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South Africa

Anti-foreigner sentiment is on the rise in South Africa

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Xenophobic riots are intensifying. They are fuelled by the economic and social crisis, but also by the actions of politicians.

South Africa has seen numerous outbreaks of violence against foreigners, some of whom have been living in the country for decades. These xenophobic incidents are becoming increasingly frequent, and any issue, however trivial, can spark unrest.

Recurring xenophobia...

It is a tradition among the Igbo, a people from south-eastern Nigeria: every community living outside the country chooses its own king. Thus, the Igbo of KuGompo (formerly East London), in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, were no exception to the rule when they enthroned Solomon Ogbonna Eziko. Except that this ceremony triggered xenophobic riots.

Traditional chief Xhanti Sigcawua considered this custom an insult to traditional Xhosa values and a violation of South Africa's sovereignty. He called for action. The affair quickly took on a national dimension, and a demonstration outside the Nigerian High Commission in Pretoria descended into violence against Nigerians, 26 of whom had to be hospitalised.

Extremist organisations such as "Operation Dudula" mobilise their members, often from poor backgrounds, to harass small-scale foreign traders and sometimes loot their shops in working-class neighbourhoods. "March and March", another xenophobic group, has not hesitated to organise raids on hospitals to prevent foreigners from accessing healthcare, taking advantage of the passivity of the police.

... organised by the ruling elites

This xenophobia is gradually infiltrating the political arena. Organisations such as ActionSA, comprising defectors from the ANC and the liberal Democratic Alliance, or the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK), led by former President Jacob Zuma, do not hesitate to stigmatise nationals of other African countries.

Many ANC leaders are not to be outdone. For instance, former Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor stated: "Many people from Nigeria are involved in drug trafficking in our country and are harming our youth by facilitating their access to drugs."

The ANC mayor of Johannesburg, Dada Morero, targets street vendors, the vast majority of whom are foreign nationals. He has also attacked the Social and Economic Rights Institute (SERI), which provides pro bono lawyers to defend migrants, whilst Operation Dudula organised protests against the organisation's headquarters.

Poverty, constant power cuts and the deterioration of public services are exasperating a population to whom the political and financial elites, responsible for the state of the country, are offering immigrants as scapegoats. This

works all the more effectively as the left, fragmented and weak, is failing to offer a credible alternative.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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