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## Xenophobicization of “*Makwerekwere*” as Used against Foreign Nationals in South Africa

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### Abstract:

*Since the outbreak of May 2008 violent attacks of foreign nationals in some South African townships – and in particular in informal settlements, literature investigating such violence has been growing tremendously. From these literature, one word “makwerekwere” received much attention as some investigators and commentators of these tensions and violence concluded that the word denoted hatred of foreign nationals by South Africans. Obvious methodological and theoretical limitations are evident from the conclusions of most of these literature. This paper investigated the “real” and “actual” meaning of the word “makwerekwere” employing ethnographic and etymological approaches – and the results revealed that the word “makwerekwere” is instead an “old” word mostly used in townships and mine hostels against peoples perceived as foreign – regardless of geographical origin and nationality – and the word does not express any form of hatred to those used against despite it being derogative and demeaning amongst others. Makwerekwere is a social word expressing dominance of one group by another in the social space. The word has also been used by locals against locals to gain social advantage. It is recommended that social science research on makwerekwere and xenophobia in South Africa should improve methodological and theoretical approaches while studying issues of high controversy to avoid sending out to the public incorrect assumptions perceived as truth and correct; one case being the distortion of meaning and context of the word “makwerekwere” as used in South Africa.*

**Keywords:** *Makwerekwere, Township, foreign nationals, Social Space, Xenophobia, Zimbabweans*

### 1. Introduction

“*Makwerekwere!*” the man next to me tells his companion after hearing me speak to a friend in *Tshivenda* at the Park City Station in Johannesburg while waiting to board a luxury coach to Makhado in Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Tshivenda* is one of the many indigenous languages of South Africa. The language is spoken by *Vhavenda* of *Venda* in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. I later learnt that the man who remarked was himself *Zulu* from the then *KwaZulu*, but currently *KwaZulu-Natal* Province, South Africa who like me was also in transit in Gauteng to elsewhere in the country. He did not know *Tshivenda* – and his assumption was that I was speaking one of the languages of the so-called foreign nationals in South Africa. In fact, he assumed I was a Zimbabwean national. The man did not call me a “*kwerekwere*” from hatred but from identity point of view – another foreign national.

A plethora of literature has emerged (Hungwe, 2012; Isike and Isike, 2012; Koenane, 2013; Konanani and Odeku, 2013; Mari, n.d) insinuating that the word “*makwerekwere*” denoted hatred of foreign nationals by South Africans. In fact Isike and Isike (2012) wrote “*makwerekwere is a cumulative result of the dynamics of psychosocial group relations during the apartheid years*” Mari (n.d) on the one hand also posited that “*makwerekwere is a derogatory term of uncertain origin, which has been coined in post-apartheid South Africa to define the whole category of inter-African migrants*” with Isike and Isike (2012) furthermore opining that “*makwerekwere explains the phenomenon of Afro-phobia*” According to Isike and Isike (2012), “*makwerekwere*” provoked anti-African orientation of Black South Africans in particular to fellow African migrants from around the continent resulting in despicable treatment of other Africans who are in fact imagined by the locals as “others” Clearly, the majority of these literature opine that the word “*makwerekwere*” denotes and expresses Xenophobic tendencies by South Africans against those perceived as being non-South Africans.

However, of the literature that denote “*makwerekwere*” expression as Xenophobic, none of such literature ever bothers to investigate the historicity and etymological factors of the word to conclude on the contextualisation of the word – such literature instead relied on emotional sentiments – assumptions of the context and meaning of the word “*makwerekwere*” to conclude on its meaning. This paper argues that the expression “*makwerekwere*” does not denote hatred of foreigner nationals living and working in South Africa by South Africans. However, the paper concedes that the word in itself is derogatory, unpalatable and demeaning to those the word is used against. This paper investigates the origin, context and meaning of the word “*makwerekwere*” to argue its case.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Emerging literature on “makwerekwere” and Xenophobia in South Africa

Many a literature professing that the use of the word “makwerekwere” for foreign nationals in South Africa (Hickel, 2014; Hungwe, 2012; Isike and Isike, 2012; Koenane, 2013; Konanani and Odeku, 2013) argue that South Africans who use this word against foreign nationals do so in obsessed hatred of foreign nationals. In fact, Isike and Isike (2012) argued that users of the word “makwerekwere” for foreign nationals suffered from *Afro-phobia* citing the events of May 2008 when foreign nationals living and working in South Africa were targeted for violence as example of a highly *Afro-phobic* South African society. This supposed hatred of foreigners by the South Africans is referred to as Xenophobia based on the popular definition of hatred depicting “intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries” as explained by Rukema and Khan (2013) in their definition of what Xenophobia is.

### 2.2. Tracing the roots of Xenophobia, and its visibility in South Africa

Xenophobia is an old human phenomenon traceable even to ancient times in Athens and other Greek city-states where issues of exclusion of non-citizens for foreigners (Verri and Franca, 2013), Adolf Hitler's era of the 1940s which promoted anti-Jewish hatred (Boaduo, Milondzo and Adjei, 2009) and modern civilisation era where Xenophobia is also propagated through the internet amongst others (Esposito, 2002). The entire world has long conceded that Xenophobia is inhumane and should therefore removed from the global social stage. This international commitment was demonstrated by the adoption of the so-called Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 seeking to fight Xenophobia and discrimination amongst others.

