[Re]-presenting knowledge: The coverage of xenophobia research in selected South African newspapers, 2008 -2013

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Abstract
Recurring xenophobic attacks on perceived foreign immigrants stand out as one of the major setbacks on South Africa's envisaged 'rainbow' nation discourse. These attacks remain a topical issue in, academic, media, social, economic and political circles. While a significant body of literature explores the coverage of migration and xenophobia issues in the South African mainstream press, studies examining media coverage of xenophobia research from research institutions are scarce. This study explores the [re]-presentation of xenophobia research findings in two popular South African newspapers: the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan* from 2008 to 2013. The study utilizes a qualitative research approach. Findings show that the two analyzed newspapers uncritically picked up stories and purveyed them without a strong base facilitated by empirical research. In essence, empirical research findings were selectively utilized to 'authenticate' or legitimize convenient ideological positions. Finally, a clear tension between discourses of 'empirical knowledge' and 'popular perceptions'; was evident in analyzed stories.

Key Words: Immigrants, *Mail & Guardian*, [Re]-presentation, Research findings, *Sowetan*, Xenophobia

Introduction

Archbishop Desmond Tutu regards South Africa as a 'rainbow' nation, a term he coined in 1994, due to a number of different races residing in the country. Almost twenty-two years after independence, South Africa finds itself being home to the second highest number of migrants in Africa (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2013). These are mostly refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants from neighboring African countries. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), an estimated 3.3% of the country's population was born out of the country. Results from the analysis of 2011 South Africa Census data revealed that there were 2 173 409 international migrants (4.2% of the 2011 total population) (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The rural to urban migrant labour system, converging towards mines and peri-urban informal settlements in the country's metropoles, has also created great spatial mobility (Vearey, Nunez & Palmary, 2009). Consequently, internal migration is ar more significant than international migration at 7% of the total population (Polzer, 2010; Crush, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2011).

However, it is not surprising that the numbers of international migrants in the country are constantly inflated and misrepresented by politicians and policy makers (for e.g., see Vanyoro, 2015; Palmary & de Gruchy, 2016 for a dedicated account on the politics of migration data in the country). Forging a common South African national identity remains elusive, as the country can be best understood as a developing idea (Alegi, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011). Partly because of the perception and alarmist discourse that migrants are 'swarming' the country (see Neocosmos, 2008; Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) & Musina Legal Office, 2010) - what Neocosmos (2008) calls a politics of fear - of late, xenophobic attacks continue to recur as 'indigenous' South Africans target perceived 'foreigners' whom they blame for their social and economic problems.

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These xenophobic episodes hardly evade the watchful eyes of the media at any given moment. Indeed, both the mass media and the new media in South Africa and across the globe have been awash with stories concerning the recurring xenophobic attacks in the 'rainbow' nation. Academics from political science, sociology, cultural studies as well as media studies have also engaged with the discourse of xenophobia from different angles. Most of these academics have focused on the manner in which the media portray xenophobia, migrants and migrant related issues (for e.g., see Danso & McDonald, 2001; Smith, 2010). But, from a Media Studies viewpoint, there is one issue that is conspicuously absent: the coverage of xenophobia empirical research findings from research institutions such as the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and others in the mainstream media.

We argue that the coverage of these findings in the popular press is political; therefore, it requires rigorous investigation and detailed analysis. This issue, which epitomizes a representation of a re-presentation (see Hall, 1997), has received very little amount of attention in the academic world of Media Studies due to its 'unconventional' standing. While an array of global literature exists on the role of the media in communicating research, particularly in the public health and development sector, most of this work is biased towards research translation and development communication (See Court & Young, 2003; Fisher & Vogel, 2008; McPhail, 2009; Oronje, Undie, Zulu & Crichton, 2011; Vanyoro, 2015). As such, it also does not adequately tease out the interaction between research findings and popular discourse in the mainstream media. One notable contribution however is by Goslin (1974) who highlights different types of research information that may be communicated by the media. Beyond this work, little more exists, especially in the global south, more specifically in South Africa.

This lacuna forms a central part of the impetus for writing this paper. In essence, what we interrogate here are the power contestations that exist in the coverage of marginalized issues and groups when empirical knowledge produced by some epistemic communities challenge popular press discourse, attitudes and powerful positions. Because re-presentation is a fluid process (Hall, 1997), we are interested in exploring the coverage of xenophobia research findings in two popular South African newspapers, the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan* from 2008 to 2013. This endeavor allows us to critically tease out the relationship between 'empirical knowledge' and 'anti-immigrant' sentiments, as polarized discourses, in these media texts.

