


# Exploring the Implications of Philoxenia on Social Cohesion between South Africans and African Immigrants: Empirical Insights from African Immigrants in Nelspruit, South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

This paper explored the implications of the existence of philoxenia on Social Cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants. The researchers employed an exploratory research design, qualitative research methods, and in-depth interviews to solicit data. Interviews were conducted with 15 African immigrants over the age of 18, originating from various African nations and living in Nelspruit, South Africa. The participants represented a range of cultural backgrounds, demographics, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The findings underscored both opportunities and challenges in fostering a more inclusive society. Thus, the paper revealed that while philoxenia positively contributes to social cohesion by encouraging kindness, empathy, and mutual respect, helping African immigrants integrate into South African society, there are barriers such as cultural differences and lingering prejudices, along with structural challenges like xenophobia, which complicate the process of full integration of African immigrants. The researchers recommend that the government and other stakeholders must establish sustained efforts to overcome barriers like cultural differences and personal preferences between these two groups. This paper sheds light on the fact that, besides the general narrative of xenophobia in South Africa, there exists philoxenia, which positively contributes to social cohesion by encouraging kindness, empathy, and mutual respect, helping African immigrants integrate into South African society.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the existing scholarly debates, there is a plethora of scholarly contributions on xenophobia, specifically in the South African context.<sup>1</sup> Xenophobia refers to fear or hatred towards people from other countries or cultures. Xenophobic attitudes can arise from factors like challenges, feelings of insecurity, cultural differences, and political manipulation.<sup>2</sup> The underlying causes of xenophobia are often complex and interconnected. This may include competition for resources between immigrants and

<sup>1</sup> Michael Neocosmos, *From Foreign Natives to Native Foreigners. Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics* (African Books Collective, 2010); Jonathan Crush, "The Dark Side of Democracy: Migration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa," *International Migration* 38, no. 6 (2001): 103–33; Jean-Pierre Misago, Loren B Landau, and Tamlyn Monson, "Towards Tolerance, Law, and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa," 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Crush, "The Dark Side of Democracy: Migration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa."

nationals. Another factor fuelling xenophobia is the belief among native citizens that immigrants encroach upon their socioeconomic entitlements by vying for resources such as housing, education, healthcare, and social welfare. This perception arises from the notion that these services are already stretched thin due to overuse.<sup>3</sup> While xenophobia is a well-known concept in scholarly, policy and popular discourse, less is known about philoxenia in Africa. Philoxenia refers to a strong inclination towards hospitality and kindness to strangers or foreigners, often seen in cultural practices that emphasize welcoming guests.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the concepts of philoxenia bring to the fore that the lack of integration of immigrants and refugees by host communities contributes to divisions that fuel xenophobia. While little is done in scholarly works to examine the existence of philoxenia in the South African context, Xenophobia has become a prevalent social issue in contemporary human history, as it has deeply affected societies worldwide. Thus, there is a common narrative framing acts of violence and hostility towards immigrants as "xenophobia". Other studies have framed acts of violence and hostility towards immigrants as Afrophobia due to such acts only occurring towards Africans.<sup>5</sup> Others have shifted scholarly narratives from "Xeno/Afrophobia" towards considering conflicts and co-existence between South Africans and African immigrants as "Threats" to social cohesion between African immigrants and South Africans.<sup>6</sup> Tewolde proposed moving away from the existing concepts towards what he termed "colour-blind xenophobia."<sup>7</sup>

However, scant attention has been given in academic discussions to instances of philoxenia, or hospitality, exhibited by South Africans towards African immigrants as well as their implications on social cohesion between South Africans and African nationals residing in the country's communities. This means that there is a need for systematic studies that illuminate the implications existence of philoxenia on Social Cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants. Hence, this work has a primary goal of exploring the implications of the existence of philoxenia on social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Xenophobia in South Africa

Xenophobia, referred to as deeply embedded antagonism towards foreigners, has long been prevalent in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Mubangizi investigated this from a legal and human rights standpoint, pointing out that non-South African workers frequently encounter prejudice and are unjustly held accountable for the high local unemployment rate.<sup>9</sup> Threats to the economy and a rise in nationalism also contribute to this sentiment, as Mutanda notes, immigrants are seen as rivals for scarce resources and jobs.<sup>10</sup> In his exploration of the emergence of new nationalists and xenophobia throughout Africa, Kersting raises the possibility that these sentiments are growing stronger and more ingrained.<sup>11</sup>

The socio-political and historical background of xenophobia is complex. Nzongola-Ntalaja examines how citizenship, violent politics, and Africa's democratic processes have all influenced the

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Yingi, Tomy Ncube, and Everisto Benyera, "Situating Dashed Prospects of Independence into the Xenophobic Narrative in South Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 55, no. 1 (2024): 68–89.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory T Papanikos, "Philoxenia and Xenophobia in Ancient Greece," *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 6, no. 3 (2020): 237–46.

