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Neither here nor there: exploring the transnational identity of West African migrants living in South Africa

Xenophobia as a form of othering manifests differently in varying contexts, and against the backdrop of globalisation, the nature of migration and societal integration of foreigners has changed over time. In South Africa, xenophobia has been a vital issue connected to migrants, whereby those from other African countries face discrimination based on their nationality, ethnicity and economic disparities. However, there is a knowledge gap in understanding how othering as a concept manifests beyond overt forms of violence and how it links to systemic forms of exclusion. The concept explored in this article is 'West-a-phobia', coined by Petkou (2005) when conducting his PhD research on West African migrants living in Johannesburg, South Africa. By reappropriating Petkou's concept through a transnational theoretical framework, this article delves into the experience of six West African migrants living in South Africa over a long period to analyse how systemic and covert forms of othering manifest within the post-apartheid context. The key findings from this study conclude that West African migrants who have lived in South Africa over a particular period experience a lack of cohesion and integration into society.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalisation and increased interconnectedness, contemporary political agendas acknowledge the mobilising power of identity. Although globalisation is an example of overlapping complexities surrounding the identity of people, there are still rigid definitions kept in place to gatekeep access to resources or to define a migrant's access by how they are placed within national hierarchies of importance. High barriers to naturalisation exist when governments want to ensure that people remain long-term non-citizens and are removed when they want to increase the population numbers (Boccagni, Lafleur and Levitt 2016: 446). As a result, marginalised outsiders fall into different categories of the 'other', defined by state apparatus or international organisations. However, there is a theme of commonality among groups of people distinguished as being the 'other'. This maintenance of 'othering' is done by retaining old or pre-existing identities, which is integral to forming and maintaining social capital and networks in new environments. Migrants within diasporic formations are "more likely to develop complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and dual or multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of the resident nation-state" (Cohen 2004: 7).

With this in mind, migrants fall into different regional categories. A group of African nationals who are subjected to one of the specific forms of discrimination in South Africa are West Africans, which Petkou (2005) refers to as West-a-phobia. West-a-phobia is defined as the fear and dislike of West Africans, and the adverse reactions from South Africans. He explains that West African migrants can be easily identified and discriminated against through external clues, attributes, and characteristics.

West Africans in South Africa are a prominent example that fits into the description of diasporic formations and movements. Since the early 1990s, there has been an increasing movement of foreign migrants into South Africa. Increasing tension between African foreigners and South Africans has been noted through different attacks along a scattered timeline. It has also been widely acknowledged by different think tanks and international government organisations that xenophobia in South Africa is an issue of concern. Research conducted by the South African Migration Project (SAMP) and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) noted a considerable growth in hostility and negative sentiments expressed towards foreign migrants (Minaar and Hough 1996). SAMP noted in their focus groups on research conducted as recently as 2014

that "respondents across race and class lines tied migrants to all sorts of social problems, including unemployment, crime, housing shortages and poor service delivery". South African attitudes to migrants and refugees indicate a level of societal conditioning that perpetuates othering.

This article explores how 'othering' is used as a tool for differentiation in South African society. Additionally, by utilising Petkou (2005)'s definition of West-a-phobia, this term is reappropriated for further qualitative research into the experience of West African migrants living in the Western Cape and Gauteng.

Conceptualising 'othering' – philosophical approach to understanding identity

Sheth (2009) discussed how the state utilises the law to entrench covert forms of political and institutional racialisation that affect the population. Racialisation of a population, according to Sheth (2009: 51), is a method that codifies different aspects of a person's identity into a larger legislative framework. Instead of relating directly to racial identities, which may be the basis in some instances, racialisation in this context relates to "the perceived threat and vulnerability that characterise a certain subject-population" (Sheth, 2009). As a result, racialisation is embedded in the set of regulations designed to govern existing populations, which is a process divided into three features. The first feature is the description of the group. This does not relate to phenotypical descriptions but factors (nationality, ethnicity, religion, and economic identity) used as markers for racial designation to a particular group within a population. Sheth (2009) describes how this description of a specific group acts as a deliberate barrier between them and the dominant group that holds power. Being racialised as a separate entity from the dominant group becomes the basis for enacting de-alienation while maintaining the outer shell of a unified racial identity. There are discrepancies in choosing aspects of what constructs a group's identity, and the second feature explains how a group's behaviours are isolated from fitting a description that paints a specific group as a threat or unruly. Under such a scenario, a group's behaviour is no longer linked to its historical, political, or cultural context but is now intrinsically representative of populations (Sheth, 2009: 52). As a result, these features are used to justify how these groups violate "beliefs, principles, or trajectory of a prevailing regime". This process of thinking is reinforced through normative justifications for biases of assuming inferiority, which alters definitions and ascribes criminality and undesirable behaviours to a particular group. Sheth (2009: 52) states that these features of the racialisation of a population often emerge through political events and "are continuously embedded in legislation, political actions, and cultural discourses that are antagonistic" towards a group.

This leads to the third feature, whereby the continuous negative construction is entrenched into the national conscience, engendering potential consequences for a larger population. Racialising the population in this way makes it easier to codify racialisation into legislation without backlash for application inconsistencies. Creating legal loopholes means withholding the acknowledgement of the other group's right to legitimacy and equal participation within society. This is done through misrecognition through legal and political categories such as 'natural born citizen', 'naturalised citizen', 'legal resident', and 'illegal migrant'.