Recurring xenophobia: A contested South African reality

In South Africa the apartheid state implemented racist pass laws in order to control permanent urban settlement and try to ensure that the black African population remained in their 'homelands' (Bakewell, 2008; Castles, 2010). After years of protracted violence, owing to (among others) international pressure, on 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first, non-racial, democratic elections. The African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela won 252 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly, falling only two seats short of the two-thirds majority needed to effect unilateral constitutional change. Ultimately, on May 9 1994, the National Assembly unanimously elected Nelson Mandela as president, with Thabo Mbeki and F.W. de Klerk as the country's deputy presidents.

This development was earmarked to be the beginning of a new epoch governed by an audacious principal in the constitution which states that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it'. That the country's black majority thought that their economic misfortunes would be reshaped as a result is also unquestionable. But today South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The country is marked by an extended history of regular experiences of violent conflicts such as violent crime, violent service delivery protests, communal violence, vigilantism within its townships and informal settlements (Misago, 2016). Within this context, the foreigner has become a political scapegoat. Xenophobia and intolerance have indeed become a recurrent reality in South African politics (Thakur, 2010).

Significant studies have therefore extensively explored xenophobia and its recurrence in South Africa at different epochs in

an attempt to explain its morphology (for e.g., see Harris, 2001; Black, Crush & Peberdy, 2006; Crush, 2008; Neocosmos, 2008; Crush & Frayne, 2010; Landau, 2011; Misago, 2011; Misago, 2016). The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) Declaration (as cited in Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013, p. 194) defines xenophobia as 'attitudes, prejudices and behavior that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity'. Meanwhile, Neocosmos (2008, p. 587) argues that:

> Xenophobia must be understood as a political discourse […] the result of political ideologies and consciousnesses – in brief, political subjectivities – which have been allowed to arise in post-apartheid South Africa, as a result of a politics of fear prevalent in both state and society'.

Xenophobia in South Africa takes multiple forms; it can either be violent or institutional. We will briefly touch on the two forms of xenophobia we have put forward in an attempt to foreground our study's point of departure. First, institutional xenophobia is seen in the unapologetically xenophobic remarks by top ranking officials since 1994 including ex-Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba, Minister of Police Fikile Mbalula, and most recently his deputy Bongani Mkongi to name but a few. As Harris (2002) puts it, 'the shift in political power has brought about a range of new discriminatory practices and victims and the 'foreigner' is one such victim' (p. 169). Institutional xenophobia manifests itself in South African practices through the exclusion and discrimination of foreigners in various institutions like banks, hospitals, the Department of Home Affairs, police, and social service providers (Landau, 2010). This has persuaded critics to assert that xenophobia has thus become institutionalized in practices of 'street-level bureaucrats' like immigration officers, health care providers, police officers and policy makers since 1994 because of the perceived 'threat' foreigners pose. Neocosmos (2008) argues that, although

state institutions have never condoned violence against migrants and have regularly condemned it, 'they have provided an environment wherein such xenophobic violence has effectively been legitimized by the state' (p. 589). This observation resonates well with Adjai and Lazaridis' (2013) argument that, under xenophobia, institutions have been used to exclude the 'other' through practice and not by design.

Second, foreign migrants are also constant targets and victims of violent xenophobic attacks. This is not a new phenomenon. 'Foreign nationals have been attacked repeatedly in South Africa since 1994' (Misago, 2011, p. 96; Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013, p. 195-196; Misago, 2016). Crush (2008) has also argued that xenophobia has been a long-standing feature of post-apartheid South African society. Indeed, many grueling accounts of violence against foreign migrants have been recorded between 1998 and 2008 (Crush & Frayne, 2010). However, one of the most notorious occurrences of xenophobic violence in the world was the May 2008 violence. Most scholars agree that 62 people lost their lives, a third of whom were local inhabitants, whereas at least 670 were wounded; dozens raped and more than 100 000 displaced (Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA), 2008; Polzer, Igglesden & Monson, 2009; Landau, 2011). Misago (2016) argues that young people formed the vast majority of the perpetrators of the 2008 violence. But ongoing studies are showing that it is not angry, poor, young uneducated men who are most likely to perpetrate the violence by looting shops during protests for example. Ongoing research by Social Surveys Africa has begun to show that there is no significant correlation with age, household-income level, education and poverty and the propensity or disposition to loot from foreigners.