<sup>5</sup> Moses E Ochonu, "South African Afrophobia in Local and Continental Contexts," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 58, no. 4 (2020): 499–519.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Oshupeng Maseng, "Revealing "Threats" and "Enhancers" to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans.," *African Journal of Development Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Amanuel Isak Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis," *Migration Letters* 17, no. 3 (2020): 433–44.

<sup>8</sup> Neocosmos, *From Foreign Natives to Native Foreigners. Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics*; Crush, "The Dark Side of Democracy: Migration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa"; Misago, Landau, and Monson, "Towards Tolerance, Law, and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa."

<sup>9</sup> John C Mubangizi, "Xenophobia in the Labour Market: A South African Legal and Human Rights Perspective," *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 21, no. 2 (2021): 139–56.

<sup>10</sup> Darlington Mutanda, "Economic Threat, New Nationalism and Xenophobia in South Africa: Some Reflections," *African Security Review* 31, no. 3 (2022): 332–50.

<sup>11</sup> Norbert Kersting, "New Nationalism and Xenophobia in Africa—A New Inclination?," *Africa Spectrum* 44, no. 1 (2009): 7–18.

current xenophobic atmosphere.<sup>12</sup> A modern interpretation is given by Yingi, Ncube, and Benyera, who place the post-independence narrative's shattered promises inside the xenophobic framework.<sup>13</sup> They contend that because South Africa's democratic expectations have not been met, African immigrants have been made the scapegoats for the country's socioeconomic problems. The nation's social cohesion and democratic ideals are seriously threatened by the combination of past failure and present economic worry, which fosters xenophobic tendencies. The idea of colour blindness can worsen attitudes in South Africa. Thus, the notion of a Rainbow Nation has led some individuals to believe that race no longer plays a role in society, leading to the dismissal of biases, which can manifest as xenophobia.

While recognizing that race is crucial is a crucial factor that instigates prejudice, it is equally important to acknowledge that the identities and experiences of immigrants living in South Africa are prejudiced. The term "xenophobia" alone falls short of capturing the complexities of discrimination faced by immigrant communities within South Africa. Hence, Maseng concluded that xenophobia is a foreign term in both South African and African contexts in general.<sup>14</sup> However, the existing literature does not cover the presence of philoxenia in promoting social unity between South Africans and African immigrants. Instead, studies in this area merely touch upon the issue of xenophobia within South Africa and how foreigners are mistreated, which is commonly perpetuated by the media. Little consideration is given to showcasing the impacts of philoxenia on fostering social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants, which this paper dwells on.

### **Afrophobia in South Africa**

Afrophobia is defined as anger towards African migrants; it is a particular type of xenophobia that attacks people because of their African identity. According to Masenya, this phenomenon can be understood as a specific case of xenophobia, in which African migrants face violent attacks and disparaging labels that result in the destruction of lives and property.<sup>15</sup> This type of prejudice has its roots in the history of the nation, particularly in the apartheid period, which isolated black South Africans from the rest of the world and created a climate of fear and suspicion towards foreign African nationals.<sup>16</sup> Afrophobia's continued existence in South Africa is a complicated problem that is entwined with the country's struggles with social cohesiveness, identity, and economic competition. Ochonu offers a more comprehensive examination of Afrophobia in South Africa within both regional and global frameworks, emphasising the inconsistency between the nation's educational endeavours towards pan-Africanist initiatives and the pervasive Afrophobic violence.<sup>17</sup> Friedman suggests that allegations of Afrophobia are at times politically motivated, potentially serving as distractions from pressing issues like inequality and corruption within the country.<sup>18</sup> There is, however, a knowledge gap when it comes to understanding the role of positive attitudes towards African immigrants in promoting social cohesion between these communities.