Although this seems authentic, it pre-determines the nature of membership according to the terms of entry into a space. Furthermore, this makes it easier for frameworks to dehumanise certain groups such as migrants as unworthy of protection under the law. The lack of protection reinforces dehumanisation, and the rigid categorisation feeds back into this cycle. Protection against the state becomes challenging when considering legal frameworks created in other contexts affect its ability to protect vulnerable populations. The limitations of Sheth's racialisation framework could be seen when her methodology is applied to a transnational context. The global political sphere encompasses multiple overlapping processes: state–state relations, globalisation processes, multinational institutions (both public and private), international organisations, and various treaties and procurement contracts (Keller 2014). Non-state entities may enable similar frameworks of othering, and legal frameworks fail to represent the contemporary importance of specific values and principles.

Socio-political implications of 'othering' in South Africa

Expanding on the limitations of Sheth's conceptualisation of othering, explaining the social formations that influence transnational identity is essential. As premised by Okeja (2019: 15), otherness relates to the construction of identity and how the relevance of these differences relates to judgement about who is fully human. The understanding of the individual can only be understood by the other. From a philosophical perspective, the processes of othering are often absolutist and create an antagonistic approach to reconciliatory practices. Examples such as xenophobia, terrorism, homophobia, and intolerance of varying kinds are often antagonistic forms of othering that fail to include reconciliatory practices (Okeja 2019: 20). Within Africa, multiple pre-colonial and post-colonial examples juxtapose the different roles of othering. Moreover, the question of who holds power to determine who is othered requires contextualisation; and relying on moralistic discourse to analyse outcomes fails to recognise structural complexities embedded in different levels of engagement.

The legacies of Apartheid policies continue to perpetuate economic deprivation and social inequalities. This skewed stratification remains a core reason for the lack of social cohesion in South Africa and the stagnation of democratic processes and values in informal non-governmental spaces among citizens (Matsinhe 2011). This situation gets even more complex, and potentially explosive, when foreigners are caught in the middle, as they can be easily targeted and blamed for this state of affairs. The inheritance of an Apartheid immigration policy meant that it was based on a classical colonial settlement policy, which focused on the socio-economic needs of a minority, while institutionally disenfranchising the majority of the country through various discriminatory practices and frameworks (Matsinhe 2011). The fear and mythology surrounding the threat of outsiders prompted the South African government to engineer their form of racial segregation systemically. The conceptualisation of race within Apartheid ensured clear demarcations for where different groups were meant to live and develop themselves in their own political, economic, cultural, religious, and educational spheres. The ideological justification of manufacturing differences and preventing natural cohesion among the population of South Africa also became grounds for justification to enact structural and explicit forms of violence over many years. As a result, exclusionary policies coupled with limited access to socio-economic empowerment for marginalised South Africans compounded the projection of negative attitudes on to outsiders, as foreigners are deemed a pervasive threat to socio-economic access and empowerment. However, this is a normative explanation for understanding deeply complex processes cultivated over hundreds of years under colonialism, Apartheid, and marginalisation.

Negative attitudes towards migrants juxtaposed with the country's perceived role as a continental hegemon create different expectations for integration and community. Hostility towards migrants is tied to the historical nature of the relationship between different groups who have lived in South Africa and the antagonistic trajectory embedded into the social, cultural, political, and economic fabric of the state. Consequently, limitations to structural changes had a spill-over effect on how migration laws are constructed with similar rhetoric and justification in post-Apartheid South Africa. The new government structure under the African National Congress (ANC) leadership aimed to rectify and abolish physical and legal boundaries of segregation. South Africans classified as outsiders during the Apartheid era were now able to integrate into previously exclusionary spaces and build toward a new nationalist project. The existence of terminologies and other modes of exclusion utilised before the advent of democracy meant that conceptualisations of otherness needed to be either abolished or reimagined under the new democratic order. However, immigration policies were tools used to construct national identities and controlling the movement of people and

territory is "integral to the exercises and maintenance of state power" (Peberdy, 2001: 16). The question of who belonged in the new South Africa became a codified process of sorting between who deserved to identify with the state and who did not. Immigrant selection may be tied overtly to criteria of productivity, class, wealth, and skills of potential immigrants. However, the selection process conveys powerful ideas about the self-image of the destination-state, race, national identity, and the stereotyping of non-nationals and their places of origin.

Contemporising 'West-a-phobia'

As mentioned previously, the term West-a-phobia coined by Petkou (2005) was built on qualitative research collected on the experiences of Cameroonians and Nigerians living in Hillbrow, South Africa. This research involved 112 respondents and used transnationalism to contextually analyse the different sites of social and cultural exchange such as internet cafés, phone booths, hairdressing and beauty salons, restaurants, and bars. The central findings of the research posit that West African migrants can survive in their host countries due to being transmigrants and small business dealers. By going to different areas of small businesses, Petkou was able to identify the different economic activities as a way of surviving, predominantly in the informal sector. The author directly ties the definition of West-a-phobia to the state of struggle West Africans face and the different economic strategies they engage in to generate some form of income. Furthermore, his dissertation framed a discourse around the systemic discrimination faced by West Africans due to preconceived notions as job stealers, criminals, drug dealers and carriers of disease, and how such perceptions have become underlying barriers of entry into the formal working sector.

While Petkou's research is in-depth and provides elaborate explanations of the experiences of Cameroonians and Nigerians in South Africa from an economic perspective, there is space for expansion when discussing transnationalism through the lens of identity. He recognised that "the nature and how West African identities are formed in South Africa is subject to further research" (Petkou 2005).