While incidences of Xenophobia might be high in South Africa (Isike and Isike, 2012; Rukema and Khan, 2013), the pronouncements of the word “makwerekwere” as being a word expressing hatred and Xenophobia against foreign nationals by South Africans presents an empirical challenge – and in addition increased prospects for critical debate considering increased views expressed by most literature opining that “makwerekwere” expression denoted Xenophobia in South Africa. This paper will argue that categorising “makwerekwere” as an expression of hatred of foreigners by South Africans is based on flawed, misinformed, exaggerated and misleading contextualisation of “makwerekwere” expression and what the word really means. To start with, name calling has been popular practice all over the world and the practice has been part of human behaviour in both civilised and uncivilised societies – which humans used - especially towards those “other” persons perceived different from the one who uses such words as “makwerekwere”. For example, Achume (2014) found that foreign nationals – especially refugees have been targets of verbal and physical abuse and harassments through Xenophobic and practices of discrimination in some societies around the world for decades. Derogatory anomatopoeia such as “ndingari” - that is, “tick sucking blood from the attached cattle” when referring to West African foreign nationals in the Congo have been very common and of frequent use amongst Congolese locals against “other” African nationals (Kirsting, 2009). Often, in countries such as Cameroon, Mozambique and Ghana for example, foreign nationals were psychologically violated in obvious discrimination and Xenophobia by locals through expressions such as “travellers in permanent transit” or “Zombies” when referring to foreign nationals (Kirsting, 2009).

The use of words such as “makwerekwere” against “others” (Isike and Isike, 2012) could be explained in terms of these differentiations and diversity of culture, language, geography, religion and so forth (Isike and Isike, 2012). Human beings are always aware of what they regard as their own, and those they regard as outside from their own. From this human trait and behaviour emanate issues of “national solidarity and identity based on shared history and common destiny” which evolve into politics of “belonging”, “Exclusion of strangers” (Geschier, 2005; Kirsting, 2009), “other” and “self” (Isike and Isike, 2012; Steinitz, 2007). These insinuations therefore characterise society as an embodiment of consciousness of “self” and “other” (Steinitz, 2007). These manifestations could unfortunately promote stigmatisation of certain groups or individuals perceived as being “other” while impeding synchronisation with the “others” (Steinitz, 2007). Rushton (2005) tried to explain some of these traits and behaviours through the so-called “Genetic Similarity Theory”, “Ethno-symbolism” and “Altruism toward kin and similar others” theories where the author fundamentally argued that human behaviour and trait such as Xenophobia explained what the author called “dark side” of human altruism. Based on the Rushton theories of human behaviour and traits, issues of human “belonging” or “non-belonging”; “inclusion” and “exclusion”; “us” and “others” (Isike and Isike, 2012; Steinitz, 2007) for example could therefore not be an exclusively South African societal behaviour as some literature of Xenophobia would want to portray. These are universal traits and behaviour patterns and traits of human kind which according to Kirsting (2009) demonstrated “a latent mindset in the midst of societ”. Unfortunately, Africa still suffers from lack of capacity of integrating the vast masses of its so-called foreign nationals into the social systems of the “hosting” country (Kirsting, 2009) suggesting that tendencies of Xenophobia for example might have to be dealt with over an extended period of time. Crucially however is that no region in the whole world has ever attained a civilisation or modernisation which has totally eradicated Xenophobic tendencies to date, and therefore, “assumptions that modernisation will gradually reduce the effect of local antagonisms and promote the growth of more universalistic societies” (Rushton, 2005) might remain highly elusive.

The views expressed by Isike and Isike (2012) opine that the aftermath of apartheid which delinked South Africa from the rest of Africa and under-education of Black South Africans remain firmly embedded in the South African society so much that the entire society has become Xenophobic. This hypocritical assumption detaches the effects of apartheid on Black South Africans from those of colonialism in the rest of the continent therefore opining a challengeable notion that apartheid had more psychosocial damage to Black South Africans than colonialism had on the rest of Africa. Apartheid and colonialism in the rest of Africa never created better peoples anyhow but promoted a continent highly polarised against itself in violent “ethnic” or “national” antagonism (Kirsting, 2009; Rushton, 2005) promoted through various hypotheses (Rukema and Khan, 2013); Black on Black and Tribe on Tribe and Ethnic group against ethnic group in Burundi, Congo, Gabon, Rwanda, Nigeria and so forth.