Several scholars have tried to explain the causes of xenophobic violence differently. While it is not the intention of this paper to settle those debates, it will briefly identify a few arguments and concepts that are key to the following discussion and analysis. Misago (2016) has argued that the May 2008 violence cannot be understood nor investigated in isolation from the general history of violence in informal settlements and townships. Structural violence by the state through repression and resource, opportunity inequalities during

apartheid created a climate where housing, education, jobs, wages and service delivery are today politicized (Hamber, 1999 as cited in Misago, 2016). Indeed, as Misago (2016) notes, the violence against foreign nationals speaks in part to the history of tensions between local urban residents and internal migrants in townships. In light of this, others have thus proposed that xenophobia can be explained by relative deprivation. Lerner, Roberts and Matlala (2009, p. 16) for example submit that, 'In South Africa, high expectations for employment, housing and other social provisions, coupled with the realization that delivery of these is not immediate, are seen to result in frustration targeted at foreigners.' In other words, xenophobia manifests itself as a spillover of citizen opposition to migration and a by-product of political scapegoating which blames migrants for the country's unemployment woes. Foreigners are seen as taking jobs away from locals and, as we will show, there is a perception among locals that they fare better economically as a result.

However, conditions of real or perceived socio-economic and political deprivation alone cannot explain the outbreak of violence in specific locations in specific times (and not others) (Fauvelle-Aymar et al., 2011). Therefore, the concept of relative deprivation is not a sufficient explanation on its own (Misago, 2016). As Neocosmos adds, it requires little effort to see that, however real; economic factors cannot account for why those deemed non-South Africans are attacked (Neocosmos, 2008).

There has also been scholarly and political contestation over the terminology of xenophobia. Sevenzo (2010) refers to the attacks on foreigners as 'Afrophobic' and not xenophobic. However, while more Africans are targets, referring to the violence as 'Afrophobia' fails to adequately explain why other non-African groups including Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Chinese are targeted. Against this argument Sevenzo's (2010) definition of the 2008 and subsequent xenophobic violence as 'Afrophobia' is contentious. This is one term, which is empirically unsubstantiated, and one that we shall have occasion explicitly to reject. Political interests and attempts not to taint the romanticized image of Desmond Tutu's so-called inclusive 'rainbow' nation by avoiding the 'X-word' have in large part driven such

definitional preoccupations. Naming the violence 'Afrophobic' is politically expedient because it focuses on the effects of apartheid and internalized racism rather than the actual political drivers, including poor leadership (Polzer & Takabvirwa, 2010); absolving the state of any blame in the process. In other words, it also allows the state to blame the violence on a third force (Nyar, 2010; Landau, 2011), a term that largely refers to unidentified 'white racists' attempting to stifle the pan-Africanist agenda and the 'African renaissance'. This argument is cemented by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011) who argues, 'The outbreak of xenophobic attacks in May 2008 […] ran counter to the philosophies of 'Ubuntu' and African Renaissance that Mbeki was articulating' (p. 281). Ultimately, 'xenophobia undermines concepts such as the rainbow nation' (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013, p. 194).

The denials of xenophobia in the country have gone as far as citing criminal elements as the responsible 'third-force'. Polzer and Takabvirwa (2010) argue that the South African Police Service's (SAPS) response to the 2008 violence in protecting victims was quite ambivalent and left a lot to be desired. Yet, the Thabo Mbeki regime then took a denialist stance and underplayed the attacks as 'criminal' and not xenophobic (Polzer & Takabvirwa, 2010; Landau, 2011). Mbeki even went as far as arguing that there was no xenophobia in the country (Amisi, Bond, Cele & Ngwane, 2010). There is a general consensus in the literature we reviewed that the tendency by public officials in South Africa to reduce xenophobia to criminality is a long-standing discourse in the country, more profoundly within the police service (Polzer & Takabvirwa, 2010). It aims at sustaining other discourses beside those of a 'xenophobic crisis'. This observation reiterates Lindley's (2014) argument that 'political actors may promulgate a 'business-as-usual' or non-crisis discourse, seeking to deny or *minimize empirical experiences* and objective indicators of severe threat and discontinuity' (p. 6) (italics ours).

In terms of actual justice, only one person was brought to book by the South African justice system (The Times, 2015). Besides that, hundreds of other perpetrators of the violence simply went unpunished. That said there was another recurrence of xenophobia in 2015, starting off in the township of Soweto and

manifesting more acutely in Durban and across other parts of Gauteng. Our review of existing literature suggests that, in the long run, notwithstanding other factors, this recurrence can be partly accounted for by the culture of impunity underscored by scholars like Misago (2016). Impunity has allowed violence to become one of the ways citizens use to grab government attention to attend to poor service delivery issues, especially in poor townships and informal settlements.