### **Colour Blind Xenophobia in South Africa**

Tewolde observes Xenophobia in South Africa as a more complicated issue influenced by socioeconomic considerations and the perception of outsiders rather than being exclusively determined by ethnic or racial boundaries.<sup>19</sup> This, according to the author, must be considered as "colour-blind

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<sup>12</sup> Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, "Citizenship, Political Violence, and Democratization in Africa," *Global Governance* 10, no. 4 (2004): 403–9.

<sup>13</sup> Yingi, Ncube, and Benyera, "Situating Dashed Prospects of Independence into the Xenophobic Narrative in South Africa."

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Oshupeng Maseng, "Repositioning the Concept of Xenophobia in the African Context: Why Do We Allow Ourselves to Be Defined by Others?," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 2024, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2020/v10n4a3>.

<sup>15</sup> Malesela J Masenya, "Afrophobia in South Africa: A General Perspective of Xenophobia," *Bangladesh Sociological Society* 14, no. 1 (2017): 81.

<sup>16</sup> David Addae and Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour, "Afrophobia, 'Black on Black' Violence and the New Racism in South Africa: The Nexus between Adult Education and Mutual Co-Existence," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022): 2130458.

<sup>17</sup> Ochonu, "South African Afrophobia in Local and Continental Contexts."

<sup>18</sup> Steven S. Friedman, "The Problem with Calling Every Prejudice Afrophobia," *Business Day*, 2019, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/opinion/2019-02-28-the-problem-with-calling-every-prejudice-afrophobia/>.

<sup>19</sup> Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis."

xenophobia".<sup>20</sup> The notion of "colour-blind xenophobia" incorporates two theoretical positions: the exclusivist citizenship model of Neocosmos and the proximity-based "Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT)". Tewolde argues that these frameworks contribute to the understanding of the reason xenophobia in South Africa primarily targets individuals who are perceived as outsiders, such as Asian, African, and White traders.<sup>21</sup> The effects of colour-blind xenophobia are profound since they damage not only the targeted "outsider" groups but also South Africa's reputation abroad and its social cohesion. According to Tewolde, understanding the colour-blind component of xenophobia is essential to creating treatments and laws that effectively deal with the underlying reasons for the violence. Besides Tewolde's contribution, Maseng posits that the concept of xenophobia is foreign to African indigenous languages and asserts that the conflict between South Africans and African migrants must be understood as "sibling fights" conceptualised by the Batswana people of African descent as "Maragana teng a ban aba mpa".<sup>22</sup> Despite existing studies on social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants, the concept of philoxenia has not been fully defined. It seems that scholars are hesitant to address this concept in the South African context and the issue of welcoming immigrants in South Africa, despite the presence of African immigrants in the country.

### **Threats and Enhancers to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africa**

The social fabric between South Africans and African immigrants is stressed due to xenophobia and harassment, especially by government agencies like the DHA and SAPS. Maseng notes that identity disparities and various forms of discrimination present serious "threats" to societal cohesiveness between South Africans and African immigrants residing in South African communities.<sup>23</sup> The problem is made worse by a resistance to accepting diversity and tolerance for differences, which fuels social unrest and threatens cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants.

However, some "enhancers" support harmonious cohabitation and societal cohesiveness between South Africans and African immigrants.<sup>24</sup> Maseng highlights shared communal spaces, professional ties, and positive interactions amongst African immigrant service suppliers and South African consumers as elements that support the development of a feeling of belonging and respect between these individuals. In a heterogeneous society like South Africa, these components are essential for promoting social cohesiveness.

It is essential to lessen the "threats" to social cohesiveness while fostering its "enhancers" in order to create a harmonious and cohesive community. As Maseng suggests, a systematic investigation of these elements is required to establish successful solutions for promoting social cohesiveness between African immigrants and South Africans.<sup>25</sup> South Africa may become a more welcoming and peaceful nation by addressing the underlying causes of discrimination and xenophobia, as well as emphasising the benefits of cohabitation. However, the literature lacks information about the role of philoxenia in promoting social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants. Previous studies have only focused on identifying threats and enhancers to social cohesion, without emphasizing the existence of these positive attitudes towards foreigners by South Africans. For instance, Maseng reveals that there are both positive and negative idealisation of social cohesion and African continental integration due to the complex interactions between the two groups. This shows that more research needs to be done to explore the impact of philoxenia on social cohesion among these groups. To this day, there appears to be one prominent and recent contribution to Philoxenia in African migration-social cohesion scholarship. This work reveals certain aspects of the South African legislation which exhibit philoxenia. The work also provides evidence of philoxenia in various economic sectors and communities in South Africa.

