irregular migrants % always
Right to legal protection	87	48	31	18
Protection by police	90	54	36	22
Access to social services	92	50	28	16
Treatment for AIDS	93	65	55	44

Another important finding concerns the apparent willingness of South Africans to turn belligerent attitudes into hostile actions. Moreover, the events of May 2008 appear to have had very little moderating influence. One in six South Africans (15%) were ready to collectively use force against migrants (Table 4). As many as 11% were willing to use violence against migrants. In 2011, 10% of the adult South African population (over the age of 15) would have amounted to around 3.6 million people. In effect, 13 million South Africans are willing to report the presence of migrants to the authorities and over 3.5 million are willing to use violent means to force them out. One in four said they would use violence to prevent migrants from running a business in their locality. Nearly a quarter are ready to stop them from living in their neighborhoods and one in five do not want migrant children to interact with their own children. These South Africans not only want little to do with migrants in “their” residential areas and educational institutions, they are comfortable using violence to achieve and maintain this “social distance” from migrant groups.

Given the considerable latent potential for the expression of extreme xenophobia amongst a sizable minority of South Africans, the key question is where, and under what conditions, this potential is likely to be realized. In-depth analyses of the xenophobic violence of May 2008 provide important insights into this question, as well as challenging the stark deterministic links of the xenophobia minimalists.⁵⁵ Fieldwork at the affected sites

has revealed that a great many of those who were assaulted were not new migrants, having lived in the area for many years. While their numbers had grown, the increase was not abrupt or excessive.⁵⁶ Several studies have focused on the particular factors and “triggers” prevalent in the areas affected by violence. In all the locations where violence occurred in 2008, local groups and persons organized as well as guided the attacks in order to extend their own power and authority in these settlements.⁵⁷ Violence occurred in areas that were already unstable and volatile with established pasts of forceful, organized conflict, such as taxi, gang and political violence, and where incidents of crime were much higher compared to other locations.

Willingness to:	%
Report them to police	36
Report them to employer	27
Report them to community organization	27
Stop them running a business in their area	25
Stop them from moving into the neighbourhood	23
Prevent their children from being in the same classroom	20
Get people together to force them to leave	15
Use violence against them	11

These localized conditions have been characterized as the “micro-politics of violence.”⁵⁸ The common element is the struggle for local leadership, which permitted the appearance of illegitimate, violent forms of politics and community organizing by manipulating local residents’ hostility toward “non-compliant”, undesirable outsiders. The second element is the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms and in their absence, the use of vigilantism and mob violence to resolve conflicts and other social matters involving migrants. A third factor is the “culture of impunity” existing in South Africa and its tolerance for public violence and especially xenophobic violence, which in turn encourages residents to target migrants repeatedly for individual and political gain. The influence of local conditions and “triggers” is therefore decisive in shaping extreme xenophobia.

Since cycles of xenophobic violence may appear to end as abruptly as they appear, the follow-up question is when, and under what conditions, expressions of extreme xenophobia terminate. The report on May 2008 of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) found that although local leaders were able to intervene successfully in some contexts, in many others, the violence ended only after the “source of conflict” – the migrants – had been completely removed and their properties confiscated, and not because peace had returned to these communities.⁵⁹ Termination

is really only possible when strong restraints are imposed on the actual and potential perpetrators through sustained intervention of law enforcement agencies or the army. In other words, violence may not necessarily subside even after the offenders have purged “their” spaces. This certainly helps explain why the intense violence of May 2008 subsided but continued sporadic violence has continued. For example, the culture of impunity that existed prior to May 2008 has been reinforced by the poor prosecution of perpetrators and failure to impose harsh sanctions on their behaviour.⁶⁰ Such an environment of general permissiveness can only encourage more aggression given the high potential for violent action.

The South African government’s reaction to the purge in mid-2008 and its “management” of the large-scale humanitarian crisis has been characterized as deeply discriminatory.⁶¹ Despite being exposed to shocking aggression and displacement, the terms and quality of protection was determined by the victims’ status as “foreigners” and what was seen to be their temporary residence in South Africa. In many areas, state authorities encouraged those affected to leave the country, facilitating their hasty departure or “voluntary deportation”, and undermining the eventual prosecution of offenders. Agencies such as police were similarly disinclined to negotiate on behalf of the victims for fear of alienating local residents and in some cases, actively aided the offenders or like them, looted the victims’ properties.

Although the number of individuals who participated in the violence of May 2008 may have been relatively limited, the social legitimacy of these actions was widespread.⁶² Nearly 60% of the South Africans surveyed by SAMP were unconcerned about the violence: 28% said they felt no guilt for the attacks and another 28% were indifferent. Only a third felt any personal responsibility to help repair the damage done to migrants. A much smaller proportion felt that the migrants deserved what happened to them (14%) and that the attacks were justified (15%). However, 35% and 42% respectively were indifferent (Table 5).⁶³ Among the most common reasons given for the violence were that migrants were involved in crime (cited by 64%), they take jobs from South Africans (62%), are “culturally different” (60%), “cheat” South Africans and do not belong (both 56%), use South African health services for free (55%), and take housing away from South Africans (52%) (Table 6). In other words, when South Africans try to explain why the extreme violence of May 2008 occurred, they draw on the reservoir of myths and stereotypes of migrants as job-stealers, cheats, thieves and culturally-different. A third agreed with the official denialist position that South African criminals perpetrated the violence.

	% agree	% disagree	% indifferent
I feel guilty about what South Africans did to foreign migrants	44	28	28
I believe I should help repair the damage to foreign migrants	33	28	37
I think foreign migrants deserve what happened to them	14	53	33
I oppose the violence against foreign migrants	11	54	35
The violence against foreign migrants was justified	15	43	42

Reasons for the attacks:	% agree	% disagree
They cause crime in South Africa	64	11
They take jobs from South Africans	62	16
They are culturally different	60	14
They cheat South Africans	56	14
They do not belong in South Africa	56	17
They use health services for free	55	15
They take RDP houses from South Africans	52	17
The men 'steal' South African women	52	19
South African criminals are to blame	32	27
The police do not protect them	27	37

CONCLUSION

The anti-migrant violence that plagues contemporary South Africa has prompted considerable commentary and analysis. Initially bewildered by the unexpectedness and ferocity of the 2008 violence, the South African government settled on a position that the deaths, destruction and displacement were the work of criminal elements in the affected areas. Certainly, the actions of the perpetrators were crimes under South Africa law, but that is not the same thing as saying that the rationale for these, and subsequent, attacks was criminality rather than xenophobia. Ex-President Mbeki's position has remained the official stance of the South African government towards May 2008 and the six years of xenophobic violence that have followed. In this paper we designate the official position as xenophobia denialism. Disowning the existence of xenophobia not only flies in the face of a large body of quantitative and qualitative research, it illustrates a continuing lack of political will (first evident in the mid-1990s) to own the problem and act against one of the most destructive and anti-democratic forces in post-apartheid South Africa.