Xenophobic sentiments by top leaders have also elevated the xenophobic attitudes of locals. Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini in his speech a few days before the attacks encouraged Zulus to 'remove ticks and place them outside in the sun'. SAPS officially reported that seven people were killed in the violence, three of which were South Africans. A thousand more undocumented by SAPS were displaced. This time around, for scholars like Achille Mbembe (2015) the cancer had metastized. In what was a foreseeable and inevitable reincarnation of the violence, the rainbow nation's image has again been brought to international disrepute in recent attacks in 2016 and 2017.

We contend that there appears to be a bias in both scholarly and media responses to xenophobia in general. First, xenophobic violence grabs more media attention than institutional xenophobia. For example, it was only in the month of May in 2008, a remarkably violent, dark period in post-apartheid South Africa, that the rainbow nation's mainstream media was flooded with graphic images of violence against foreign migrants; burning shacks and even burning people that left the continent and the whole world shocked (Nyar, 2010). This phenomenon and 'politics of representation' is well articulated in the work of Polzer and Segatti (2011). They argue that, some politicians, civil society, celebrities and 'ordinary' South Africans stood up in solidarity condemning the violence as it occurred. They further posit that the violence in 2008 received global media coverage and was debated publicly (p. 200). They then refer to the violence as a 'crisis' which created 'political opportunity structures and universes of political discourse' for collective action. In other words, their conclusion is that violence provides a convenient window of visibility for multiple actors within the public sphere to assert their legitimacy and relevance through condemning

xenophobic violence publicly, an argument that has also been made elsewhere (for e.g., see Vanyoro, 2015).

Second, in terms of scholarly responses, most studies that have explored xenophobia in the country have tended to focus on violent and institutional xenophobia. We are particularly responding to this gap: that Media Studies have simply focused on the manner in which the media portray xenophobia, migrants and migrant related issues (institutionalized). This forms the point of departure for our paper in which we take a nuanced approach. We subscribe to Bourdieu's (1999, p. 11) concept of symbolic violence by arguing that xenophobia is symbolic violence where symbolic capital in the form of mass communication is used as a means of power to *reinforce* an institutional and structural form of discrimination (italics ours) (Kamali, 2005; Sjoberg & Rydin, 2008). As Foucault (1980) argues, every regime of representation is a regime of power formed. His assertion holds true, as the media in South Africa are a heated terrain of identity politics. By examining how xenophobia research as a discourse in itself has been covered in the two newspapers under study and how these newspapers uncritically picked up stories and purveyed them without a strong base facilitated by research - to reinforce institutional forms of discrimination - this paper presumes to fill this scholarly gap.

Method of Study
The study utilizes a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is an approach to human science research in which the researcher studies people, cultural practices or beliefs, institutions, or communities in their natural settings (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2014). Qualitative research is usually utilized when there is need for a complex, detailed understanding of a difficult problem that has debarred comprehension (Yin, 2014). The scarcity of studies on the interface of empirical research findings and press coverage of xenophobic attacks in South Africa is a serious problem worth investigating utilizing a qualitative research methodological lens. Through a critical analysis of stories from the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan* newspapers on migration and xenophobia, we provide a detailed account on the extent to which empirical research findings informed the selected newspapers' framing of

the xenophobia discourse.

Grounded in the interpretive prism of qualitative research, we make inferences by interpreting different trends, and forms of meaning constructed through textual representation by the two newspapers under study (one could call these media frames) immersed in social context. This is a fitting complement to the qualitative research process that entails identifying categories, and patterns that emerge from the data under scrutiny (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The study employs an explanatory case study approach. A case study is 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2011, p. 13). Case studies are generally associated with a qualitative methodology, and have become a common way to conduct qualitative enquiry (Yin, 2011). A case study approach suits the intention of this research, which examines newspaper coverage of a contemporary topic in South Africa: xenophobia. Often, case studies are the preferred strategy 'when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed' (Yin, 2011, p. 1). The paper shows how the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan* newspapers in reporting recurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa, from 2008-2013, 'conveniently' deployed empirical research findings. However, the limitation of the case study is that the findings cannot be generalized. Yin (2011) contends that case studies can only be generalized to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this case, our findings are specific to the *Mail & Guardian* the *Sowetan* newspapers.