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<sup>20</sup> Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis."

<sup>21</sup> Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis."

<sup>22</sup> Maseng, "Revealing Threats and Enhancers to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>23</sup> Maseng, "Revealing Threats and Enhancers to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>24</sup> Maseng, "Revealing Threats and Enhancers to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>25</sup> Maseng, "Revealing Threats and Enhancers to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

## METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted an exploratory research design. This is a type of research design used to explore an area or phenomenon where little is known. Since little has been done by scholars to explore insights on philoxenia in African and South African contexts specifically, exploratory research was deemed suitable. The researchers employed the qualitative method as a way of soliciting empirical qualitative material to explore the philoxenia-social cohesion nexus. This method was used to describe and provide narratives on the implications of the existence of philoxenia on social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants.

The research site was Mbombela, Mpumalanga Province, in South Africa, due to the municipal area being a host to about 35.6% of immigrants (both from other provinces and other countries). This site was helpful in attempting to sufficiently obtain insights from African Immigrants (from various African countries). In addition, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews due to the scarcity of knowledge on the subject of philoxenia within the South African context. Respondents were mainly fifteen (15) African immigrants from various African countries. Data was thematised according to the questionnaire. Figure 1 below presents the questionnaire.

### Figure 1: Research questionnaire

#### Section A: African immigrants' experiences with South African society

1. How would you describe your overall experience living in South Africa? Explain
2. To what extent have you felt welcomed or supported by South Africans? Explain
3. Have you encountered any forms of discrimination or prejudice from South Africans? Please describe the nature of these experiences.

#### Section B: African's perspectives on philoxenia (hospitality and kindness to foreigners)

1. How often do you feel that South Africans show kindness or hospitality towards you and other immigrants? Explain
2. Have you been involved in any community activities or events organized by South Africans? Explain
3. If yes, how would you describe your experience in these activities? Explain

#### Section C: African's perspectives on the effects of philoxenia on social cohesion

1. In your opinion, how does the presence of philoxenia affect the relationship between South Africans and African immigrants? Explain
2. What improvements or changes would you suggest to enhance social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants? Explain
3. Do you have any additional comments or experiences you would like to share regarding your interactions with South Africans? Explain

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS /FINDINGS

The sections present findings relating to the implications of the existence of philoxenia on Social Cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants from an African Immigrants' perspective.

### African Immigrants' description of their overall experience with South Africans and living with them

The overall experience of living in South Africa, as shared by the respondents, reflected a blend of positive and challenging aspects, shaped by social interactions, attitudes towards immigrants, and opportunities for integration. Many participants acknowledged the support and warmth they have received from South Africans, with some finding success in setting up businesses or gaining acceptance in local communities. However, there is also a noticeable undercurrent of tension, with respondents noting instances of being treated differently due to their immigrant status. Some individuals felt

welcomed and embraced, while others experienced hostility, often rooted in perceptions of competition for resources or jobs.

For example, participants provided the following perspectives:

A 47-year-old woman, Respondent A works, as a housekeeper for households in Nelspruit and expressed an optimistic perspective: *"My journey so far has been quite good overall. I've managed to set up a business and received some support from people in South Africa despite encountering occasional moments of tension."* [19/10/2024]

Respondent B, a 23-year-old male Zimbabwean, described seeing: *"I get the sense that I'm treated differently just because I'm an immigrant. Some folks are welcoming, while others seem to have an attitude towards us."* [19/10/2024]

Respondent C, a 20-year-old student at the University of Mpumalanga, mentioned: *"It's been a bit of a bag, for me some locals have been really friendly and welcoming while others have shown hostility towards us because they see us as competitors."* [19/10/2024]

Respondent D, a 34-year-old self-employed Zimbabwean male, reflected: *"I've had chances in South Africa. Sometimes I feel like I'm on the outside looking in at society as a whole."* [19/10/2024]

Respondent E, a 26-year-old female retail worker, shared: *"My journey has presented its share of obstacles because of how immigrants are viewed; however, I have encountered warm-hearted South Africans who have embraced us with open arms."* [19/10/2024]

The experiences shared earlier suggest that immigrants' integration into South African society is largely influenced by a combination of positive and negative social interactions. Acts of philoxenia provide pathways for assistance and acceptance, while feelings of exclusion and hostility can create obstacles that hinder social cohesion. From the experiences shared in this part of the study, it is clear that many participants understood the concept of philoxenia and recognized its influence on their interactions in South Africa. Overall, respondents acknowledged the importance of hospitable behavior from locals in helping them feel accepted as part of the community. However, some participants noted that their experiences were not entirely positive, citing prevailing negative attitudes toward immigrants. Despite these challenges, South Africa remains a popular destination for migrants, drawn by its economic opportunities and regional proximity. Nevertheless, fostering a more welcoming social environment could enhance unity and mutual respect across communities.