The majority of academic commentary on the violence has also eschewed xenophobia as an explanation, seeing it instead as an epiphenomenon or

symptom of a deeper malaise. These scholars seek a materialist explanation for the violence, generally viewing it as the outworking of structural economic inequalities and the capture of the ANC by neo-liberalism with the consequent inability of the state to effect a fundamental transformation and redistribution of wealth and resources in the country. For the xenophobia minimalists, grinding poverty, inequality and fierce competition for resources in the country's impoverished informal settlements will inevitably lead to victimization of the most vulnerable.

This paper takes the position that both xenophobia denialism and xenophobia minimalism ignore the evidence that the majority of South Africans hold extremely negative views about migrants and refugees and want the state to exercise greater coercive power to purge the country of their presence. These views are suffused with a powerful set of migration myths about migrants and their supposed threat to the interests of citizens. We argue that xenophobia realism is the only way to make sense of the phenomenon of extreme xenophobia (that is, the translation of hostile attitudes into violent actions). The primary challenge for xenophobia realists is to explain why, if hostility is so widespread, violence tends to be more confined, targeted at poorer neighbourhoods in the cities. First, whether and where animosity translates into actions depends on community-specific dynamics such as the nature of local leadership, the absence of dispute resolution mechanisms and the character of policing. Second, all of the common myths about migrants are offered by residents to explain why the attacks take place. Migration myths are not epiphenomena or post-hoc rationalizations; they have powerful mobilizing and animating effects spurring those who believe them into acts of extreme xenophobia.

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APPENDIX:

XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS: TIMELINE

1996

- Somali refugees are threatened and attacked by local traders in Germiston and forced to stop trading in Kempton Park. One migrant is fatally shot. Migrants say police told them to “go back to your own country”.

1997

- Local hawkers organize xenophobic campaign against migrant traders in central Johannesburg, looting their goods and attacking them. Chairperson of Inner Johannesburg Hawkers Committee reportedly states: “We are prepared to push them out of the city, come what may. My group is not prepared to let our government inherit a garbage city because of these leeches.”
- Some 500 South African hawkers organize a march in Johannesburg, chanting slogans like “chase the makwerekwere out” and “down with the foreigner, up with the South Africans.”

2004

- A Somali shop owner is shot dead in his store on Christmas day. Nothing is stolen from the store.

2005

- Three Somali refugees are stabbed to death outside their shop.
- Twelve migrant-run businesses are looted in Viljoenskroon; 146 persons are arrested for malicious damage to property and theft.
- During community protest in Bothaville, Free State, against the local municipality, Zimbabwean and Somali refugees are physically assaulted and migrant-owned stores are looted.

2006

- After a South African youth is killed during altercation with Somali shopkeeper in township outside Knysna, Somali-run stores are looted and destroyed. Some thirty stores are ransacked and their owners are chased out of the area.
- In a month of attacks against Somali refugees in the Cape Flats, around thirty persons are killed and their shops robbed and looted.
- Somali-run stores are repeatedly torched in Diepsloot outside Johannesburg.
- More than twenty tuck-shops and fruit stalls owned by Mozambican migrants are vandalized and ten migrants are injured after stones are hurled at them.
- Somali-run shops are attacked in Masiphumelele, Cape Town, and their contents are ransacked and torched. Dozens of migrants flee the area.

2007

- UNHCR expresses concern over the increasing frequency of attacks on Somali migrants. The Somali community claims some 400 migrants have been killed during past decade.
- Anti-Somali riots break out in Port Elizabeth and it is reported that some 40 Somalis have been killed over a six-month period in the Western Cape.
- Over one hundred Somali-run stores are attacked and looted in Motherwell. Some four hundred migrants flee the area in fear, leaving behind their belongings.

- A large mob pillages and damages stores belonging to Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somali and Ethiopian shopkeepers in Ipelegeng near Schwiezer-Reneke.
- Shops owned by Somalis and other migrant groups are torched during anti-government protests in Khutsong near Johannesburg.
- Migrant-run shops are violently attacked and looted in Delmas causing some forty migrants to flee and seek shelter elsewhere.
- Two Somali migrants are killed in Mossel Bay after their shop is torched.

2008

- Local residents attack Somali-run shops in Jeffrey's Bay forcing many Somali migrants to seek refuge at a local police station.
- After four migrants are apprehended for breaking into a local store in Soshanguve, the stores and homes of migrants are looted and torched. Many migrants flee the area.
- Itireleng residents are encouraged to chase out migrants during a community meeting. Violent clashes soon follow and migrant stores and homes are looted and burnt.
- Valhalla Park residents forcefully evict five Somali shopkeepers.
- Around 150 migrant-stores and homes are vandalized, damaged and torched in Atteridgeville forcing some 500 migrants to seek shelter elsewhere. More than seven migrants are killed.
- Zwelethemba informal settlement residents destroy migrant-owned stores.
- Fifteen migrant-owned spaza shops and homes are burnt down in Mamelodi.
- As violence spreads to Cape Town, Somali and Zimbabwean migrants are attacked by large mobs and their shops and homes are destroyed. Somali-owned shops are looted in Kynsna.
- One source reports that during the xenophobic violence that swept the country, that 342 migrant-owned shops have been ransacked and 213 have been raised to the ground.
- Somalis in Port Elizabeth are attacked, forcing migrant shop owners to move their stock.
- Somali shop owner, Mahad Abukar Alasow, is shot dead by group of men while returning to Khayelitsha from the Soetwater safety camp. Somalis express their shock at death: "We know how the people hate us in this country." They claim he is the eighth Somali migrant to have been killed after returning from the camp. Twenty more are injured in attacks.
- Hundreds of Somali shopkeepers in Khayelitsha say that they have received threatening hand-delivered letters from local Zanokhanyo Retailers' Association asking them to close their businesses by mid-September. Abdulrahim Mohammed, who own two shops says: "We fear for our lives. This is just like Somalia, only worse." Chairperson of Cape Flats Somali community Kakaroots says that he is shocked to "receive such threats from people who are supposed to be my brothers in business. What they don't understand is that we employ locals, we create jobs."
- Somali shop assistant is shot dead in Delft a day after Zanokhanyo Retailers' Association withdraws their threatening letters to local Somali shopkeepers.
- Eleven South Africans are arrested in Khayelitsha after shops of five Somali traders are looted.
- More than 200 people go on rampage in Jeffreys Bay, looting shops owned by Somali refugees and setting twenty shops on fire.
- Somali shopkeepers in Mitchells Plain Town Centre receive anonymous letters demanding they close their shops or face violent reprisals.