Previous studies conducted have explicitly looked at the experiences of West African migrants in South Africa; the works of Banda and Adetomokun (2015) examined the Yoruba identity in the diaspora by interviewing Nigerian students based in Cape Town; Oyebamiji and Asuelime (2018) interviewed Nigerian families based in South Africa and their role as economic migrants. Marschall (2017) also looked at this specific phenomenon, how African transnational migrants explore memories of home through tourist behaviour and activities.

Methodology

This research has been designed with a qualitative approach to explore critical concepts such as 'transnational migration' and 'identity'. Combined with the literature review of secondary sources, a conceptual and theoretical framework was established, which was utilised through a discourse analysis to unpack qualitative data. Data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and respondent sheets. To participate in this research, respondents had to fit the following criteria: of West African descent and have resided in South Africa for a minimum of three years. Additionally, those who met these criteria but were dual citizens of South Africa through naturalisation or descent, also qualified to participate. Supplementing in-depth questions with impromptu follow-up questions provided a deeper insight into the research objectives. Selective sampling was used for analysis. After the call for respondents, two nationalities of West Africa were represented: Nigeria and Ghana. Therefore, 'West African migrants' in this article refers to migrants from these two countries.

Cape Town and Stellenbosch were the primary location points for data collection. This affected the type of data collected due to environmental factors, as respondents from other provinces such as Gauteng were not accessible for face-to-face interviews. Focusing on economic migrants added another layer of stratification in selective data sampling – the reasoning behind the respondents' decision to move to South Africa was based on seeking socio-economic opportunities that they would not have had access to in their country of origin. As a result, this allows for choosing based on decisions laid before them and individual agency. Comparatively, those migrating due to political conflict, civil war, violence, or human rights violation face a different process that takes away aspects of their agency in a more overt form.

Furthermore, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks relied on collecting secondary sources and data, highlighting discrepancies in how abstract concepts are applied to contemporary discussions around the research topic. Due to the definition of the West African migrants, these findings focused on a specific experience that might differ from other migrants from other West African countries. It should be pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the sample size of people who were interviewed, as national restrictions on movement further limited travel and interaction.

Experiences of West African migrants in South Africa

Six respondents were involved in the data collection process: Emily, Mary, Adeola, Adwoa, Lionel and Donna. The names used are not the respondents' real names for ethical reasons. The respondents are predominantly women, as Lionel is the only male participant. Adeola, Adwoa and Lionel are based in Gauteng, and Emily, Mary, and Donna in the Western Cape. The age of respondents ranged from 21 to 28 years. All the respondents have studied and lived in South Africa for at least three years.

Adeola is a 21-year-old Nigerian-South African, currently pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Town. Her father is Nigerian, and her mother is South African. She moved to South Africa after her primary school years, because her parents had split up and her mother wanted to move back home. Upon her arrival in South Africa, she initially found it hard to integrate:

> I spoke with a heavy Lagos accent. I had a lot of Nigerian mannerisms and I was not used to being around white people. I think language was the biggest barrier, I would try and make friends, but black South Africans tend to speak in their home language in social settings, although my mom is South African. She is coloured so I didn't share that.

She further describes her initial experiences of racial integration being culturally strange, as she attended schools in central Pretoria. She mentions feeling like a 'token black person' while being friends with white South African kids. However, over time she gravitated towards being friends with non-South Africans as she "needed friends who just spoke English all the time and did not expect me to know their kwaito references or watch *Generations*". This comment speaks to the importance of language being a tool of inclusion that "race just does not make up for". She states that many of her friends currently are West African, and it is a community that she feels safe in, as her mother encouraged her to so that she would not lose touch with her roots. However, on the sixth question on whether she feels integrated in South Africa, she says:

> Not at all. I am South African, but I do not feel like it... sometimes I feel coloured like when I am around family, but to the world, I don't look it so I'm black, but my blackness clashes with this monolithic idea of blackness that is pervasive in this country. I guess a lot of it is by choice because to integrate, you must decide to integrate ... like if I decided to learn isiZulu it would be easier for me. But I am not sure that is fully true, as I have a lot of friends who have made that decision to integrate and it is like, your 'Nigerian-ness' is inescapable. It will never be enough.

Building on these sentiments, Adeola does not see herself permanently settling in South Africa because she wants to be "somewhere that I feel like I belong, somewhere people do not get burned bi-monthly for their immigration status". Relating to instances of facing discrimination for being West African, she recounts an experience with a Home Affairs official who insinuated that her passport was fake and that she should not lie about being South African. She has both Nigerian and South African citizenships. The ability for different identities to intersect has limitations, as she sees the power dynamics in recognising one nationality over another.

Mary is 28, from Osun State in Nigeria, and moved to South Africa in 2013 to pursue her master's degree at Stellenbosch University. She is currently working. Before moving to South Africa, she received support from a family friend based in Johannesburg, who supported her move to Stellenbosch. Initially, she was unable to communicate or speak to others, as she arrived before the start of the academic activities at her tertiary institution. Her first interactions started as students started coming back to campus and church activities. University provided a starting point for connection to other West Africans. Through the Association of Nigerian Students at Stellenbosch University (ANSSU), church, and classroom interactions, she met other Nigerians and created new connections. However, she notes that she had strong roots with home beforehand:

> I think I'm someone who wouldn't forget my roots, so whether I joined the Association or not, I hold Nigeria in high esteem, so that's something very dear to me. However, joining ANSSU reinforces that spirit in me, to be able to meet with other Nigerians, it is kind of mixed feelings, because you review things said about Nigerians overseas. You might get worried or frustrated, but it does not change who we are. I believe coming together makes us more united, but it doesn't take away from the negative experiences about who we are.