Our focus was on the *Sowetan*, the largest morning daily with over 1.5 million daily readers and the *Mail & Guardian*, a weekly publication (Danso & McDonald, 2001). The choice of the two newspapers was influenced by our observation that these are popular newspapers reporting significantly on migration and xenophobia issues.

Data was collected using an online archive called *SA Media*. Because of the need to access documents created at some point in the relatively distant past, this archive provided access that the researchers might not otherwise have had (Ventresca & Mohr, 2001). Purposive sampling was used to select articles for analysis. Purposive sampling is simply selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions and the theoretical position (Yin, 2011; Bryman, 2012). The sampling procedure involved two stages. Firstly, articles falling within the period between 2008 and 2013, and exclusively reporting on the themes of migration and xenophobia, were collected. In the second stage, relevant articles that used xenophobia research findings in their reporting were screened towards much detailed analysis. Eventually, from a total of 476 migration and xenophobia articles, there remained only 14 articles from the *Sowetan* and 57 articles from the *Mail & Guardian* that grappled with the discourse of research findings in their reportage. This disparity is explained by the fact that most articles in the *Sowetan* had a huge inclination towards sensationalism at the expense of engaging critically with the discourse of knowledge unlike, in the *Mail & Guardian*, a more 'elite' newspaper which takes evidence relatively more seriously. Analysis was narrowed exclusively to these 71 articles, employing a Foucauldian discourse lens to analyze the 'discursive formation' of text through the nature of reporting. In the following section, the findings are discussed employing insights from Foucault's theory of discourse, power and knowledge.

Research findings and discussion
(See tables 1 and 2 for summation of coverage trends).

Table 1: Trends: *Mail & Guardian*
coverage of migration related issues (2008
2013)

Year	*migration coverage*	*xenophobia coverage*	*Research coverage*	Total articles reporting migration related issues/year
2008	69	65	14	150
2009	36	10	3	49
2010	42	14	15	71
2011	34	5	12	51
2012	64	0	2	66
2013	67	11	11	89
Total Frequency	312	105	57	476

Table 2: Trends: *Sowetan* **coverage of migration related issues (2008 to 2013)**

Year	*migration coverage*	*xenophobia coverage*	*Research coverage*	Total articles reporting migration related issues/ year
2008	3	100	8	126
2009	0	15	6	20
2010	2	15	0	17
2011	0	9	0	10
2012	4	10	0	14
2013	1	6	0	7
Total frequency	10	158	14	198

Research coverage by both newspapers was relatively lower than overall migration and xenophobia coverage. Therefore, it is plausible to assert that the two newspapers did not use much scientific evidence in their reporting. As we demonstrate later, where the two newspapers employed 'empirical evidence', they did so in an uncritical manner. However, when juxtaposed, the *Mail & Guardian* relatively utilized empirical data more than the *Sowetan*. This could be explained by the different patterns of their target audiences. The *Mail & Guardian* mainly targets a more elite group than the *Sowetan,* which thrives more on sensational reporting. From Table 1, we observe that in 2008 the *Mail & Guardian* reported more on xenophobia issues (65 times) and migration issues (150 times), which is a lot than in subsequent years. Similarly, from Table 2, we observe that, in 2008, the *Sowetan* reported more on xenophobia issues (100 times), which is also significantly higher than in subsequent years. This suggests that there could have been a reactive interest in the issues because it was also the year that the first major recorded xenophobic violence outbreak took place in 21st century South Africa.

A closer scrutiny of data shows that, on 5 June 2008, the *Mail & Guardian* had 16 articles in one publication that reported on xenophobia, and a similar trend can be found in the 29 June 2008 edition. On 21 June 2008, the *Sowetan* had 11 articles in

one publication reporting on xenophobia issues, and a similar trend also took place on 20 May 2008. Inferring from the context, which shows that the worst xenophobic violence took place in May and June of 2008, this trend also suggests reactive interest in the xenophobic violence of that month.

Our interpretation of these findings persuades us to argue that the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan* had a reactive, rather than proactive interest in these issues. Where the two newspapers were interested, they picked up stories and purveyed them without a strong base facilitated by research, which is largely contradictory to popular discourse. In so doing, we argue, the two newspapers implicitly became complicit in a political agenda that selectively deploys knowledge to reconsolidate state autonomy, political power, order and preserve the reputation of the 'rainbow' nation. This view resonates with Foucault (1980) who argues that, not only is knowledge always a form of power, but power is implicated in the questions of whether and in what circumstances knowledge is to be applied or not. In this regard, media coverage uninformed by scientific knowledge becomes tantamount to ideology (seeThompson, 1990). This mediated ideology, wittingly or not, mobilizes a range of meanings and practices to establish and sustain relations of domination and alterity (Chimni, 2000). In order to strengthen this argument, we draw on an analysis of the newspapers' content itself in the following two sections.