Tolerance of difference and diversity is what humans have to learn – they are not born with such traits. This makes the rest of the African continent a victim of apartheid and colonialism – and therefore recovering from the shock. No part of the region has fully recovered from such inhuman atrocities suffered by the peoples of this region – no matter how their supposed “superior” education might have been infused by the former colonisers into their post-colonial system. In fact Dhlandhlara (2014) opined and corroborated this assertion by arguing that development of social capital, unity and cooperation amongst humans might be disrupted by amongst others differences of language, social affiliations, community status and so forth in a study conducted in Nyanga, Zimbabwe for example. It is not like others in Africa, and elsewhere are incapable of being Xenophobic, but only how the story of Xenophobia is told by others. That apartheid, violent nature of the the South African society and South Africa's isolation from the international community might have contributed as sources of Xenophobic tendencies and adoption of violence against foreign nationals amongst South Africans (Rukema and Khan, 2013) ignores the fact that there have been millions of foreign nationals already living and working in South Africa before the new era of democracy. The numbers just increased with democracy while Xenophobia on the one hand is not a “new” post-apartheid product. Compared to the intensity of violence that took place elsewhere in Africa – Burundi, Rwanda, Zimbabwe during and post-war in the 1980s, Nigeria and so forth, it is needless to point that the violent nature of South African society is being an exaggeration. The tendency amongst some commentators of Xenophobia in South Africa is to use the events of May 2008 which in addition took place in less than half the total geographical area of South Africa; Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (Rukema and Kahan, 2013) – and in isolated areas of these provinces as indication of a country with a crisis of Xenophobia. It is misleading. It is common in Social Science research to find encroachment of researcher's opinion as cautioned by O'Brien, Remenyi and Keany (2004) who argued that in Social Science research “*Whoever does the telling (of the story) will have a point of view*” The point of view is often not the story.

### 2.3. “*Makwerekwere*”, criminality and Xenophobia in (South) Africa

To therefore assume that South Africans who use the word “*makwerekwere*” against foreign nationals did so from Xenophobic tendencies without delving into correct contextualisation of “*makwerekwere*” pronouncements remains empirically challengeable. In fact, the whole school of Xenophobicisation of every kind of violence by South Africans against foreign nationals living and working in South Africa opining that South Africans were more Xenophobic than the rest of world – and other peoples of other regions in Africa is empirically baseless, misguided and incorrect. Xenophobia like racism is a global practice by humans against other humans – which needs no regionalisation as a South African product as a plethora of literature wants to demonstrate. Some of the events of May 2008 could have been pure criminality because South Africans like any other African peoples were also capable of criminality. This assertion however does not seek to exclude South Africa from being a society terrorised by some incidences of Xenophobia as Kirsting (2009) has already clearly argued that Xenophobic tendencies had been part of the South African society far longer before the events of May 2008 in what could not be referred to as mere criminality. However, criminality and not Xenophobia could not be totally argued out of the circumstances of May 2008. South Africans were capable of looting during public turmoils the same way Zimbabweans were during the so-called food riots of 2005 in Harare. Two Burundians and Congolese who experienced looting of their goods while selling in the streets of Durban (Rukema and Khan, 2013) could not be sufficient to express the intensity of Xenophobia in South Africa for the looters may never have known the victims were of some other nationalities, and therefore involved in what could have been mere criminality.

### 2.4 Some offensive words used against “other peoples” in (South) Africa

With regard the use of the word “*makwerekwere*”, Zimbabweans for example, call South Africans “*Masasko*” (Tafira, 2011) - and the use of this word against South Africans has never been referred to as hatred of South Africans by Zimbabweans. “*Makwerekwere*” is an “old” (Tafira, 2011) township expression for teasing those whose language one might not be familiar with or not understand. In the case of the reference cited in the opening paragraph of this paper, a *Zulu* who wouldn't understand *Tshivenda* – a language spoken in the northern region of South Africa called another South African a “*Kwerekwere*”. “*Makwerekwere*” is not a word in isolation in this context - there are several other words considered unpalatable and derogatory when used against other people - and words such as *izifikanamthwalo*, *matswantle*, *magirigamba* – West African men, *maforeigner* and *amakalanga* and so forth are common amongst South African public (Koenane, 2013; Tafira, 2011) – all used in different contexts of the broader social space. The use of derogatory words against other humans perceived as being foreign is a global practice and still haunt many a countries. For example, in the Congo, the word “*ndingari*” used against West Africans by Congolese nationals is very common amongst Congolese nationals.

Koenane (2013) reported that the use of words of similar nature elsewhere in the continent might be unkind, demeaning, derogatory and denegrating to others. However, researchers such as Chigora (2009) opine that some of these words are mostly used to intimidate others so that the user might gain advantage and perceived benefits in the social space. In other words, most of these words are used for what Chigora (2009) calls “*contestations for space*” - especially against those persons “*seen as socially and culturally inferior*” (Tafira, 2011). Township life – especially in South Africa is characterised by dominance of the social space – especially amongst males – and to a certain extent certain tribes and social groups wanting to prove toughness of males from their tribe or social group. These battles of “*contestation for space*” are fought socially through various intimidatory tactics to gain social advantage. In most areas of Soweto for example, not to have been an “original” Sowetan or not able to speak *IsiZulu* might be regarded as backwardness and stupidity – and when such insinuations are made by a *Zulu*, it might be construed as hatred of other tribes by the Zulus. Tafira (2011) affirms this assertion positing that in Alexandra township for example, in contestation for that social space it is common to hear references such as “real” or “*bona fide*” Alexandra resident while those perceived as outsiders were referred to as “*amagoduka*” - those from the rural areas who would return to their “original homes” in

the former batustants such as Ciskei, Giyani, Transkei, KwaZulu and Lebowa for example. For those commentators familiar with township life, they would never make assertions that the use of these words were references of hatred of certain groups of people or “hate speech” because they understand the context from which these words are used.