According to Falicov (2005), a cultural attachment can be mediated through family, friends, and the communities in which one involves oneself. The formation of student associations based on national identities helps cultivate a sense of belonging and community among those in a new and unfamiliar environment. In most cases, the celebration of independence days, social outings, and sports matches are some activities that create linkages and sustain familiarity to home. It is also a space in which home languages are spoken, as there is a high chance that other members of the society speak the same language. The linguistic benefits and reproduction of cultural modes of belonging are essential aspects of identity operationalising in new contexts.

Moreover, those who would be considered outsiders (in Mary's case, South Africans, or non-Nigerians) may also be interested in being part of the association. This is a form of soft power, whereby stereotypes or prejudices about the group may be disproven once they form part of the association or participate in their activities. However, the other side of the argument is one's ethnic identity informs assumptions about one's culture.

Mary delves into the nuances of her integration experiences by pointing out that South Africans ask if she is Nigerian and which ethnic grouping she is part of. She observes that these questions serve to classify and pre-determine the type of person you are:

> When they are asking you which tribe you are from they are bringing in issues of ... we are just trying to check that you are not a fraudster, you are not into this, are you sure you do not like money, oh you guys are the ones that like money, you're the ones who like books, then they begin to give classes and give strata for each tribe, and ... we know this for ourselves and in Nigeria, but to see people from other countries start to class us according to this, as they pick it up, it's really I don't know...

Perceptions of cultural and ethnic identity are intertwined when the latter can inform the former. The idea put forward by Keller (2014) of socio-cultural identity being more fluid than political and economic identities is challenged, as determining characteristic behaviour based on ethnicity is a limitation based on othering. The ability of South Africans to notice the different traits among Nigerian ethnic groupings, as pointed out by Mary, maybe are due to the commonality in Africa's political systems being developed according to Mamdani's definition of national and subnational citizenship. South Africa is not a stranger to treating its citizens as outsiders, as ethnic groupings are markers of difference among the population. The creation of Apartheid's homelands was modelled on national territories but required overarching simplifications of ethnicity and race to subjugate specific populations of South Africans to designated areas (Klotz 2016). As a result, complicated questions surrounding citizenship post-1994 arose, as the administrative existence of ethnic groupings carried over into a new non-racialised South Africa. Distinguishing between ethnic groupings within a foreigner's nationality is used to compartmentalise normative understandings of foreigners. Furthermore, it is a subconscious justification for making over-generalised positive or negative assumptions about individuals. This reinforces similar exclusionary practices from national policies on an individual level.

When asked whether she would settle permanently in South Africa, Mary says that change is inevitable and constant. However, there is no place like home at

the end of the day, but it seems like she would stay if she were occupied and had legitimate reasons to remain and work in the country. Mary points out that perceptions indirectly have an impact on how people see an individual's identity, which can bring limitations. Concerning travel, she notes that although her Nigerian passport affects her mobility, a defining characteristic of Nigerian migrants is that movement plays a part in their identity.

Adwoa, 22, is a recent UCT Management Studies graduate and is Ghanaian. She moved to South Africa in the 1990s, when her father came to Cape Town to pursue higher education. Although born in Ghana, she grew up in South Africa. She "didn't really find it difficult integrating to South Africa", as she had done all her schooling in South Africa. Identifying herself as dark-skinned and tall, she noted that she did not see many people who looked like her and was one of the only foreigners in her classroom and schooling environment. In response to the third question asking about connections to other West African families in South Africa, she said:

> Many families from Ghana came to South Africa around the same time my parents did. Many of them went to university together back in Ghana. All the children grew up together, so it was always nice to have people to relate to and understand your life. There is always a sense of community.

A decisive pull factor for other West Africans to come to South Africa is the existing population of West Africans in the country. According to Petkou (2005), his research findings indicated that 61% of Cameroonians and 95% of Nigerians had friends or/and relatives in South Africa before arriving (Petkou 2005: 111). Building on this, Adwoa said that for the most part, she feels integrated into South Africa, despite people being able to tell that she is not from here and asking her where she is from. Additionally, she notes that she cannot speak any official language fluently and sometimes feels left out. Language is an essential tool for integration, as it forms part of creating a shared identity (Vertovec 2001). The ability to speak a local language opens a different world of understanding that can create more favourable opportunities for integration. An example of this is Germany, where all refugees are required to take a compulsory integration course. They are taught not only German, but also aspects of German culture, including an overview of German geography, politics, and history (Federal Office for Immigrants and Refugees [BAMF], 2016).

Despite having lived in South Africa for nearly all of her life, Adwoa does not see herself settling in South Africa permanently. This is due to "the economy, corruption and crime" being the main factors. Her parents are looking to move back to Ghana soon, as they see South Africa is going down, in contrast

to their positive perception of South Africa when they initially arrived. She has both Ghanaian and South African citizenships and points out that she makes it known to people when initially meeting them. From a cultural perspective, "both countries have had a huge impact on my life and have made me who I am today".

Lionel, 22, is from Ghana and moved to South Africa to pursue an education. When faced with the first question of the initial experiences of integration in South Africa, he says:

> There is no such thing as integration when you are constantly alienated for having darker skin, 'funny' names, different accents, and 'peculiar' facial and body features.