Reporting 'using' findings and not 'on' findings

As tables 1 and 2 have shown, during the period 2008 to 2013, the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan*'s research coverage was relatively lower than that of migration and xenophobia issues. In this section, we focus our analysis on the content of the relatively few articles that carried out 'research coverage'. During this period, the *Mail & Guardian* research coverage did not report 'on' research findings per se, but, rather, it reported 'using' findings in an uncritical manner. In contrast, the *Sowetan*'s focus seemed to be more

centered on reporting xenophobic incidences with little attention to research findings on the issue (e.g., what causes xenophobia?). Where it did, it also reported 'using' findings, but in an uncritical manner.

In 2008, the *Mail & Guardian* published an article *Xenophobia: Business in Africa set to take a dive*. The article was concerned with how South African business was set to take a dive 'following the wave of xenophobic attacks against foreigners in the past few weeks'. The journalist interviewed Saki Macozoma, one of South Africa's most prominent businessmen, and wrote:

> "These attacks will have serious implications for South African business in other countries. Standard Bank's personnel has been threatened in Mozambique," he told the Mail & Guardian. "Doing business on the continent is going to be harder." Macozoma cited an Institute for Security Studies assessment of the situation, which states: "What we have seen is what some have termed a perfect storm- the coming together of pent-up frustrations over poor service delivery, lack of leadership and the legacy of apartheid". "If you add into that witch's brew the culture of violence and general criminality, you have a potent cocktail of explosive material", said Macozoma.

> (*Mail & Guardian,* 05-06-2008, p. 2).

From the excerpt above, we argue that the article was primarily interested in South African business operations in other countries and its potentially negative plight in the light of xenophobic violence. It was only in passing that the source made brief reference to a particular piece of research from ISS. Research was only used in order to 'build a story' connected to other possibly more 'important' proceedings and ground a totally different story on empirical evidence in order to qualify Macozoma's viewpoints. Research coverage itself does not appear to be the primary interest here. Rather, empirics were only used to meet the objective,

acceptable standards of social critique. If anything, by using research as a reference point, the article most probably created 'moral panic'. This view is consistent with Boin (as cited in Lindley, 2014, p. 6) who argues that, 'Political actors may be very active in the construction of a crisis, typically because it serves to justify, or reorient the dominant policy agenda in ways they deem desirable'. In another article headlined *Copy-cat ethnic cleansing*, the journalist wrote:

> Xenophobia may have been the spark that set Ajax alight this week, but joblessness, crime, a lack of service delivery and soaring prices provided the kindling. Loren Landau of the Forced Migration Studies programme at the University of the Witwatersrand points out that "in some instances, leaders have blamed foreigners to deflect criticism around the lack of jobs and service delivery". Lashing out at foreigners is rather like domestic violence, he says: "A man who loses his job may go home and beat his wife. He'll feel better for five minutes, but in the morning his wife is bruised and he still doesn't have a job."

(*Mail & Guardian,* 22-05-2008, p. 4).

The article only made reference to xenophobia research findings against a pre-existing premise. The researcher as a 'source' was called upon to validate the journalist's viewpoint that 'joblessness, crime, a lack of service delivery and soaring prices provided the kindling', instead of objectively unpacking actual research findings and discussing them against the context they exist in. The researcher was called upon to provide their view, against an already established lead, paradigm and discourse. Reference to research was made within the 'parameters' of the journalist's biases and agenda by first establishing their own premise then validating this viewpoint using a solicited quote to justify a 'certain kind' of argument. In this regard, research was only used as reference point. For some reason, the journalist preferred to use the active

voice of the researcher, rather than to problematize research evidence. Yet, as we have already shown through our review of existing literature, economic factors alone cannot adequately explain the occurrence of xenophobia (Neocosmos, 2008; Misago, 2016).