In most South African townships, one has to prove toughness and not weakness to survive other men or tribes – lest one is considered weak and stupid. Men perceived as weak are generally called “*abafazi*”; that is, women. This is not hatred of women by men but a word of comparison of strength; women are generally regarded as being physically weaker than men. Life in the townships is different from that in the suburbs and elsewhere in the so-called native homelands. Weaker males in the townships are called “*sphukhuphuku sa emaplasin*”, meaning “*the stupid from the farms*” - and it might also go to an extent of being called *kwerekwere*. This assertion is clearly explained by Abrahams (2010) who posited that the “*unschooled in the ways of the city*” - referring to migrant workers mostly coming from native homelands and rural areas – irrespective of nationality have to be initiated into city life. New comers to township and hostel life are referred to as “*abomafekezolo*” In this context, “*abomafekezolo*” refers to the other party as being new and not yet familiar with how life is in the townships. References such as “*ebari*” meaning “stupid” used against migrant workers – especially those from the homelands and elsewhere outside South Africa are often heard in this context.

In fact Chigora (2009) argued that “*Issues of dominance and dehumanization*” are common in “*diverse nationalities and cultures*” around the world. Such references of dominance of the social space have nothing to do with hatred. In some cases, to display dominance, men would form terror groups – especially in hostels during the time of mining migrant labour as far back as 1920 in South Africa. Such groups as Ninevites founded by Nongozola, Isitshozi for the Amampondo working in the Witwatersrand mines and Tsotsi founded in the 1950s (Abrahams, 2010) were established as dominance groups. Elsewhere in places such as Alexandra township, there were the so-called Msomi gang. However, in most cases, such groups went beyond social dominance by becoming vigilante groups and criminal gangs terrorising communities – irrespective of nationality. This kind of life in the townships and mine hostels must explain the notion of “*superiority towards other Africans*” by South Africans (Abrahams, 2010) used out of context by commentators of Xenophobia – especially post-May 2008 tendencies to display obsession by South Africans to dominate immigrant peoples of other nationalities in particular. Correctly contextualised however, township and mine hostel life is about display of superiority towards others – and this is not motivated by any hatred of some tribes, ethnic groups or nationality as most literature on Xenophobia would argue.

In the context of the scenario alluded to in the opening paragraph of this paper for example, “*makwerekwere*” in particular does not denote hatred of the *Venda* by the *Zulu* – unpalatable, derogatory and demeaning the word “*makwerekwere*” might be with the *Venda* or whosoever the word is used against. In fact use of unpalatable words against those perceived culturally and linguistically different is not only an issue of South Africans as Hungwe (2012) also cited such references amongst Zimbabweans themselves. Leeseling (2011) also found that those people who looked or sounded different from “original” Australians for example were considered “second” or “third” generation migrants despite such individuals having been born in Australia. Leeseling (2011) furthermore found that simple factors such as accent or name were used in Australia to determine nationality or citizenship. However, in the Leeseling (2011) study, the author could not link the use of such insinuations with Xenophobia. In the case of the Zimbabwe scenario mentioned earlier for instance, words such as *Injiva*, *majoni-joni*, *Umjubheki* and *Umgoli* are common – especially used by Zimbabweans at home against migrant Zimbabweans - especially those from Johannesburg and South Africa. The home-based Zimbabweans use such references to explain certain tendencies and behaviours of foreign-based Zimbabweans considered deviant, strange and misunderstood by home-based conservative Zimbabweans. Those Zimbabweans reflecting strange and foreign culture to Zimbabwe are considered violent, showy, irresponsible, uncultured and without language because they speak neither *Shona* nor *Ndebele* – Zimbabwe’s major languages (Hungwe, 2012). This reference just characterises people in terms of behaviour, and in no ways explains hatred of the so-called uncultured migrant Zimbabweans by the home-based conservative Zimbabweans.

However, the use of some of these words against certain peoples – especially foreign nationals by South Africans might not entirely be exclusive of Xenophobic tendencies. These words have been, and are being used by certain peoples to infer non-acceptance of diversity; be it on race, tribe, ethnic group or geographical origin. Such rejections of diversity is not only an African practice but a general attitudinal tendency common in society around the world. In collaboration of this assertion, Lim (2009) for example found that South Korean society is seriously polarised – especially with regard those other South Koreans who are perceived as not being so much Korean because of their multi-national identities of Chinese, Russian, Japanese and American roots or affiliations. Clearly, such tendencies created a rigid, stereotypical and narrow Korean society intolerant to even its own (Lim, 2009). On this account, some of these words have been *Xenophobianised* – however in most cases, out of context mainly by commentators of Xenophobia who lack proper understanding of the context in which these words are used. No one would therefore correctly say “*makwerekwere*” is a word of hatred of foreigners in South Africa.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. The Study Area and its choice for this paper

This study was undertaken in the Nzhelele area of Makhado Municipality, Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. Nzhelele is less than 100km from the Beitbridge Border Post which separates Zimbabwe from South Africa in the north of South Africa. When nationals from Zimbabwe arrive into South Africa, they first land in Nzhelele. The choice of this study area was therefore based on the fact that there were many Zimbabwean nationals staying in the eight selected villages for this study. The word “*makwerekwere*” is likely to be used in this area because of the vast number of Zimbabweans who stay in these villages.