Questioning the nature of integration from his personal experience, he expands by saying that cultivating a shared sense of belonging in this space is not currently realistic. However, South Africa presents better opportunities than back home. He mentions a specific instance where he was arrested and falsely charged by a police officer after not responding in isiZulu, "a language I had no clue about even when it was spoken to me". The police officer in Lionel's recollection "did not care whether I understood or not and said demeaning things about foreigners".

The interaction between law enforcement and foreigners in South Africa is a topic that is highly reported in media and academia. Incidents of xenophobia are spread out over a continuous timeline, whereby predominately African migrants living in urban spaces in South Africa face overt forms of discrimination. This can vary from extreme forms of physical violence, with deliberate targeting resulting in property damage, to having tumultuous experiences at Home Affairs. Amnesty International (2019) reported on the systemic xenophobic violence still evident in South Africa:

> Businesses belonging to Nigerians and other foreign nationals were targeted in Johannesburg and Pretoria, with stock and possessions worth millions burnt to ashes. The violence escalated dramatically during the first week of September following confrontations between locals and foreigners, marked by horrific attacks and killings. The government has largely failed to address past violent xenophobic outbreaks across the country, instead often continuing to scapegoat foreign nationals by claiming they are responsible for high levels of crime, putting a strain on government services and operating illegal businesses.

On the final question about the impact of being South African on his identity, Lionel notes that more doors would open were he to obtain South African citizenship but that he would still "be treated like every other foreigner".

Donna, 23, is a Nigerian who grew up in South Africa for most of her life. She attended school in Johannesburg and completed her undergraduate and honours degrees, and is currently pursuing her master's at UCT. Her parents currently live in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, and moved to South Africa about 25 years ago to find better economic opportunities. However, she was born in Swaziland since her parents moved through Southern Africa before arriving in South Africa. This was because her father's most accessible point of entry to South Africa was through Harare, and then via Swaziland. She has a Nigerian passport, a Swati birth certificate and has South African permanent residence. In critiquing the South African citizenship application process, she says that South African permanent residence is only valid for identification within the country. The default nationality is Nigerian when outside South Africa, yet South Africa is the country she has lived in the longest and has a deeper connection to. In making these points, she states that "…the process of naturalisation is as if you are in a state of being unnatural… where you now revoke your citizenship from your country of origin…".

She points out nuances in her experiences as a humanities graduate and how her identity affects decisions surrounding her studies and prospects:

> If you are not a doctor or an engineer, you need to go all the way to PhD so that they can consider you critical to staying in the country and be able to get a job … To get your permanent residence, you must be on a critical skills visa. If I did not get my permanent residence before entering university, I do not know how my parents would have been able to pay international fees for my tuition. It's almost as if they (South African Home Affairs) use anything they can think of to prevent anyone from staying here.

Prioritising the retention of international students with specific skills is not a new strategy. From a state perspective, international students studying in South Africa and leaving after that are seen as skills investment loss. Furthermore, international students with critical skills are a way to close gaps in the domestic labour market. However, skills deemed favourable are those from studies geared towards occupations needed by the South African economy. These are Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related fields, which are seen as a direct form of transferable skills, more so than other fields. In the 2017 White Paper on International Migration in South Africa (Department of Home Affairs, 2017), the ability for migrants to remain in the country relies less on constitutional rights, but on an exclusionary point-based framework under the guise of being a meritocracy:

> In South Africa, there is a misconception that immigrants have a constitutional right to progress towards permanent residency or citizenship status (naturalisation). A sovereign state has the prerogative to determine who enters its territory, control migration patterns relating to the country and enact laws to regulate such migration. States also have the right to protect themselves from risks, such as the entry and stay of fugitives from justice linked to organised crime.

Migrants are not only viewed as 'less desirable' in enacting sovereignty but their presence is seen as inherently risky by how they navigate spaces and opportunities within the country. Little is done to facilitate a broader process of transnationalism, and the state selectively appropriates aspects of globalisation under the guise of national development. The oversimplification of the migration policy to create narratives of 'good' versus 'bad' migrants fails to highlight the nuances in determining the type of citizens South Africa wants.

Concerning reflections on integration and community, Donna here expounds on overlapping identities used for designation to particular groups, where acknowledging privilege and marginalisation can overlap:

> I've grown up here my entire life, this is my home, everything that I know … like you realise you don't mean anything to them, and it does not make sense. My parents literally gave me access to certain privileges, so I do not experience xenophobia in ways that other people have, and I have been dealing with a lot of guilt around that. If I didn't go to the public school I went to, if I didn't live in the area in Cape Town that I currently do, I didn't speak a certain way, if I weren't at UCT, I can see how I would be treated like other migrants facing ongoing violence. This is not your home. For a long time, I felt like I did belong, but over time and growing older I'm realising specific experiences are making me come to terms with realities … this othering takes place socially that you can't hide from …and it's strange.

Emily, 22, is an honours graduate at UCT, studying Gender and Transformation. She was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and moved to South Africa when she was seven years old. South Africa has been her home for 15 years, and she first moved to Johannesburg where a South African man provided her family with a place to stay and a school to go to (the school was part of a church). Throughout her primary and high school days, integration through assimilation into a place that did not want her affected her. She grew up detached to her cultural identity as a Nigerian, it was only as she got older that she started to lean more into it:

> I've grown in a sense of who I am as a Nigerian person. I remember coming to university – like, I spent my whole high school not doing anything Nigerian, not listening to Nigerian music, it was just a foreign place to me. In fact, I remember being young trying to assimilate – you know how in Nigeria we wear Ankara dresses? So, we brought all that stuff to South Africa and I came here, and I just did not want to wear it because I knew I would be pointed out as being foreign. I knew part of the reason I was kind of looked at funny was because of the fact that I was from another African country.