- After a child is murdered in Masiphumelele, local residents clash with immigrants believing that an immigrant was responsible for Ayola Adonis' death. Twelve shops are looted and damaged. Migrants are forced out of their homes. Police later confirm that the suspect is a South African.

2009

- Shops owned by migrants are looted in Worcester.
- In two separate incidents in Delft, people opened fire on Bangladeshi migrants, killing Shabier Ahmed and injuring Abdur Rahman and Mohammed Hussein. Another Bangladeshi migrant, Anwar Mohammed, and owner of a shop where the incident occurred says that the assailants did not loot the shop or demand any money.
- Bangladeshi spaza owner Mohamed Samir Khan is shot in the leg in Delft.
- Two Somali migrant spaza owners, Omar Josef and Hazim Amad, die when their store is set alight in Darling.
- Gugulethu traders sent threatening letters to Somali shop owners in the area advising them to leave within seven days. Seven shops owned by Somali refugees are closed down.
- Eleven migrant shopkeepers from Zwelethemba Township in Worcester appear before Equality Court to seek financial compensation and apology from police for failing to protect them during the March 2009 attacks.
- After a series of meetings between Somali and South African shopkeepers in Gugulethu, Somali migrants are forced to increase the price of goods to correspond to their South African counterparts.
- Two Somali youth working as shop assistants are burned to death in Khayelitsha.
- Three shop assistants sustain injuries from gunshots in Delft.
- Shop owned by Somali migrant is set on fire in Khayelitsha.
- Hundreds of Franschoek residents gather outside shops owned by Somali traders and pelt stones to compel them to increase their food prices. Four shops are damaged in Langrug and Mooiwater informal settlements and one migrant is injured.
- Cape Town Mayor Dan Plato says that city is on high alert after Somali traders in Samora Machel and Gugulethu receive threatening letters.
- During mediation efforts with local and migrant traders in Gugulethu, Somali shop-owners are asked to move their shops 100 meters away from their local competitors and inform the Somali Association of South Africa in the Western Cape before opening a shop.
- Shops owned by Ethiopian and Pakistani immigrants are looted in Balfour and burned during protests against poor government service delivery. 30 migrants seek refuge at local police station. Some 100 migrants are displaced from their homes.
- Three men are arrested after body of a Somali trader is discovered in open field in Khayelitsha.
- Four men are arrested in Delft after a Somali shopkeeper is stabbed to death and his store looted. Somali migrants allege that local South African traders are instigating these attacks in bid to force them to close their businesses.

2010

- After the body of a local man is discovered in Rivierisonderend, some 400 residents attack and loot shops owned by Somali migrants. Twenty migrants flee to the local police station for protection and, a day later, leave the area permanently.
- Seventeen year-old Somali shopkeeper Smile Haji dies and another Somali Salad

Apdi is injured when petrol bomb is hurled at their store in Crossroads. Local police say that they will not be increasing patrols at Somali-owned shops. Somali Association of South Africa Western Cape Chairperson Hussein Omar observes: "We are concerned. Since the xenophobic attacks [in May 2008], it has been getting worse. We think this is a very organized plan to threaten Somalis. And the police do nothing about it. There are never any follow-ups to investigations."

- Somalis forced out of Riviersonderend after their shops were destroyed continue to live in a municipal shed.
- During service delivery protests in Siyathemba Township, several hundred local residents loot and burn shops owned by migrants, forcing them to flee for a second time in eight months. Some 134 Ethiopian migrants are displaced and seek shelter in safer areas locally or in other provinces.
- Denouncing local and provincial police failure to protect property and ensure safety of immigrants in Siyathemba Township, Amnesty International declares immigrants are being attacked "with impunity" in South Africa.
- During service delivery protest in Orange Farm, local residents loot migrant-run shops.
- During demonstrations in Reiger Park, Atteridgeville, Ennerdale, Dobsonville, Daveyton, Sharpeville and Orange Farm, migrant-owned stores are looted and destroyed.
- Shops owned by migrants are looted in Worcester.
- Letters are sent to Somali traders in Morreesburg outside Cape Town directing them to close down their stores. A crowd of some fifty persons later attacks traders and ransacks their stores. Four Somali refugees are hurt. Somali human rights activist Abdhihakim Mohammed asserts that his fellow migrants are regular targets of xenophobic violence and that despite "ongoing efforts" of authorities, "they are [not] meeting expectations."
- A Somali trader is robbed and murdered in his store in Soshanguve outside Pretoria.
- A Somali shopkeeper is shot to death in his spaza shop in the Muizenburg suburb of Cape Town.
- A Bangladeshi trader is shot and killed during a robbery in Nuwe Eesterus Township in northwestern Gauteng.
- Members of the South Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) organize a protest against Pakistani traders in Mhluzu and demand that they exit the area. Later, union members and local residents vandalize and raid stores. Two shops are completely destroyed by fire.
- Somali traders in Cape Town reveal that they do not feel safe trading in city's numerous townships because they regularly receive threats and are victims of xenophobic violence. Somali Community Board of South Africa maintains that 17 immigrants have died in xenophobic attacks so far in 2010.
- During protest against poor school conditions in Malmesbury, students assault several Somali traders, raiding their stores and destroying their property.
- Local residents attack shop owned by an Ethiopian migrant in Wolsley. Two persons, including an Ethiopian migrant, receive injuries.
- After an altercation involving a South African and a Somali migrant near Sasolburg, more than eleven shops are looted.
- Somali shopkeeper Mahomed Ahmed is injured in Cape Town when three men attack him in his store and decamp with his money.
- Two South African shop owners at Bloekombos outside Cape Town are detained for trying to incite violence against Somali traders.