### 3.2. Sample Frame

Fifty four (n=54) South African nationals were purposively and randomly selected from a list constructed with the assistance of traditional and civic leaders in the targetted villages.

- Twenty Seven (n=27) Zimbabwean nationals were also selected for this paper. The Zimbabweans were selected from a list constructed with the assistance of other identified Zimbabweans. From the list, the participants were randomly selected.
- Some participants were sourced for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Amongst these participants were the local indigenous chiefs or their representatives (eight) from the selected villages, local civic organisations leadership (eight), representatives of local churches (four); youth (four) and women groups (four).
- Key Informant Interviews (KII) were also held with former mine employees (four) and township residents (four) who had personal experience on how foreign nationals were treated in the mines and townships during apartheid era migrant worker system. This was to established the historical use of the word “*makwerekwere*” in these critical sites.

### 3.3. Data Collection

The South Africans (n=54) were interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire instrument. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with several community leadership structures to gain insight on the use of the word “*makwerekwere*” on Zimbabwean nationals. Key Informant Interviews (KII) were also held with former mine employees and township residents who had personal experience on how foreign nationals were treated in the mines and townships during apartheid era migrant worker system. Snow ball techniques were used to select key informants. Eight elderly former mine workers and residents of Soweto and Alexandra were profiled and interviewed as key informants. The data were recorded as field notes.

#### 3.3.1. Historicity of “*makwerekwere*” in South Africa

On studying issues around “*makwerekwere*” expression, two approaches were employed. First was the “etymological” approach and secondly the “ethnographic” approach to draw conclusions. Etymological approach studies the history of words; their origin, and how their form and meaning have changed over time while on the other hand, ethnographical method allows the researcher to study belief systems, social arrangement and interactions, behaviours, and perceptions within groups and communities (Revees *et al.*, 2008). Ethnographical methods have been widely used in the social sciences as far back as the early 1900 by amongst others Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown – and later emerging at Chicago School of Sociology where the approach became widely popular amongst scholars such as Everett Hughes, Robert Park and Louis Wirth. The successes of ethnographic approach lie with the fact that the ethnographer would be able to interact with the research participants while documenting the culture, perspectives and practicess thereby accessing rich, holistic insights of the participants' nature, views and actions (Revees *et al.*, 2008). For the purpose of this paper it became evident during the study process that not much literature existed on the history of words such as “*makwerekwere*”, and it therefore became imperative to rely on oral information sourced from key informants and the rest of the participants drawn for Focus Group Discussions. Notes were compared for the results.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The paper collected two data types; socio-demographic and other qualitative data collected through FGDs and KII. Socio-demographic data were entered into an excel spreadsheet for analysis. The results were recorded in frequencies and percentages for the main report. Data from the FGDs and the KII were coded and analysed for the main report.

## 4. Results and discussion

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 18 years	14	25.9
19-25	12	22.2
26-35	11	20.4
36 and above	17	31.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	35	64.8
Female	19	35.2
<b>Have you ever used the word “<i>kwerekwere</i>” to a Zimbabwean</b>		
Yes	12	22.2
No	42	77.8
<b>If yes, what was your reason for doing so</b>		

Habit	3	5.6
Hatred of Zimbabweans	2	3.7
Fun	5	6.2
Teasing	16	29.6
Because of their language sounding strange	28	54.9
<b>Do you hate Zimbabweans</b>		
Yes	2	3.7
No	52	96.3
<b>If Yes, why do you hate them</b>		
They are foreigners		
They will take our jobs		
They will take our women		
They out-compete us for business		
For the crime they commit in the area	1	50
The diseases they bring in the area		
Other	1	50
<b>If not, why do you like Zimbabweans</b>		
They provide cheap labor	22	40.7
They re Africans like us	21	40.4
Sympathise with their situation back home	9	16.7
<b>Have you ever used any form of physical violence against Zimbabweans</b>		
Yes	-	-
No	54	100

Table 1: Results of the questionnaire-based interviews with South African nationals (n=54)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 18 years	4	14.8
19-25	13	48.1
26-35	7	25.9
36 and above	3	11.1
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	18	66.7
Female	9	33.3
<b>How long have you been living in South Africa</b>		
Less than five years	9	33.3
More than five years	18	66.7
<b>Has anyone ever used the word "kwerekwere" to you</b>		
Yes	12	44.4
No	15	55.6
<b>If yes, what was your reaction</b>		
Kept quite	8	66.7

Protested	4	33.3
<b>Where was the word used against you</b>		
In the street when walking in the village	4	33.3
At work place	6	50.0
Public place like shop and transport	2	16.7
<b>How do you describe your relations with South Africans</b>		
Good	11	40.7
Fair	9	33.3
Bad	7	25.9
<b>If bad, why do you think the relations are bad</b>		
South Africans lack respect for foreigners	4	57.1
Labor-related issues	2	28.6
Other	1	14.3
<b>If good, why do you think the relations are good</b>		
They provide employment	7	63.6
They provide shelter, food and clothes	2	18.2
Sympathize with our situation back home	2	18.2
<b>Have you ever been involved in any form of crime while in South Africa</b>		
Yes	-	-
No	27	100

Table 2: Results of the questionnaire-based interviews with Zimbabwean nationals (n=27)

#### 4.1. Results of the Interviews with South African nationals

##### 4.1.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the respondents

As indicated in Table 1, the results of this paper revealed that of the 54 respondents, 64.8% were males while 35.2% were females. Their age distribution ranged from lower than 18 years of age (25.9%), 19-25 years of age (22.2%), 26-35 years of age (20.4%) and those aged over 36 years of age (31.5%).