### **African Immigrants' perspectives on the extent of welcome or support by South Africans**

The extent to which immigrants in South Africa feel welcomed or supported varies significantly depending on the individuals and circumstances involved. Respondents provided a range of experiences, with some highlighting the warmth and hospitality they encountered, while others described more transactional and formal interactions.

For example, a 47-year-old woman shared her story: *"Some individuals are warm and open to assisting others. I've developed bonds with community members who create a sense of belonging for me."* [19/10/2024]

A male truck driver, from Nelspruit, also shared his thoughts: *"Some areas offer assistance based upon the community and its residents' attitudes towards newcomers."* [19/10/2024]

A student who is also self-employed in his twenties in Kamagugu, Nelspruit, shared his thoughts: *"I receive a lot of support in my endeavours. I feel like there's a lack of support in my social life where the interactions seem more formal and limited."* [19/10/2024]

Furthermore, a female student aged 26 from the University of Mpumalanga shared her thoughts: *"Assistance is not always readily available to me here, at the moment though some folks have been friendly and accommodating, overall I do sense a bit of a detachment."* [19/10/2024]

These experiences show that the reception and support experienced by immigrants in South Africa depend greatly upon the circumstances and people involved in the situation. While some individuals have established friendships and a sense of belonging in their environment, others describe their interactions as mainly transactional, with limited additional support available. Although some interviewees noted a lack of warmth towards foreigners, among South Africans, one young retail employee shared his perspective: *"It's not often that people from the area are genuinely hospitable; however, I value those who exhibit kindness and open-mindedness."* [19/10/2024]

The level of support provided to immigrants seems to vary depending on the area and social context they find themselves in. While immigrants often struggle to establish connections in professional settings, they also tend to experience a sense of social isolation overall. This suggests that, although there are moments of openness and hospitality (philoxenia), such gestures are not always consistent or reliable across different situations. Some immigrants report experiences where they are warmly welcomed by locals and form lasting friendships, while others describe receiving support that feels more conditional or limited, particularly outside of professional environments. The experiences of the truck driver and street vendor highlight the significant role that the surrounding community and local environment play in shaping an immigrant's sense of belonging. Meanwhile, self-employed individuals and students emphasize the social challenges they face in integrating into society. While a few immigrants manage to build meaningful relationships, many feel disconnected or only receive support within specific professional contexts.

### **African Immigrants' experiences of discrimination or prejudice from South Africans**

This section explores the experiences of African immigrants in South Africa, focusing on the discrimination and prejudice they face from some locals. Through the personal accounts of several respondents, the narrative reveals how immigrants often feel excluded or alienated in certain areas, particularly in less urbanized regions. While some individuals extend kindness and hospitality, the prevailing sentiment of mistrust and bias often hampers their sense of belonging. The section highlights the complex dynamics between African immigrants and South Africans, underlining the need for greater dialogue, understanding, and efforts to foster inclusivity and unity. When asked, Have you encountered any forms of discrimination or prejudice from South Africans? One of the respondents indicated the following: *"Yes indeed! Particularly, in areas where the residents see us as taking their jobs or engaging in activities."* [19/10/2024]

Her experience reflects a broader perception among some immigrants that South Africans, particularly in less urbanized areas, can be distant or even indifferent towards them. This could be attributed to a variety of factors, including economic competition, historical tensions, or general unfamiliarity with different cultures. Despite occasional kindness from certain individuals, the respondent suggests that these moments are more the exception than the rule, with a pervasive sense of exclusion or alienation affecting their overall sense of belonging in the country. A 23-year-old male Zimbabwean stated the following: *"I occasionally hear remarks. Notice people purposely avoiding us in public areas."* [19/10/2024]

A 20-year-old student in one of the local universities mentioned: *"I once got rejected for a place just because I wasn't from South Africa."* [19/10/2024]