However, there were a few notable exceptions where the *Mail & Guardian* gave researchers space to write opinion pieces or special columns, in order to put some of their findings across. Here is an excerpt from an article headlined *Xenophobia: No one is safe*, written by two researchers from ACMS (FMSP at the time). They wrote:

> This week the International Organization for Migration launched a report on the violence and responses to it. With research conducted by the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits, it argues that the violence is rooted in the antisocial politics of life in our townships and informal settlements. Based on almost 300 interviews across the country, it shows that local leaders mobilized the violence to claim and consolidate power and further their economic and political interests. There was no third force.

(*Mail & Guardian,* 26-03-2009, p. 23).

We observe differences in tone between this excerpt and the previous one where the journalist only appealed to knowledge to substantiate their premise. By use of technocratic language and a strong ownership of claims and voice through premises such as 'There was no third force', we begin to see the value such forms of coverage 'on' findings can bring to critical journalism. We also begin to see much critical analysis of the causes of the violence, beyond popular discourse that presents xenophobia as purely economic or 'Afrophobic' while ignoring its political drivers. But there are very few cases of such opinion pieces within our sample and during the period we investigated.

Findings of this article are consistent with Danso and McDonald's (2001) study, which show that the South African press

tends to be unanalytical, uncritical and lacking in depth, even where they do report using research findings. They mostly use research to appease acceptable standards of social critique which emphasize the need for evidence-based reporting, but as Danso and McDonald (2001) note, the coverage may appear neutral, but there is a tendency by so-called 'statistics-happy' journalists and editors to catalogue statistics and other data on migration and so this apparent neutrality does not necessarily constitute good reportage or a lack of bias.

Tension between discourses of 'empirical knowledge' and 'popular perceptions'
The article also shows that tension was visible between discourses of 'empirical knowledge' and 'popular perceptions' in the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan*'smedia coverage. Few articles in both newspapers either written by researchers or citing research, seemed to always suggest a contrary belief system to popular public and political discourses on migration and xenophobia. Polemical discourses were evident between popular perceptions and research in the two newspapers, wherein 'indigenous locals' perceived foreign migrants negatively even when scientific evidence suggested that migrants are positive contributors to South Africa's socio-economic dynamic.

For instance, an article in the *Sowetan* entitled *Xenophobia deepening* reflected these contestations. Thabo Mbeki, then South African president, strongly denied that the 2008 violent attacks were xenophobic, arguing instead that they were criminal. In a clear ring of denial, he was quoted as saying: "When I heard some accuse my people of xenophobia, of hatred of foreigners, I wondered what the accusers knew of my people, which I did not know." (*Sowetan,* 04-09-2008, p. 13)

This excerpt portrayed tensions between research showing that the violence was xenophobic and not criminal (Polzer & Takabvirwa, 2010) with popular government discourse. Mbeki used inclusive and exclusive phrases like 'my people', to disregard the existence of xenophobia in the country. Implicitly, his speech suggested that there were such

categories as 'his people' and 'others', revolving around the 'dangerous' nationalist binaries of insider-outsider that caused xenophobia in the first place. The same article cited Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and ISS research showing that a majority of South Africans were in fact xenophobic. Here is the excerpt:

> Research conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Institute for Security Studies in 1996 and 1997 showed that South Africans were becoming more xenophobic in their attitudes towards migrants generally and illegal immigrants in particular. The survey showed that almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) believed that illegal immigration was "bad" or "very bad" for the country.
> (*Sowetan,* 04-09-2008, p. 13).

This research countered Mbeki's denialist claims, again confirming tensions between empirical knowledge and popular public and political discourse. Another article in the *Mail & Guardian* headlined *Sanco chief in war over RDP houses*, also demonstrated the overt contestation between empirical and popular discourse in the text. The *Mail & Guardian* reported:

> ANC MP Rose Sonto, also the head of the South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) in the Western Cape, this week repeated unsubstantiated allegations that foreigners are buying government subsidized houses and forcing South Africans to live in shacks. […]. Following the allegations, the provincial minister of housing, Richard Dyanti, went on a fact-finding mission to Du Noon. Dyanti and 32 officials conducted a door-to-door investigation of 500 houses in the township, and discovered that only one was owned by a foreigner.
> (*Mail & Guardian,* 12-06-2008, p. 10).