##### 4.1.2. The use of the word “makwerekwere”

Most crucially is the result indicating the number of those respondents who have used, and those who have not used the word “makwerekwere” against Zimbabwean nationals. The results of this paper revealed that 22.2% of the respondents have at some point used the word “makwerekwere” against Zimbabwean nationals. However, a bigger majority (77.8%) of the respondents have never used the word “makwerekwere” against Zimbabweans nationals. However, some participants positively confessed of harboring hatred (3.7%) against Zimbabwean nationals living and working in South Africa while 96.3% denied harboring any sort of hatred of Zimbabweans living and working in South Africa. This result is consistent with Rukema and Khan (2013) who professed that some people in the South African society have expressed unwarranted and unprovoked fear of other people – especially foreign nationals. In a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal Province, Hickel (2014) also reported immense hatred of foreign nationals on account of various factors including myths such as witchcraft stories amongst foreign nationals.

Rukema and Khan (2013) however furthermore indicated that the number of South Africans who would want to see a blanket prohibition of foreign nationals from coming into South Africa had increased from approximately 16% to 37% by 2006. What Rukema and Khan (2013) failed to clarify is whether these perceptions were based on Xenophobia or other factors which could be socio-economic for example. The common element however emanating from this kind of reference is generalized Xenophobianization of the South African public which could be incorrect and misleading. Even in most literature that advocates for this line of reasoning, the evidence is not visible. The end-product of misleading and misguided overtures and rhetoric are obvious distorted policy direction with regard improvement of societal integration of foreign nationals living and working in South Africa. Maybe South Africa needs to educate its public on social issues of other peoples of Africa and to also relax some of its stringent laws on access to public service such as on employment to make the systems easier for inclusive participation. This is an implementable expectation considering the fact that already South Africa has accommodated thousands of foreign nationals into its economic ranks; from as low as farm work to directorship of companies through its democratic labor systems. It is however not uncommon in Africa to experience draconian regulatory policies and sometimes political rhetoric used against access to public services and opportunities to foreign nationals. For example, Kirsting (2009) found that in Gabon, President Omar Bongo had

advocated for exclusion of foreign nationals from public service access, and also their expulsion from Gabon while in Angola in 2005, foreign nationals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were also deported. The irony of it is that the Congolese had also deported approximately 6000 West Africans seizing their property in the process which was distributed to Congolese nationals (Kirsting, 2009).

#### 4.1.3. Reasons for using the word “makwerekwere” against foreign nationals

On the other hand, those South African nationals respondents who used the word “*makwerekwere*” against foreign nationals used the word for different reasons and circumstances, amongst others the Zimbabweans' *Shona* or *Isindebele* languages which sounded funny to the locals (54.9%), teasing (29.6%), fun (6.2), habit (5.6%) and hatred of the Zimbabweans (3.7%). It must be argued that the use of the word “*makwerekwere*” is unkind, demeaning, derogative and degrading to others – especially foreign nationals (Koenane, 2013). For those South Africans in the study area who hated Zimbabweans, they opined that Zimbabweans were responsible of most of the deadly crimes such as murders, rapes and house breaking in the area (50%) while others opined that Zimbabweans were foreigners who wouldn't be trusted because they were known for practicing witchcraft (50%). In other words, this was the group of those who feared Zimbabweans for being Zimbabwean or for alleged witchcraft and economic competition. This behavior is not uncommon in most societies around the world, and elsewhere in South Africa (Hickel, 2014; Koenane, 2013; Tafira, 2011, Chigora, 2009). Clearly, this unwarranted discrimination of others based on nationalities explains the theory of “scapegoating hypothesis” alluded to by Rukema and Khan (2013).

#### 4.1.4. Reasons explaining less adoption of “makwerekwere” by locals to foreign nationals

On the other hand, the results of this paper revealed that the majority of those South African respondents who never harbored any hatred against Zimbabwean nationals did so because they opined that Zimbabweans provided cheap labor (40.7%), they were Africans just like every South African (40.4%) while some sympathized (16.7%) with the socio-economic circumstances in Zimbabwe. All the respondents had never used any form of violence against Zimbabweans before. This might opine that the use of violence against Zimbabwean nationals through Xenophobic motivations might vary from region to region in South Africa; suggesting that not all regions were Xenophobic the same.