She goes on to talk about her experiences as a foreign black woman living in South Africa:

> I don't only feel unsafe because I'm an immigrant, I also feel unsafe because I'm Black and I'm a woman. Like today I was just thinking to myself, like, I have become so paranoid about my safety, it is crazy. I feel so so so unsafe. Like with what happened with the girl who's missing right now, and I read through the tweets about her name and I remembered a story of another girl, her name was Karabo, who also went missing last year and she hasn't been found. And I have noticed it has become ... I am picking up on the fact that a lot of young Black women are going missing and nothing is happening. I went to bed last night feeling so unsafe, feeling so down, thinking I need to leave this place because this place – it's damaged me because I've become so paranoid about my safety and security.

The experience of being black and a woman in South Africa raises the issue that foreign black women sit at the nexus of two critical issues. The link between gender and the experience of xenophobia is evident, where Emily's safety could be targeted for either her gender or nationality or both. Women remain vulnerable in South African society due to the lack of infrastructural response to gender-based violence. Emily's concluding remarks during the interview shows her contemplating whether she would ever return to Nigeria. She talks about giving back to the country through women empowerment and providing safe spaces for young women, acknowledging that an idealistic part of her wants to complete the Nigerian Youth Service Corps (NYSC).[1] However, she is still not sure if this is what she wants once she finishes her studies in South Africa.

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1   The NYSC is a programme set up by the Nigerian government that requires recent graduates under thirty to be trained for non-combative service. Once they complete their training, they are deployed to one of the thirty-six states to utilise their training and education to serve the country through civic duties. Source available: https://www.nysc.gov.ng/

The interviews reveal the different experiences of the respondents. West African child migrants experience transnationalism differently from those arriving in South Africa later in life. King and Christou (2010) talk about second-generation returnees having an idealised view of their homeland, where visits back to their country of origin reinforced a heightened sense of their identity formed in the country they grew acclimatised to. Homeland politics have become a point of contention for migrants who are unsure of their intentions to return. Despite these contradictory feelings, respondents indicated through their anecdotal examples that there was a solid connection to their country of origin. This was expressed through wearing West African clothing, travelling back to visit family, communal activities among fellow West Africans within their networks, and online community engagement. The respondents indicated a need to leave South Africa, but not necessarily to return to their home country. The idea of belonging to a country that is foreign to them is not necessarily predicated on a solid allegiance to the political, economic and cultural identity of South Africa in its entirety. Instead, it is about taking different aspects that they relate to or strongly identify with and having the ability to incorporate it into their own conceptualisations of themselves and who they are. By doing so, this gives them leverage to navigate the broader scope of opportunities available to them by accepting different markers of identity according to their own benefit through a transnationalism perspective.

Analysis

Forming an identity against a backdrop of transnationalism while experiencing instances of West-a-phobia can be problematic. Different layers of stratification expand citizenship beyond state-sanctioned nationality, West-a-phobia beyond face value discrimination, and transnationalism beyond physical movement. This is further complicated by the notion that identities are not monolithic, and the respondents use heterogenic ways to identify with being West African to navigate contextual situations. Countries like South Africa, which seemingly represent the better of the Global South in terms of development and opportunities in Africa, fail to capitalise on their status for collaborative national integration efforts. Consolidating migration policies would require a systematic rethinking of attitudes towards foreigners that removes covert forms of stigmatisation and criminalisation. Respondent Lionel's experience with SAPS reflects this more significant issue whereby othering is legitimised through official state business. Transnationalism threatens the idea that identity can solely be based on nationality. A symbiotic relationship between the different channels involved can facilitate the more effortless movement of people and create a holistic approach.

Adeola talks about being South African, and how being of West African descent doesn't let her feel fully integrated:

> I don't think I'll ever be integrated and for me, it's difficult because one part of your identity is silenced in public discourse and the other part is always talked about negatively. Sometimes I wonder what integration looks like, because I can clearly point to my roots … my mother's township, my grandfather's experiences of forced removals, my great grandmother's experiences of migrant labour. All of that is where I come from but it's not enough only because my father is Nigerian and my name is Nigerian, so there's no way to look around it.

Adeola's experience of feeling like a foreigner in her home country ties in with the work of scholars Chandia and Hart (2016). Their article followed Chandia's journey of being a South African citizen with Ugandan origins. Despite being born in South Africa and growing up in the Transkei, her identity was devalued due to her being visibly identifiable as an African foreigner. Integrating was not easy, as she had fears of being denied Constitutional rights as a citizen. However, integration as a concept can be challenged, as its meaning in traditional and contemporary understandings of transnational migration are two different things. The former denotes a linear process of arriving and settling permanently. The latter, however, may have less to do with the physical process of integrating, and more about belonging to a political community that represents your interests.

Moreover, the respondents' answers show that their idea of being integrated in South Africa as the ability to navigate different social fields effectively. Although one has the tools to navigate different social fields, there are still barriers to claiming space due to othering behavioural patterns exhibited by South Africans. Donna discussed her schooling experience in South Africa, and the challenges she faced attempting to assimilate at a young age.