- After receiving threats from customers in Tembisa Township that migrants should leave South Africa after the World Cup, traders begin to temporarily close shops.
- Some Makhaza residents intervene to prevent violence when persons attack Somali spaza shops after the South African team is ousted from World Cup tournament.
- Somali Retailers' Association confirms that a Somali shopkeeper has been killed in Site C of Khayelitsha settlement.
- A Somali shopkeeper is seriously injured in Cape Town after armed men break into his shop.
- With heightened fear surrounding possibility of a renewed outbreak of xenophobia, migrants begin to leave city. It is reported that Somali traders in Cape Town are not restocking or keeping their stocks at low levels to avoid looting.
- It is reported that local South African businessmen have hired criminals to deliberately target migrant-owned businesses.
- Violent incidents are reported in Silverton, Phillipi, Langa, Cape Town and Mbekweni, involving looting of migrant-owned shops.
- Some 200 persons loot a Somali-owned shop in Khayelitsha, a short distance away from where National Police Commissioner gives anti-xenophobia speech. Several Somali shopkeepers close their stores and leave with their belongings. Migrants say: "these people called us makwerekwere and said we must go home. They said no one from another land is going to stay here." Community leader Michael Hamco denounces the attackers as "just criminals who roam the street and have nothing to do."
- Seventy immigrants seek refuge at Mbekweni police station after looting and burning of shops. Somali-owned shops are also scorched in Phillipi. Smaller numbers of migrants seek the safety of police stations in Franschhoek, Langa, and Harare. Provincial authorities say there have been "sporadic" attacks on shops and "some incidents of looting" in areas like Mbekweni, Paarl East, Wellington, and Nyanga.
- Nyanga police advise immigrants, especially Somalis, to leave the area and escort them to safety elsewhere.
- Franschhoek police say that all migrant-owned stores in two informal settlements are closed.
- Two Ethiopian migrants are shot to death in their spaza shops in Walmer, Port Elizabeth. Although the assailants leave without taking anything from store, the police deny the murders were motivated by xenophobia.
- Somali trader, Ibrahim Ali, is shot and killed in his store in Kugya Informal Settlement, Port Elizabeth.
- Residents of Wallacedene informal settlement in Cape Town hurl a petrol bomb at a Somali-owned store, injuring three migrants. In a separate incident, armed assailants shoot another Somali migrant in the shoulder and leg.
- A Somali entrepreneur is shot in his shop and receives injuries at Zinyoka Township near Motherwell.
- Somali shopkeepers suggest that immigrant antipathy remains at high levels in Cape Town: "Xenophobia is part of life. We do not live easy here. We only survive" says one.
- Three migrant business owners, two from Somalia and another from Ethiopia, are shot to death in Cape Town, while three other migrants are injured. The Somali community says 30 traders have been victims of targeted attacks since August.
- Somali trader Cyrix Man is shot twice in the head outside his shop in Khayelitsha and dies from injuries. Other Somali migrants living locally say they are living in fear and wondering who's going to be next: "We came to South Africa to survive

not die” says one. The Khayelitsha Somali Retailers’ Association states that more than 22 Somali migrants have been killed locally over past three months.

- Local business owners force migrant-owned shops to close in Freedom Park informal settlement near Johannesburg. Three South Africans and one migrant are killed and migrant-owned businesses are raided.

2011

- A Somali trader burns to death after his shop is attacked by an armed gang in Samora Machel Township, Western Cape
- Gauteng MEC for local government and housing establishes a task team to examine tensions between locals and migrants in Freedom Park. Shops belonging to migrants are to remain closed during the investigation. Local ward Councilor Ntombela says only 12 migrant-owned stores are to be allowed to remain locally.
- After renewed threats of violence against Somali traders in Ramaphosa, police patrol the area.
- Somali shop-owner Idris Haji is killed in Delft after he is shot and a petrol bomb is thrown at his store, which is extensively damaged.
- During service delivery protests, thousands of people raid shops belonging to Somali traders in Ermelo and Lephalale, taking or destroying their goods. Migrants say only shops belonging to non-South Africans are looted and police refuse to help them, telling them to return to their country of origin.
- Somali-owned businesses in Freedom Park settlement open after three months when the local community supports their presence at meeting attended by the Gauteng Housing MEC.
- Somali trader Ahmed Nur Sheikh Ali is robbed and shot to death outside his shop in Motherwell.
- 71 persons are arrested in Kathlehong for sending intimidating letters to migrant-owned shops on behalf of the Gauteng Business Forum.
- After a migrant is accused of raping a 13-year-old girl in Lebowakgomo, local residents attack Ethiopian immigrants and damage their homes, shops and vehicles. Four migrants are injured and some 150 Ethiopian migrants flee the area.
- Greater Gauteng Business Forum members are arrested in Soweto after a protest march demanding Somali and Pakistani traders close their stores.
- Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry Thabethe tells small business owners in Tshiawelo, Soweto to stop complaining about foreign traders: “you guys give these foreigners places to stay and places to do business because you love money.” Gauteng Business Forum Chairperson Mokhosana Mhlanga criticizes Minister’s the remarks: “these people [migrants] are molesting our economy.”
- Fourteen shops owned by Somali traders are raided in Motherwell and set on fire. Two stores are completely destroyed in Kamvelihle and Ramaphosa. Other Somali traders abandon the area.
- 80 members of the Greater Gauteng Business Forum are arrested in Eldorado Park and nine charged for organizing an illegal gathering after Forum organizes campaign to shut selected migrant-owned businesses.
- Four Somali-owned stores are set on fire in Port Elizabeth and more than fifty others are raided in Motherwell and KwaDwesi. Some 200 Somali migrants flee fearing for their safety. Police rule out xenophobia as cause of violence and attribute it to business rivalry between local and migrant traders.
- Some 20 Somali traders seek shelter at Motherwell Police Station with their goods after their stores are set alight by residents.