Housing is a highly politicized discourse in South Africa, and it has been responsible for most service delivery outrages by citizens over the years. Consequently, locals in the Western Cape township of Du Noon had been repeatedly blaming foreigners for supposedly 'stealing' their Reconstruction and Development Programme(RDP) housing. As a result, foreigners had been targeted in the 2008 xenophobic attacks. The literature we reviewed shows that politicians also stirred this discourse. For example Mangosuthu Buthelezi the ex-Home Affairs Minister stated in 1998, 'if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme' (Neocosmos, 2008, p. 588). However, as an investigation by Richard Dyanti, the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for local government and housing in the Western Cape later proved, the notion that foreigners were 'stealing' RDP housing belonging to locals was a pure case of scapegoating, perpetrated through popular perceptions. Du Noon is predominantly a black population with an unemployment rate of 53%. There are 2 500 RDP homes in Du Noon therefore, while it is not clear what sampling strategy Dyanti's Housing Occupancy Survey used, it is safe to say the sampled 500 houses are illustrative of the township profile. Nowhere is this contestation clearer than in Sonto's conviction (like Buthelezi) that foreign migrants were 'stealing' local RDP housing, despite Dyanti's evidence to the contrary. In February 2008, Mr Sonto told an audience at the Human Settlement Summit in Cape Town that 'three-quarters' of the 2 500 RDP houses in Du Noon were owned by foreigners (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2008). In a speech, Sonto was quoted as saying:

> With no apology, I must say, in what many would regard as being xenophobic, when laying bare the dangerous problem that is creeping into our democracy […] many houses in various localities are

owned by foreign nationals whose refugee status is unknown to us as citizens of this country.

(*Mail & Guardian,* 12-06-2008, p. 10).

The *Sowetan* also reported an almost similar story on the topic of foreigners 'stealing' RDP housing from locals, headlined *Corruption fans the anger* (4 June, 2008). Unlike the above article, the journalist did not use any research to prove whether the claim that foreigners steal migrant housing was true or not. But given the little amount of research used in the newspaper's overall coverage during this period; this observation comes as a little surprise.

In an article titled, '*Putting out 'fire next time'* in the *Mail & Guardian*, we also observe tensions between empirical knowledge and popular perceptions. The writer presented evidence from FMSP at Wits University, which argued that, 'immigrants, even at the bottom of the heap' help to create employment opportunities for South Africans 'rather than taking away their jobs'. But this argument did not sit well with an 18-year-old South African, also featured in the article. This 'indigenous local': "[…] expressed the standard sentiment: "They must go back to their countries. They do not belong in South Africa." (*Mail & Guardian,* 25-02-2010, p. 40).

One lady in that same article was also quoted as saying: "These foreign people come to South Africa with nothing, but tomorrow he has cash, third day he owns a shop and fourth day he has a car. Where do these foreign people get this money?" (*Mail & Guardian*, 25-02-2010, p. 40).

In all fairness, given the huge disparity of inequality in South Africa, it is to be expected that locals will be suspicious of foreigners who generally tend to work harder to climb the social ladder, and have been found to sometimes accept lower wages in sectors like hospitality because of their precarity and poor monitoring of employer minimum standards by the Department of Labour. But, through our observation, we are critical of the writer's unanalytical

standpoint. The writer stated that perhaps 'this makes perfect sense' for people who have just come out of apartheid expecting a better life, which it does - though inadequately (Misago, 2016) - as explained by the relative deprivation thesis (Harris, 2002). However, when such arguments are made without teasing out the various dynamics at play, for example that unemployment has deeper multifaceted causes beyond just immigration, they sanitize xenophobia by giving it a moral and rational foothold. Ultimately, we contend that such uninformed and biased reporting, wittingly or not, inadvertently gives salience to the discourse of migrant apathy and feeds into xenophobic discourse.

Conclusion

While burgeoning literature on xenophobia in South Africa has examined the subject from sociological, historical and political lens, Media Studies interrogating newspapers' use of empirical research findings in reporting xenophobia are scarce. This research is a timely welcome addition to critical African Media Studies, highlighting the polemical nature of empirical research findings and newspaper discourses on South Africa's recurring xenophobic attacks. This article illuminates on the nature and extent to which empirical research findings were utilized by two mainstream South African newspapers, the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan*, in reporting recurring xenophobic attacks from 2008-2013. Inadvertently, the contestations between 'empirical knowledge' and 'popular perceptions' are inextricably tied to the South African nation-building project of 'rainbow' nation. The two media sustain existing power relations between migrants and locals. The study demonstrates that the two analyzed newspapers uncritically picked up stories and purveyed them without a strong base facilitated by empirical research. In fact, empirical research findings were selectively utilized to 'authenticate' or 'legitimize' convenient ideological positions. Research findings were largely marginalized in the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sowetan*, and where they

were used; this was done in an unanalytical and uncritical manner.

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