### *4.2. Results of the Interviews with Zimbabwean nationals*

#### 4.2.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the respondents

The results of this paper revealed that of the respondents, 66.7% were males while 33.3% were females. Their age distribution ranged from lower than 18 years of age (14.8%), 19-25 years of age (48.8%), 26-35 years of age (25.9%) and those aged over 36 years of age (11.1%). The majority of the Zimbabwean nationals have been living in South Africa for more than five years (66.7%) while some had been in South Africa for less than five years (33.3%).

#### 4.2.2. Experience with the word “makwerekwere”

Zimbabweans who had had an experience of being called “*kwerekwere*” amounted to 44.4% while 55.6% never has had the experience. Those who have had the experience of being called “*makwerekwere*” felt offended however kept quite (66.7%) for fear of violence on them while 33.3% protested when that word was used against them. Most dehumanizing was the fact that this word was mostly used in places such as the workplace (50.0%), street in the village (33.3%) and public places such as in mini-buses (16.7%). The majority of those with an experience with the word “*makwerekwere*” opined that it was out of lack of respect of South Africans for other Africans such as Zimbabweans (57.1%), abuse of Zimbabwean laborers working for South Africans (28.6%) and hatred of Zimbabweans (14.3%) that some South Africans called them “*makwerekwere*”. This result is corroborated by the findings of Tafira (2011) who reported that Xenophobic tendencies manifested the behavior that undermined other persons because they were regarded as socially and culturally inferior.

#### 4.2.3. Perceptions of relations of foreign nationals and South Africans

However, in the case of this paper, still, the majority of Zimbabwean nationals felt that South Africans were good (40.7%), bad (25.9%) and fair (33.3%) people. The majority of Zimbabweans (63.6%) opined that South Africans were good to them because they provided small-scale informal jobs mostly in their gardens which provided crucial income while others were thankful for shelter (18.2%), and also sympathized (18.2%) with their socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe.

#### 4.2.4. Economic contribution of foreign nationals in society

Contrary to some beliefs, the results of this paper revealed that none of the Zimbabwean nationals employed a South African because all of those Zimbabweans who are living in the study area derived informal employment from the locals. There is a contrast between this result and the findings reported by Fatoki (2014) who reported that foreign nationals elsewhere had provided employment to the locals.

#### 4.2.5. Criminality and foreign nationals

The results of this paper revealed that none of the Zimbabweans living and working in the villages of this study area had ever been involved in any sort of crime whatsoever. This is contrary to claims made by some respondents in studies conducted elsewhere in South Africa (Hickel, 2014; Rukema and Khan, 2013) who opined that foreign nationals were criminals based on the so-called stigmatization of those perceived as non-citizens, different in form or otherwise, strangers and “dissimilar others” (Geschiere,



2005; Rushton, 2005; Steinitz, 2007; Verri and Franca, 2013) in pure discrimination, Xenophobia and Afro-phobia (Kirsting, 2009) worthy of regular targets of verbal abuse and physical harassments (Achume, 2014). The results of this study revealed that perception that Zimbabweans were thieves, murderers, burglars and rapists who unleashed horrendous crimes against South Africans is baseless, if not that such crimes might differ in terms of geographical space. For example, in provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape where crime rate is usually high, maybe some of the crime is committed by foreign nationals such as Zimbabweans.

#### 4.3. Historicity and conceptualization of the word “makwerekwere” in South Africa

Following the expert opinions emanating from Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions, it is opined that commentators of Xenophobia in South Africa who portray the use of the word “makwerekwere” as being Xenophobic, expressing hatred of foreigners by South Africans could be exaggerating and Xenophobicising a simple word made complicated. The results of this paper revealed that “makwerekwere” might be an “old” word which had been used for decades in various South African social space by those wanting to enforce their superiority over others; wanting to belittle them to a point of socially surrendering to them. This assertion is in sharp contrast to the view shared by Mari (n.d) who argued that “makwerekwere” was a post-apartheid era word used by South Africans to define foreign nationals. Contrary to assertions by Mari (n.d), it emerged through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in fact that “makwerekwere” was a very popular word mostly used in the apartheid era mines and the so-called Black townships in South Africa. The word was used indiscriminantly, not particularised for foreign nationals. It is instead evident from the reviewed literature, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions that insinuations of the word “makwerekwere” as being Xenophobic emanated basically from flawed empirical methodologies, contextualisation and theoretical factors employed by commentators in the study of Xenophobia in South Africa which over-looked the need to analyse contextual meaning of the word, and its historicity on the one hand.

Also, the *Xenophobicisation* of “makwerekwere” might have emanated from literature that has been influenced by certain experiences of the authors or the ill-informed foreign nationals respondents in those particular studies who opined the expression “makwerekwere” denoted hatred towards foreigners – this influenced by their lack of understanding of the contextual meaning of the word – and in addition its historicity. Such “critical blindness” (Leeseling, 2011) to the actual meaning of the word mislead most of the literature on Xenophobia to make assumptions based on non-existent and untested public opinion on the actual meaning of the word. The misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the meaning of “makwerekwere” might also have emanated and drawn references from what Leeseling (2011) posited as “thinking makes it so” as such evidence making its original usage as motivated by fear of foreign nationals is in terms of oral evidence from key informants of this study without any empirical backbone whatsoever. For example, amongst South Africans for example, it has been common for decades to hear a *Venda* referring to a *Zulu*, *Xhosa*, *Ndebele* and *Swati* as “mabunyu” – for a simple reason that the *Nguni* tribes were dressed in their traditional regalia – which in the case of the *Venda* might denote semi-nakedness and therefore unacceptable culture. In *Tshivenda*, *Mabunyu* means those who stay naked. It is an expression of a traditional sentiment against perceived differences and to a certain extent intolerance of other different tribes, race and cultures amongst others. Such expressions could obviously not be informed by hatred of such other peoples but rejection of what might be viewed as “strange” and therefore unpalatable cultures of others.