- While trying to forcibly oust Somali traders from Ramaphosa, Greater Gauteng Business Forum members are confronted by local women who urge them to leave the migrants alone. The Forum organizes a march in defiance of court order and some members are arrested.
- The NIA is apparently looking into connections between various “business forums” in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng and their role in inciting violence against migrant businesses.
- Greater Gauteng Business Forum reveals that they have been asked to set up similar structures in areas like Limpopo, Kwazulu-Natal, Port Elizabeth and Western Cape.
- Two Bangladeshi traders are attacked in their shop in Botshabelo.
- At least ten shops belonging to Somali migrants are raided and three are set on fire in Rothenburg.
- Two Somali traders are shot to death in their Port Elizabeth stores after refusing to hand over cash.
- Four Somali traders in Cape Town are injured after a large migrant-owned store is attached and robbed.
- 20 gang members attack a Somali trader’s shop in Khayelitsha. One man is stabbed.
- Two Somali migrants die after unidentified persons shoot them in the face in Delft.
- A Bangladeshi shopkeeper is robbed of his possessions in Polokwane, including money, groceries, and cellphone. He is subsequently doused with paraffin and set on fire.
- Somali businessman Ahmedey Mohamed is shot dead by armed assailants in Cape Town.
- A day after Vice-President Motlante promises to support and protect Somali refugees living in South Africa, a prominent Somali cleric and businessman is shot and killed in Duncan Village.
- The Somali Refugee Forum states that some 50 tuck shops belonging to Somali, Ethiopian and other migrant communities have been closed since June in Steve Tshwete Municipality because municipality will not issue them licenses. The Municipality denies discrimination and insists that only landowners can apply for such licenses. The Middleburg Small Business Community Forum, representing South African traders, says it helped to mobilize local government for the closures. The Forum says they “are a non-violent organization”, while highlighting “problems” associated with migrants: “Why should townships become dumping sites where foreign people come to promote lawlessness?”
- Local residents hold violent protests in Atteridgeville, outside Pretoria, attacking and raiding Somali-owned stores. The trouble begins when a Somali shop owner is pelted with stones. He fires shots at the crowd killing a woman.
- Responding to recent violence in Atteridgeville, Economic Development MEC urges people not to attack migrant traders and says: “Violent acts are an embarrassment to the country.” He says that perpetrators would be severely punished.
- A group calling itself Alexandra Bonafides sends notices demanding that migrants leave RDP homes in Alexandra Township otherwise they will be “pushed like animals or aliens.” Police say that they are closely monitoring the situation after reports of death threats against migrants are received.
- Criminal charges are filed against Duma Kulashe, leader of the Alexandra Bonafides group for threatening to attack migrants.
- Some 100 residents of Ekurhuleni march to the Gauteng Premier’s office and hand over memorandum urging strict action against migrant-owned businesses. Organized by the Ekurhuleni Concerned Residents, Business and Enterprise Forum,

participants accuse migrant traders of evading municipal by-laws and of selling drugs. A Forum spokesperson says they do not want to take the law into their own hands, but adds: “what do you expect people to do if they are going hungry because foreigners are running down their businesses.” He says they are seeking “positive response within 14 days, failing which we will take drastic steps.” Migrant businesses remain closed during the protests.

- Two Bangladeshi men are robbed and stabbed to death in a shop in Thabong.
- In case against the Safety and Security Ministry, Judge Nathan Erasmus rules that police “failed” to protect migrant shopkeepers in Zwelethemba who were assaulted in March 2008 and had their shops looted. He adds that traders failed to prove police discriminated against them.

2012

- Two Bangladeshis are killed after a petrol-bomb is hurled at their shop in Thokoza township. They are attacked after local residents insist migrant traders must leave the area.
- More than 100 shops owned by Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants are attacked and looted in Thabong, Welkom and Odendaalsrus for three days. Some migrants are also attacked and injured. This happens after local youth take to the streets when discussions with mines stall over preferential employment for South Africans.
- Members of Zankhanyo Business Association force more than five Somali traders to close their shops permanently in Khayelitsha. Two Somali-owned shops are looted and several shops destroyed.
- Some 400 youths returning from a funeral ransack a grocery store belonging to three Bangladeshi migrants in Soweto.
- A large group loots migrant-run stores in Fouriesburg.
- ANC’s “peace and stability” policy discussion report recommends foreign nationals with spaza shops be subjected to stricter by-laws compared to their South African counterparts.
- Angry residents of Ratanda informal settlement ransack stores belonging to migrants during a service delivery protest.
- Sharpeville residents hold a protest march after Human Rights Day celebrations are moved elsewhere, during which spaza shops belonging to foreign nationals are ransacked, while migrants flee for safety.
- Somali migrant Salaat Hussein is killed at his store during a robbery in Kuils River, Cape Town. Somalians say they are being targeted in townships because of business rivalry and xenophobic violence incited by community leaders and local traders.
- Residents attack and ransack stores belonging to Pakistani immigrants in Modimolle Township, Limpopo. The attacks happen two days after two Pakistanis are implicated in death of local woman. Many Pakistani traders seek refuge in neighbouring townships. Some news reports say other migrants’ shops (Somalis and Ethiopians) have also been looted and vandalized.
- Fifty members of Zankhanyo Retailers’ Association threaten to burn down and demolish Somali-owned stores in Khayelitsha. Police watch as members go from store to store and forcibly close fifteen shops. However, residents of Town Two protest and say they do not support the Association’s actions.
- During service delivery protests in Ekurhuleni, residents attack municipal property and shops belonging to migrants.
- Somali traders in Masiphumelele say they are terrified after a series of attacks leave more than eight injured.