A 34-year security guard also recounted a work-related incident where he faced discrimination. He described the case as follows: *"My workplace encounters have not always been welcoming as some locals feel threatened by my presence and worry about job security."* [19/10/2024]

A 26-year-old female explained the discrimination she faced in Nelspruit as follows: *"Many older South Africans often display discrimination towards foreigners."* [19/10/2024]

These experiences highlight that some immigrants encounter acts of kindness and hospitality, promoting inclusivity and unity. However, many also face prejudice and unjust treatment. This bias not only limits their opportunities but also undermines the sense of belonging in the community, which is vital for fostering social harmony. The findings show a divide within South African society regarding the treatment of African immigrants. While some South Africans extend kindness and support to African immigrants, others engage in behaviors that hinder integration and create distrust. Addressing these issues is essential to fostering dialogue between South Africans and African immigrants, promoting unity, and cultivating an environment where all individuals, regardless of nationality, feel welcomed and respected.

### **The Feelings of African Immigrants about the show of kindness and hospitality from South Africans**

Immigrants shared that while gestures of kindness and hospitality do exist, they are often sporadic and not consistently experienced across the board. Many respondents noted that younger South Africans were more likely to show warmth and openness, but this sense of goodwill was not always widespread or extended in social settings. In professional or formal environments, kindness was sometimes more apparent, but in social or everyday interactions, the feeling of inclusion was less common. Similarly, when it comes to involvement in community activities, the experiences of immigrants vary. While some have participated in gatherings and felt welcomed, others felt excluded or out of place. A few respondents mentioned the sense of being an outsider or not being invited to engage in social events, despite their willingness to participate. This suggests that while some immigrants are able to integrate into certain aspects of South African society, the process of inclusion is not universal and often depends on individual circumstances, attitudes, and settings. These experiences reflect the complex nature of immigrant integration into South African communities, where kindness and hospitality may be present but are not always felt consistently, and full participation in community activities can remain a challenge for many. Participants provided the following views: *"Though kindness can be found among some South Africans who show hospitality, many others seem to be quite indifferent."* [19/10/2024]

In addition, a 23-year-old male Zimbabwean stated that: *"There is occasional kindness, but it's more likely in professional settings rather than socially."* [19/10/2024]

One young man, from one of the local Universities, shared that hospitality often depends on age groups: *"I tend to encounter a sense of hospitality, from the generation of South Africans; they appear to be more welcoming and open-minded."* [19/10/2024]

In his 20s, a man who was participating in the interviews mentioned that: *"Good hospitality is hard to come by these days. Always a pleasant surprise when it does happen."* [19/10/2024]

At the age of 26, one of the respondents shared that: *"Some people are naturally hospitable and kind-hearted, while others may not possess the demeanour."* [19/10/2024]

African immigrants recognize the goodwill shown by South Africans, particularly among the younger population. While there are instances of philoxenia, it is not yet deeply ingrained as a societal norm. The perspectives reveal a mixed portrayal of how immigrants are treated in terms of kindness and hospitality in South Africa. Many acknowledge that acts of kindness do occur, but are not widespread; experiences differ depending on factors such as location or individual personalities. Some view kindness as more common in certain settings, while others believe it is less frequent in the broader cultural landscape of South Africa today. Younger South Africans are often seen as welcoming and warm, but genuine acts of kindness from individuals can be sporadic and rare. While hospitality is appreciated when it is offered, it may not always be a consistent element in interactions between immigrants and South Africans.

## **The involvement of African Immigrants in community activities or events organized by South Africans**

There are varying perspectives which underscore that while some immigrants are able to find a sense of belonging and engagement in South African community activities, others struggle with exclusion or a lack of opportunities to fully integrate. The experiences point to the barriers many immigrants face when trying to participate in social life, where factors such as personal connections, community attitudes, and cultural differences often influence the level of inclusion or alienation they experience. A 47-year-old Zimbabwean woman working as a housekeeper shared her thoughts: *"Definitely! I took part in a community gathering. It turned out to be quite enjoyable."* [19/10/2024]

However, a 23-year-old male Zimbabwean states: *"I haven't received any invitations or nudges to participate in community gatherings."* [19/10/2024]

A 20-year-old man shared the statement: *"I gave it a shot before. I ended up feeling like I didn't really belong."* [19/10/2024]

A man working in one of the shops in town mentioned: *"I haven't attended any events because I don't feel included."* [19/10/2024]

A woman in her mid-twenties shared the following thoughts: *"I go to a gathering; however, the conversations are quite restricted."* [19/10/2024]

This reveals that immigrants' experiences with participating in community events hosted by South Africans vary. Some immigrants felt accepted and included, while others expressed a sense of being excluded or lacking the motivation to get involved. Several participants felt like outsiders or unwelcome when they tried to engage, while younger immigrants noted limited interactions despite attending events. Be that as it may, some immigrants are able to integrate smoothly into community activities, besides that many others face challenges that prevent full participation and hinder their integration into South African social life.