> In school, I felt like I always had to defend myself and my brother because we were being reprimanded for having an attitude. When a lot of it related to how we stood out from everyone else. We were being bullied in school, being made fun of … we went to school at a time when Africa Magic [a television channel with Nigerian movies] was popular. When people were watching *Aki and Pawpaw*, and South Africans were really into it, their notions of Nigeria were highly influenced by what they would see through these media representations. We would go to school and kids would comment and say, "Oh, we watched this movie, and we know what you guys eat in your house." We [my brother and I] were very big-boned. The physicality was different, South African

> kids were small and grew differently. South Africans would have the stature of a 6-year-old but are nine years old. When you stand next to them, you will have a bigger frame than most people...in Grade 5 that was when I noticed my growth spurt and became tall. I will never forget I got stretch marks on my knees and I was taller than everyone...I was taller than most guys and my friends.

Donna's experience as being visibly identifiable as an outsider matches Adeola's, in how their names and physicality made them stand out. Sheth's conceptualisation of othering touches on this through the 'racialisation' of a population. This theorisation emerges when Donna touches on how media representation can create a particular caricature that ascribes certain behaviours seen on television shows to an entire group. By using broad characteristics to define a group, certain features that were selected for entertainment value when showcasing Nigerians in media end up excluding historical context. What is shown is then used to enact what Sheth calls de-alienation, creating fallible discrepancies when categorising different groups of people.

Mary, having grown up in Nigeria and having lived there much longer than the other respondents, provides her perspective on understanding racialisation in the South African context:

> So, what I think about the issue of race is that it does not only affect South Africans, and they've sort of extended it to those of us who are foreigners because we didn't have that kind of conception. So, when we arrive, they say that because you are black you cannot go to these areas, you cannot do this, even though we aren't in Apartheid, it's there and it stays with you... yeah, I don't know if it does a lot of good or if there's any aim or purpose but it just... I think it can kill the spirit of a person who is not confident or having an identity crisis... if you have got an inferiority complex, it might be challenging to stand up for yourself. For example, if you are a student you might say this particular thing is for those people, then I cannot get it. It takes a lot of confidence and courage for people who are said to be black to be able to go for things that other races go for. Because if you use that reasoning that because you are black you cannot go for it, you will not be able to compete and have that ambitious spirit that you generally find in most West African citizens. It might be affected.

Through assimilating into South African society over time, Mary understands how earlier barriers of entry for South Africans still play a role for the previously disadvantaged and how that framework is also applied to non-South Africans. Institutional dimensions affect individual choices to belong to a specific group

and supply a larger backdrop to discovering how othering is a layered progression influenced by the context in which it takes place. The fourth proposition of transnationalism in South Africa reiterates that migration is a process that changes over time (Crush and MacDonald 2000). As migration shifts, so does the state apparatus, whether it is reactionary or fluid to adapt to changing needs and issues.

Emily ponders on whether being in another country would have affected how she integrated into a host country and the ability to find a community:

> You know, I've asked myself, like, why didn't my dad move to London? Because if he moved to England, I would now have my blue passport or whatever colour it is [laughs]. I just connect with the place, and it's not that there's no racism there, it's not that there's no xenophobia there – there is. I'm aware of it. But I just feel like the community there is just different. As a Nigerian, I would never feel isolated or out of place, you know? So, on Twitter, I follow a lot of Nigerian Americans, Nigerian British, and I follow a lot of Nigerians too (on social media), so I get Nigerian news first. And sometimes I feel so bad for the non-Nigerian people that follow me because that's just what I'm constantly retweeting on Twitter.

Emily creating her own transnational space on the internet is not a unique phenomenon, as studies have shown how the internet is a tool for advancing migrant networks and activities driven by globalisation. Online activities can be spheres of interaction and can be a mode for expressing one's identity by bridging national and cultural borders (Kissau and Hunger 2010). The construction of a shared space helps transnational migrants discover diasporic cultures that stay connected to their country of origin through online chat groups, blogs, and social media. Through online communities, people like Emily are not only able to gain a sense of belonging, but also the validity of their identity through visibility in online public spaces, and not see structures such as the state as the only source of legitimation. This is a form of transnationalism, as technologies of transnational connection become a part of border-crossing consciousness that constructs a social world without the limitations of distance or proximity (Robertson 2013: 139).

Despite widespread antagonistic views of African migrants, respondents perceived South Africa as a favourable place in Africa in which to live. Emily noted that the comparatively better conditions in South Africa are the underlying reason for staying, despite still wanting to go back home:

> I want to go back [to Nigeria]. I just want to see my grandmother because I know she's old, and she's probably going to pass on very soon, so I just want to… But then at the same time, I want to go and make sure she is comfortable, but I am not at that position yet because I am just a student. So, I just hope she is alive until I am something. I do not even mean something big and great; I just want her to be alive when I become something. Because of the way she is living right now is just not ideal. And then also her living in a country where there's not good access to healthcare, and her being by herself – because my mother has siblings that just do not care that their mother is…you know? So, whenever I think about her, I am just worried about her safety, health. So, my mum is considering bringing her here and I think it would even be better, honestly.