- Angered by government's decision not to build a university as pledged in their town, residents of Emjindini Township, Emjindini Trust and Sincobile Village organize a violent protest lasting several days, breaking shop windows and looting stores. Shops belonging to Pakistani nationals are especially targeted. Some 45 persons are arrested, of whom 18 are minors.
- Angered at not receiving RDP houses, residents of Viljoenskroon stone, loot and burn down 20 shops belonging to Pakistani migrants.
- Six policemen from the Tactical Response Team (TRT) appear in court for violently assaulting Somali migrant Osman Nuur Mohamed. Mohamed succumbed to his injuries at Kwazakhele Police Station where he was taken after the assault. One TRT officer faces a charge of murder.
- Somali migrants say that xenophobia is on the rise again with more than ten Somali shop owners having been assaulted and killed in less than one week. Another twenty traders have been violently robbed.
- ANC Provincial Secretary Mjongile says number of foreign spaza shops need to be curbed because it contributes to tensions between locals and migrants and could result in additional xenophobic violence.
- During protest to demand better housing and living conditions, local residents of Botriver attack migrant-run shops and cause damage worth R100,000. Police urges traders to press charges against the perpetrators.
- Somali businessman Abdikadir Isse Abdullahi is shot dead by armed intruders at his shop in Malmesbury Township. He is believed to be seventh Somali to be shot dead that week.
- After unregistered street vendors are removed from Fairways, businesses owned by Somali, Chinese, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Ethiopian migrants are attacked, raided and houses are set on fire in Botshabelo. Nearly 600 persons are displaced.
- Twenty-nine migrant-run spaza shops are attacked in Valhalla, Bishops Lavis and Mitchells Plain. Nine shops are gutted and twenty looted over several days. Somali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants are affected.
- After more than 600 migrants are assaulted and displaced in Western Cape and Free State, rights groups say "country close to boiling point". PASSOP blames the violence on the ANC's new "Peace and Stability" document, saying it unfairly targets migrant businesses and demonizes refugees.
- Police implement "Operation Hard Stick" in Limpopo province during which more than 500 spaza stores are raided and closed for operating without trading licenses. Allegedly, trading laws are "selectively enforced" to target migrant-run businesses.
- Amnesty International says the livelihood of many refugees is being jeopardized by forced closures of migrant-run spaza shops.
- Heavily armed persons loot and burn shops belonging to Portuguese and Chinese migrants in several settlements like Boitekong and near Jabula Hostel. The Somali Association of SA says it has asked its members to leave area for safety. Reportedly, the violence is tied to anger over migrant employment in Anglo Platinum mines.

2013

- ANC's 53rd national conference resolutions' document declares that irregular migrants pose "both an economic and security threat" to South Africa.
- Somali shopkeeper Mohammed Abubaker Mo'alim is shot dead by unknown assailants in his store in Wynberg.
- 45 Somalis were murdered in the Western Cape in the previous year estimates the Somali Community Board. "We are shocked [at] the endless killing of our nationals," they say.

- During violent protests against government plans to merge Sasolburg and Prys municipalities, migrant-owned shops are looted and set on fire in Zamdela and neighbouring Denysville and Koppies. Affected migrants say 60 shops are ransacked and destroyed. Eyewitnesses say police also engaged in looting.
- Nine persons are arrested for ransacking migrant-owned shops in Kwanobuhle. A store belonging to an Ethiopian migrant is also set on fire. Many storeowners flee the area and complain that the police response has been weak.
- Zamdela Township residents say that Somali, Bangladeshi and Pakistani shop owners were attacked during protests because they do not contribute to local community they profit from.
- Mozambican taxi-driver Emidio Macia dies in custody in Daveyton from severe beating after being tied and dragged behind a police van. Eight police personnel are arrested.
- Police reinforcements are called in after many shops belonging to migrants are looted in Kwanobuhle. Some shops are set on fire and migrants flee area.
- Twelve shops are ransacked in Kwanobuhle after the police take Somali traders to police station to check their business permits. The police say it was part of a Home Affairs' operation, but the department denies it.
- Five South Africans accused of robbing Pakistani and Bangladeshi shopkeepers in Buhlebesizwe village in two separate incidents in mid-2011 are sentenced to serve terms of fifteen years each.
- The Somali Community Board of South Africa estimates that more than 1 000 of their compatriots have been killed in South Africa since 2004, many of them in Eastern and Western Cape provinces.
- Around 100 Somali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants from Mitchell's Plain march to Parliament demanding justice for violent deaths of four Pakistani shopkeepers.
- Somali shopkeeper Ahmad Olow-Noor is killed at Mbekweni and his shop looted.
- Pietmaritzburg High Court Judge Igna Stretch sentences a South African man to 25-years' prison sentence for robbing and killing Ethiopian migrant Thomas Ebamo. Ebamo died after being dragged behind a car with seatbelt tied around his neck. Judge deems it a "savage act of xenophobia."
- A Community protest in Delmas over a lack of jobs turns violent with looting of migrant-owned stores. 74 shops are forcibly closed down.
- SAPS personnel successfully intervene when Somali shopkeepers in Soshanguve are threatened and protect their properties.
- Shops owned by migrants are attacked and looted in Ga-Rankuwa. One victim is shot and attacked.
- In a targeted attack on migrant-owned shops, a Somali man is shot in Mamelodi East.
- Ten shops run by refugees are looted in Delmas.
- Nigerian migrant Onyechiabi Iwuaka is tortured and beaten to death by five police officers at Ladana in Polokwane.
- Somali migrant is stabbed to death at Greenfields.
- Somali shop owner is killed when residents of Booyesen Park turn on migrants for several days in a bid to rid the area of "criminal gangs". More than 15 spaza shops are looted by protesting locals and migrants flee area. At least 11 persons are arrested.
- Some 80 spaza stores and small businesses belonging to migrants are raided in Diepsloot after two Zimbabweans are allegedly shot dead by Somali shop owner.

Some 50 persons are arrested for public violence, housebreaking and possession of unlicensed firearms. Witnesses say that only shops belonging to Somalis, Ethiopians and Pakistanis are looted.

- Following heavy looting of migrant shops in Diepsloot, a local ward councilor asks for the army to be called in to contain the violence but Gauteng Police Commissioner disagrees.
- Migrants living in Diepsloot say they face regular verbal abuse from local residents: “they say go home and remove Mugabe. What are you doing in our country? Why are you taking our jobs and women?”
- Justice Minister Radebe contends that attacks on foreigners in Diepsloot are acts of criminality and should not be seen as xenophobia: “I think the criminal activities perpetuated by some South Africans is a matter of grave concern. They are not a reflection of xenophobic attacks against foreigners.”
- Government deems “so-called xenophobic attacks” in Diepsloot and other areas as “pure criminal activities.”
- Migrant shops are looted and pillaged in Orange Farm and neighboring Sebokeng informal settlement during a protest organized by the Workers and Socialist Party against the eviction of unauthorized RDP owners. Police advise migrants to leave area. Over 100 persons are arrested in Orange Farm. Residents say the violence was retaliation for the killing of a Sebokeng resident by Pakistani migrant but the police say no resident was killed.
- Police receive one hundred complaints of looting and vandalism of migrant-owned stores from the Vaal during service delivery protests.
- The Greater Gauteng Business Forum denies having a hand in recent violence but says foreign-owned shops are “here to destroy local business and people” and insists all migrant traders should “go back home.” “If nothing is done about it, there will be war.”
- Responding to two separate incidents of violence in Gauteng in recent weeks, Police spokesperson Mnisi insists that “many South Africans are not xenophobic and many cases are merely crime.”
- Migrant rights’ groups say many incidents involving xenophobia are no longer being reported by the South African media.
- LHR states that five years after May 2008 anti-migrant violence, xenophobic attacks have not been quelled and recommendations made by the SAHRC to government not been implemented. An average of 238 incidents are reported to police each month, according to the UNHCR Xenophobia Hotline data.
- PASSOP argues that threat of xenophobic violence is influenced by three factors: increasing pace of deportations, apathy of trade unions and civil society groups to attacks on migrant businesses combined with “growing narrative of anti-immigrant rhetoric among politicians.”
- During protests against poor municipal services, local residents loot migrant-owned shops in Maokeng and Kroonstad.
- SAHRC states it is troubled by the recent flare-up of xenophobic violence in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. The Commission deploys a team to Diepsloot and Orange Farm to assess the situation and urges government to implement recommendations made by them after the 2008 attacks.
- Five shops owned by Zimbabwean migrants are razed in Marapong suburb.
- Cellphone footage surfaces showing an unidentified Somali man being stoned to death in Port Elizabeth while attempting to salvage items from his ransacked store. Victim is later identified as 25-year-old Abdi Nasir Mahmoud Good.