Thought, this paper argued that “makwerekwere” is not a word in isolation. There are so many other words used in South Africa against foreign nationals and nationals alike but what made “makwerekwere” Xenophobic is pure ignorance. In fact, the opening statement of this study shows clearly that the use of the word “makwerekwere” is not exclusive of South Africans. *Zulus* might use this word to intimidate say a *Sotho* while a *Sotho* might use it to intimidate a *Shangaan*, and so forth. Abrahams (2010) and Chigora (2009) affirm this assertion contending that “contestation for space” and wanting to enforce “superiority towards others” by using “dirty” words such as “makwerekwere” have been part of human practice for decades – especially in indigenous African societies.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

South Africa is faced with a mammoth challenge to integrate the large number of foreign nationals currently living and working in the country into the multi-racial and ethnic socio-economic space which the country is today. This should be promoted by amongst others, South Africa’s “ubuntu” and the country’s “rainbow nation” rhetoric to build a cohesive society where all those who live and work in the country have equal opportunities guaranteed by tranquility, peace, safety and security. Conclusions drawn from this study and other reviewed literature is that the South African socio-economic space is not wholly integrated yet as evidence of racism, ethnicity, tribalism, Xenophobia, violence against diversity with regard religion, language and gender amongst others are encountered almost daily. The May 2008 violence against foreign nationals such as Zimbabweans and Mozambicans amongst others necessitate the country’s adoption of a better approach to promote cohesiveness and integration of society considering the fact that South Africa remains one of the preferred destinations by most immigrant Africans because of the country’s better economy and opportunities in the region – especially South of the Sahara. South Africa will not afford tendencies of Xenophobia for example considering its influence on the socio-economic paradigm in Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper investigated issues of Xenophobia in South Africa expressed through the use of the “makwerekwere” expression used by South Africans against foreign nationals – especially Zimbabweans living and working in the country. The findings of this paper are summarized as follows:

- (1) There were fewer South Africans (44.4%) who have used the word “makwerekwere” against foreign nationals – especially Zimbabweans than those who have used the word (55.6%).

- (2) The majority of the South Africans who have used the word “*makwerekwere*” have done so in reference to the strange languages of the Zimbabweans; *Shona* and *Isindebele* which the South Africans could not make meaning out of.
- (3) There was a minority (3.7%) of South Africans who conceded they were Xenophobic against foreign nationals expressing reasons such as alleged crimes committed by the foreign nationals in South Africa. Contrary to most assertions that South Africans hated foreign nationals, this paper found that instead the greater number of South Africans had good (40.7%) or fair (33.3%) relations with foreign nationals. However, the results revealed that there were indeed some South Africans who had felt bad (25.9%) around foreign nationals. This paper however argues that even if it were to be assumed that the 25.9% of South Africans who felt bad about foreign nationals were instead Xenophobic, it would still reflect some exaggeration of facts to classify South Africans as being extremely Xenophobic.
- (4) Most critically however, the conclusion drawn from this paper is that it is incorrect to opine that the use of the word “*makwerekwere*” against foreign nationals such as Zimbabweans is Xenophobic and an expression of hatred of foreign nationals by South Africans.
- (5) The word “*makwerekwere*” has a long and “old” history in the battle for dominance in the social space – especially in the apartheid era mines and townships, and has been used by those who thought they were the “*bosses of the space*” to intimidate those perceived as new and “*speaking funny language*” instead of languages perceived as superior; *Zulu* and *Xhosa* for example.
- (6) The word “*makwerekwere*” has been contextually corrupted by commentators of Xenophobia in South Africa to express hatred of foreign nationals by South Africans. In other words, “*makwerekwere*” as used in the context of Xenophobia has been *Xenophobianised* while the word in itself does not denote or express any Xenophobia.
- (7) The word “*makwerekwere*” has not only been exclusively used against foreign nationals, but has also been used indiscriminately by South Africans against other South Africans.
- (8) The word “*makwerekwere*” is offending to certain segments of the South African society. This paper opines that the use of the word “*makwerekwere*” is however, derogative, unpalatable and lacking in the expression of respect and “*ubuntu*” to other humans; foreign nationals or otherwise. Irrespective of the word's historically unxenophobic context, the word needs to be totally scrapped from the public to promote cohesiveness, unity, belonging, “*ubuntu*” and *rainbowism* amongst all those who live and work in South Africa. This would promote the spirit of the South African democratic Constitution and emotional healing of a country formally ravaged by apartheid, racialism, inequality and ethnic vilence. Government should facilitate public education on issues of Africanness where South Africans are exposed to respect for other Africans, and acceptance of diversity while promoting tolerance.

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