Pondering on the possibility of whether Nigeria would be a safe space for Emily's family in the long run becomes an influencing factor in determining whether to remain in South Africa. Additionally, the aspiration of an improved quality of life underpins the reasons for migrants to move around – the welfare of their family being an exceptionally motivating factor. Falicov (2007) posits that there are emotional costs of transnationalism to consider, where the stress of separation between relatives across different countries takes a toll on communal structures. The transformation of the family structure often means that remittances and transferring resources are inadequate in giving needed support. As a result, family reunification is a solution to giving structural capital. In Emily's case, this means giving her grandmother access to consistent long-term healthcare instead of occasional medicinal resources. However, she mentions that being a student limits giving her family the support she would prefer. Robertson (2013) states that due to an education-migration nexus, there are more complexities within the experience of those studying while being a foreigner. There are different types of transnational migrants, where some are more flexible in their ability to move and are able to give more resources. Student migrants face limitations in their ability to give back, however, as mentioned before, Emily is both South African and Nigerian through naturalisation and birth, respectively. Despite her dual citizenship, Emily's negative experience of being a transnational migrant is apparent in the limited flexibility of integrating into more than one space.

Mary pointed out the distinctive feelings of being Nigerian in South Africa and how negative feelings about Nigerians affected her mobility. According to Mary, these feelings and associated attitudes towards Nigeria have indirect impacts on how people see and treat individual Nigerians living in South Africa:

> There is scrutiny when Nigerians travel; to make sure that you're not bringing in trouble, that everything is safe and that the coast is clear. When you as a person, that your hands are clean, you're going to study or for a conference, and you also have to pass through; that's scrutiny because you're Nigerian, and it's something to be aware of.

The state promotes this attitude by showing a suspicious, protectionist nature through the various officials who work for government service branches. This includes institutions such as Home Affairs and the South African Police Service (SAPS), and they cannot account for why there is no clear direction on state-led integration policies. South Africa's White Paper on International Migration notes that "South Africa has not adopted a clear and coherent integration policy for integrating foreign nationals into the country's value system and population" (Department of Home Affairs, 2017). Consequently, there is a lack of shared vision about the value of international migration, and South Africa still being "a nation information" (Department of Home Affairs, 2017). However, they make a covert correlation between migrants entering the country and the potential for unmitigated risks when discussing the creation of integration policies. Underlying biases and assumptions about foreigners showcase the limitations of the state in taking responsibility to establish inclusive institutional mechanisms. Disguising West-a-phobia under problem statements of migrants posing security and economic risks shows how the state prioritises an exclusionary form of nationalism that does not reimagine an inclusive South African state. With multiple realities existing for transnational migrants who belong to more than one country, there are inconsistencies in how certain groups of the population are treated in national policy. As a result, West African migrants who are in South Africa due to voluntary migration have limited opportunities and reasons to stay and work or live in the country.

Conclusion

Most of the respondents indicated that they are highly aware of societal issues in South Africa, due to their individual experiences of West-a-phobia and through awareness of underlying complex problems within the country. Apartheid and colonisation affected the socialisation and integration of people, particularly in how groups of people viewed each other. Muposta and Kruetzfeldt (2016) discuss the techniques of difference used by the state. This creates overt and covert forms of othering through which foreigners feel excluded from being able to contribute to the national identity. Furthermore, it has an impact on the identity from their country of origin; the need to assimilate takes on a higher priority to survive and navigate different contexts. Then an internal familial displacement process occurs

for migrants, while simultaneously taking on challenges by choosing to work and study in South Africa. This becomes more complex for the West African migrants who have a South African hereriod. Despite the legal processes of acquiring citizenship, permanent residence, or visas as a point of entry into South Africa, the negative consequences of othering and systemic discrimination towards African foreigners are enabled through the same system.

Overall, their ability to identify with South Africa remains a negative experience due to several barriers to integration. Community-based networks were reliant mainly on their circle of friends, or their immediate family (for those raised in South Africa). For those who arrived later in South Africa, formed communities were deliberate through groups such as church and university. Antagonistic portrayals of their West African origins hindered the ability to integrate into the nation-state on a micro and macro level. The ability to leverage their understanding of being transnational migrants influences how they interact with and navigate specific spaces positively or negatively. Transnational spaces are enmeshed with national ones, as there is an ability to transform spaces designed for other purposes (Crush and MacDonald 2000). Alternatively, new transnational spaces are created with technological advancements that make it easier to connect with others. However, all respondents indicated that they are interested in leaving South Africa for different reasons. The primary reason is to seek greener pastures and the chance to escape the limitations placed on them through being viewed negatively. This corroborates with South African migration policy frameworks, that create legal barriers for foreigners to gain long-term opportunities of staying by gaining employment, housing, and IDs, for example. Additionally, prior research on the experience of West African migrants living in South Africa has similar anecdotal evidence given by the respondents. As a result, new strategies for adaptation are paramount for West African migrants, as immigration and settlement on a larger scale are the precedents for defining transnationalism in the 21st century.

From a national perspective, there are areas for improvement in South African society and government in ensuring the accommodating and acceptance of migrants living in the country. Policy recommendations for the government include acknowledging the constructive contributions that migrants bring to the country, and to focus less on a national security approach that covertly dehumanises and mythologises African foreigners. Probing deeper into this would require the state and South African citizens alike to look deeper into how the legacies of colonialism and Apartheid affect their inability to relate to others from an institutional to a personal level. Beyond a change in attitude, policy and legislative changes should include supporting the informal economy and creating more accessible access to legal documentation to facilitate smoother migration processes are key recommendations that can ensure socio-economic cohesion.

This research highlights that there is scope for a wide range of further studies on the current processes of othering and xenophobia in different contexts. Furthermore, the experiences of transnational migrants in Africa have multiple nuances in their representation. By researching a particular demographic through the lens of 'othering', this article contributes to furthering the understanding of the experience of migrants in the Global South beyond one-dimensional narratives.

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