- Following series of attacks in Diepsloot and Port Elizabeth, Somali Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon writes “open letter” to South African government requesting “as a matter of urgency to intervene and contain this unnecessary and unfortunate violence” against Somali migrants living in South Africa.
- Reacting to the latest bout of violence against foreigners, the South African Cabinet states it is “cautious not to label this violence as xenophobia as preliminary evidence indicates that these acts may be driven primarily by criminality.”
- President Zuma tells Parliament that “Many South Africans protected the foreigners and I had an opportunity to meet with them in and around Pretoria and East Rand. They were very clear that some of them were saying, ‘please don’t touch the foreigners’. I think even with some incidents that happened in Johannesburg, [there] was a clear division, so you can’t say [that] xenophobia is such a huge problem in South Africa.”
- LHR says government denial of xenophobia is really disturbing given the reality that violent attacks on migrants persist. They observe that hate crime legislation which has been on the back burner for several years would go far in proving government’s commitment to seriously address xenophobia.
- Foreign-owned shops are targeted and looted during service delivery protests in Gauteng, including Sebokeng, Evaton, Orange Farm and Lakeside townships.
- UNHCR says it is “extremely concerned” about recent episodes of xenophobic violence in Gauteng and Eastern Cape, involving refugees and asylum seekers as victims. Urges government to send out strong, clear message opposing it.
- During meeting with his Somalian counterpart in Pretoria, International Relations and Cooperation Deputy Minister Ebrahim assures that Somali refugees will “have a safe home” in South Africa.
- Migrant traders from Limpopo petition North Gauteng High Court claiming they are prevented from running their businesses by province’s economic development, environment and tourism departments who refuse to issue them with trading licenses.
- Ethiopian trader Dessta Bejogo is killed at Cato Crest and another migrant injured by shooting. A third Ethiopian migrant survives different attack on his shop. Local police dismiss claims of xenophobia and believe migrants have become “soft targets for criminals.”
- Local residents of Motholo assault three men for robbing and violently attacking a Somali shop owner.
- Two policemen are arrested for extorting Ethiopian tuck shop owners in Witpoort.
- President Zuma says that aside from “isolated incidents”, South Africa is a “hospitable country and welcoming to foreigners.”
- A shooting incident involving a Somali shopkeeper in Duduza, Gauteng, results in gangs of youth damaging and razing 200 shops run by Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi migrants. Some 800 migrants are displaced and five persons arrested for public violence and possession of stolen goods. Duduza township migrant traders say they have lost stock and other property worth thousands of Rands from looting.
- More than 150 shops owned by Somali refugees are looted during four days of violence after Somali shopkeeper kills South African boy in Port Elizabeth. Looting is reported in areas like Kwadwesi, KwaZakhele, Missionvale, Swartkops, New Brighton and Motherwell. Local police say motive for attack is “not xenophobic in nature”, but “a criminal element that has seized an opportunity.”
- Migrant traders in Duduza accuse local councilor Thabo Motaung of stoking xenophobic violence and soliciting bribes to guarantee their safety.

- Migrant-owned shops in Cape Town are targeted during protests against poor public services.
- Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane denounces latest violence against migrant traders in Duduza: “We strongly condemn violence on foreign nationals as we equally condemn violence on South Africans.”
- Migrants hold a protest in Nigel outside magistrate’s court opposing granting of bail to Councilor Thabo Motaung. Protestors say he organized several attacks on migrants.
- The Pretoria High Court rules against an application filed by the Somali Association of South Africa, Ethiopian Community of SA and other groups. Judge Ranchod says he is not satisfied that migrants are being discriminated against. He adds that restrictions on the right to trade are acceptable, recognized internationally and by Constitutional and appeal courts.
- The Johannesburg High Court directs Ekurhuleni Municipality to address the needs of victims of xenophobic violence by ensuring their personal safety and that of their property. It declares Ekurhuleni Township a “disaster zone”. The ruling follows attacks against Somali, Bangladeshi and Ethiopian migrants in Duduza and surrounding townships in recent months.
- A Somali-owned shop is attacked and looted in Duduza after residents hold meeting to allow migrants to return to township. They were chased away in August.
- At the national SMMEs summit in Mpumalanga, Deputy Trade and Industry Elizabeth Thabethe states that the “scourge of South Africans selling and renting their businesses to foreigners” hampers growth of South African entrepreneurship. “You still find many spazas with African names, but when you go in to buy, you find your Mohameds, and most of them are not even registered,” she adds.
- A march to Western Cape Zille’s office demanding better facilities like land for housing and improved sanitation turns violent. Some protestors ransack migrant traders’ stalls. Vendors claim the perpetrators told them: “You are a foreigner, we’re going to steal from you” and “Makwerekwere, hambani khaya [foreigners, go home]”.
- Police investigate the recent death of Ethiopian migrant Asefe Erise Lombabo in Pietermaritzburg. He was killed after the store where he worked was petrol-bombed in France Township. Five persons are arrested.
- Migrants in Duduza say despite a ruling granting them protection, they are being attacked again upon their return.
- Two Bangladeshi shop owners are bludgeoned to death in their shop in Manama Kgotheng Village near Mogwase.
- After the police and Red Ants remove unauthorized electricity connections from Imbeliseni informal settlement, the residents organize a violent protest during which migrant-owned shops are looted.
- Angry at the police failure to arrest suspects in the kidnapping of a six-year-old child, residents set houses and shops on fire in Setlagole. Three migrant-owned shops are looted.
- Musina and Greater Tubatse municipalities shut down some 600 businesses run by refugees and asylum-seekers. Migrant shopkeepers are allowed to present their case to the Supreme Court of Appeal challenging unauthorized closure by police of informal businesses under “Operation Hardstick”.
- Local residents burn down five Zimbabwean-owned shops, two houses and two vehicles in Liphilale town. The local business forum, accusing migrants of unfair competition and crime, is believed to have instigated these attacks.

