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Xenophobia and the migration of Nigerians to South Africa

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Abstract:

Xenophobia against people from other parts of Africa is widespread within South Africa and continues to erupt in violent attacks. Frequently, Nigerian migrants are in the focus of these attacks, which seems to be related to the negative image they have within the country. Despite the hostile environment the Nigerian migration to South Africa carries on. Against this background, the study focuses on the different factors that motivate Nigerians to immigrate to South Africa, despite the widespread xenophobia. Furthermore, light is shed on negative factors that Nigerian migrants associate with South Africa. Additionally, the prevailing xenophobia, its causes, and how it affects Nigerian migrants is examined as well as the problems within Nigeria, their root causes, and to what extent they influence the migration of Nigerians.

In order to comply with the social distancing policies and travel restrictions that prevailed during the first Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, the qualitative data acquisition for this study took place in the form of online in-depth interviews and informal discussions. The respondents consisted of 14 documented Nigerian migrants, seven men and women, located in the South African cities Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Cape Town.

The study used multiple macro, micro, and meso-theoretical approaches to identify which factors motivate Nigerians to immigrate to South Africa. The migration of Nigerians to South Africa is motivated by the aim to take advantage of the promising economic opportunities in South Africa, as well as to escape the dire socio-economic situation in Nigeria which is caused by endemic corruption and the missing political will to further develop the country. The study finds that the most negative factor that Nigerian migrants face is the insecurity in South Africa, which particularly manifests itself in the high crime rate, violence against women, and xenophobia. Why especially Nigerians are a victim of xenophobia in South Africa is explained by the envy of the local population and the boastful demeanor and illegal activities of some of their compatriots. Furthermore, it is suspected that Nigerians are being used as scapegoats by local politicians to cover their political failures. The fear of falling victim to xenophobia restricts migrants in their everyday lives and forces them to adopt special behaviors. The study provides new insights into the impact xenophobia has on migration. The fact that many Nigerians are aware of xenophobia before they leave Nigeria leads to the conclusion that the persistent xenophobia in South Africa does not have an impact on the migration of Nigerians to South Africa.

In summary, the study deepens and expands the knowledge about migration and xenophobia by promoting new knowledge. At the same time, the study raises new questions of why xenophobia towards Nigerians in South Africa has intensified in recent years and whether the escalation of violence against Nigerians has a long-term effect on the popularity of South Africa as a migration destination among Nigerians and migrants in general.