- Mozambican female trader is roughed up in Johannesburg and verbally abused by police personnel in latest development of “Operation Clean Sweep”, the city’s project to evict informal traders from inner city areas.
- Despite the enormous value of informal cross-border trade, estimated to be around \$17.6 billion for SADC countries, women migrants who constitute 70 percent of traders face many challenges, including harassment, soliciting of bribes and exploitation by border officials.
- Somali refugees feel they are being targeted with impunity in the country. They say returning to their war-torn country is preferable to animosity and resentment faced on daily basis in South Africa.
- Ethiopian Vigist Chufamjo and her 16-month baby are gunned down outside her husband’s shop in Everest at Springs outside Johannesburg.
- Somali-owned shop is looted by a gang of youths in Lindelani.

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- After a man is found dead in a migrant-owned tuck shop in Wiggins near Cato Manor, local residents loot and destroy it.
- Residents of Jika Joe informal settlement blame migrants, many of them from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Mozambique, for death of another South African, destroying their homes and attacking them with pangas, knives, steel pipes and sticks.
- Home Affairs Minister Pandor asserts South Africa is very hospitable to immigrants and refugees: “It would be difficult to find a country in the UN as welcoming as our country.”
- During day of violent protests in Tzaneen, migrant-owned shops are looted in Kubjana and Relela.
- Tshwane police officer pleads guilty to kidnapping and assaulting six Zimbabwean migrants in 2010, including unsolved disappearance of teenager. LHR says case is related to “rise in targeting of informal traders” in Pretoria and Johannesburg.
- Khayelitsha Commission investigating police conduct is informed that migrants regularly face abuse at hands of police and their human rights are often ignored. Somali shopkeepers are regularly extorted and mistreated by police after episodes of armed robberies, including stealing cash from them.
- Amandla Wethu Workers’ Union members ransack many Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese-owned shops in Mthatha.
- During violent service delivery protests, more than 1,000 persons vandalize informal traders’ stalls at Ekangala near Pretoria.
- Two migrant-owned shops are looted and a shopkeeper injured at Majakaneng during violent service delivery protests in Gauteng and parts of North West.
- Protesting their unmet demand for housing from Nelson Mandela municipality, hundreds of residents of Kamesh set fire to houses and raid migrant-run stores in Uitenhage.
- Residents of Kwalanga Township in Uitenhage loot migrant-run shops during a week of violent protest over housing.
- More than fifteen migrant shops and three vehicles are looted and one torched in Refilwe Township outside Pretoria.
- Migrant-owned shops are looted during a service delivery protest in Soweto. Police escort migrants away from area with their goods.
- Sixty-three people are arrested in Molentlane village in Limpopo for ransacking and torching five Chinese-owned shops.

- A number of migrant-owned shops are looted during a service delivery protest at Setlagole outside Mahikeng, North West province. Twenty persons are arrested, including seven for possession of stolen goods.
- Thirty-five persons are arrested in Johannesburg for public violence after they barricade roads, burn tires, and loot several migrant-run shops.
- During public protest demanding improved municipal services, Setlagole residents raid several migrant-owned shops. Seven persons are arrested for possession of stolen goods.
- Several Somali-owned shops are vandalized and looted in Pienaar, Mpumalanga, after a migrant shopkeeper kills local resident during altercation. Somali migrants say police are not doing enough to protect them and arrived after their stock was already looted.
- Thirty-five persons are held in custody in Kanana, North West province for public violence, arson and malicious damage to property after protesters destroy local municipal offices and loot several migrant-owned shops. Two stores are set on fire.
- Ten immigrants received injuries and twenty-five shops are looted by organized gangs in Johannesburg and Pretoria. The President of the Nigerian Union in South Africa declares that commercial taxi drivers led the attacks in Johannesburg.
- During service delivery protests in Limpopo, many spaza shops owned by immigrants are looted in villages around Maake. Twenty persons are arrested.
- Shops belonging to foreigners are ransacked and damaged in Boitumelong Township in Bloemhof during protests against poor service delivery and corruption in local government. As violence spreads to neighboring areas, five spaza shops are reportedly looted and torched in Wolmaranstadt in nearby Maquassi Hills Municipality.
- Somali shopkeeper Mohamed Jeele is shot dead in Port Elizabeth by unidentified persons and his store's contents are stolen.
- ANC Secretary-General Mantashe says government is concerned about disappearing South African small businesses that are being "swallowed by foreign migrants: "If you go to Soweto, corner shops have been taken over by foreigners. We must do something about it" Mantashe informs a campaign rally at Eldorado Park South in Johannesburg.
- Unidentified gunmen kill two Somali traders, Shafi Hassan Nour and Abdirisak Abdilahi Hassan. inside their store outside Johannesburg at Mathuli district and steal money and other valuables.
- Local residents of Gilead, Limpopo, attack migrants and loot their shops after blaming them for rising crime.
- Some 100 migrant-owned shops are attacked by armed youth for several days at Mamelodi East and West after fight between migrant shopkeeper and local turns violent. Three migrants are killed, more than dozen are injured and the remainder escape to Pretoria. They complain that police checked their immigration permits instead of protecting their lives and property. Provincial police spokesperson Mofokeng says attacks are not xenophobic: "criminal elements are at play here. Young lawless people are on the loose, and we are investigating with the aim of arresting them."
- African Diaspora Forum criticizes police for verifying permits of affected migrants during Mamelodi attacks: "what is more urgent for the SAPS, saving lives or checking papers? The apparent impunity with which perpetrators commit these acts of xenophobia and government's denial that these shameful events take place or are xenophobic could possibly be the reason why attacks are multiplying."

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