## **The experiences of African Immigrants in activities or events organized by South Africans**

Respondents shared a range of emotions and experiences, with many initially feeling welcomed, but often struggling with deeper integration into the community activities soon realized that the focus of the event shifted to showcasing their culture for entertainment rather than fostering genuine, interactive engagement. While other respondents expressed similar feelings of exclusion.

These perspectives highlight a recurring theme: while immigrant participation is generally met with politeness and hospitality at the start, it often lacks depth and a true sense of belonging. Many immigrants feel like guests or outsiders, excluded from meaningful participation. The experiences shared reflect a desire for more reciprocal, inclusive interactions that would allow immigrants to engage fully, not just as spectators, but as active, valued members of the community. These are the perspectives shared by immigrants:

A 47-year-old woman working as a housekeeper stated: *"I had an experience overall; however, I felt like an observer, rather than an active participant."* [19/10/2024]

A 23-year teacher, from Zimbabwe, working in Kamagugu, recounted an encounter and stated: *"I was warmly greeted at the beginning. Excited to join in the activities later, I noticed that the emphasis shifted towards presenting our culture for amusement rather than encouraging authentic interaction."* [19/10/2024]

In addition, a 20-year-old man experienced feelings of isolation from a different point of view, according to his explanation: *"I joined community activities. Found myself frequently left out of conversations and decision-making processes."* [19/10/2024]

Furthermore, a 26-year-old female, from Zimbabwe, who found the activities enjoyable but felt a bit out of place, remarked: *"South Africans take pride in their culture; it seemed more like we were immersing ourselves in their world than engaging in a mutual exchange."* [19/10/2024]

These responses indicate that immigrants often experience a polite atmosphere at African community gatherings initially, but over time, they often struggle to feel a true sense of belonging. Many report feeling more like visitors or observers rather than integrated members of the community. Some describe the experience as superficial, and even alienating, as they are physically present but frequently excluded from meaningful participation. The responses highlight a desire for greater reciprocity and inclusiveness.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings illustrate that many participants have a clear understanding of philoxenia and its importance in shaping their interactions within South Africa. Respondents recognized that when local South Africans demonstrate philoxenia, it significantly enhances the experience of integration for African immigrants. Acts of kindness, acceptance, and inclusivity help immigrants feel welcomed and supported, providing them with pathways to form strong social ties and a sense of belonging within their new environment. This aligns with the work of Maseng, who argues that philoxenia can help decrease prejudices and promote empathy and mutual respect between diverse groups. The concept of philoxenia can, therefore, serve as a mechanism to reduce ethnic and national tensions, which is crucial in a multicultural society like South Africa. As seen in the findings, South Africans' openness to immigrants, whether through community events, social interactions, or hospitality, can help break down cultural barriers and encourage greater intercultural understanding.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, there were positive aspects of welcoming interactions and opportunities raised by African immigrant respondents on how philoxenia affects Social Cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants. The findings of this study are in line with Maseng's views that there are some "enhancers" which support harmonious cohabitation and societal cohesiveness between South Africans and African immigrants.<sup>27</sup> This current study appears to resonate with Maseng, who highlighted that shared communal spaces, professional ties, and positive interactions amongst African immigrant service suppliers and South African consumers as elements that support the development of a feeling of belonging and respect between these individuals. These findings suggest that there is an element of philoxenia between South Africans and African immigrants, as also discussed by Maseng, who concluded that, in a heterogeneous society like South Africa, there are components which are essential for promoting social cohesiveness between these groups.

In the context of philoxenia and African immigrants' opinions, views, and experiences, this study underscores that philoxenia is an essential component of social cohesiveness, especially in traditional communities where the maintenance of a customary way of life makes it possible. From the respondents, there were positive aspects of welcoming interactions and opportunities raised by African immigrant respondents on how philoxenia affects Social Cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants. Thus, acts on philoxenia were the promotion of friendliness and positive interactions with strangers, strengthened social links and promoted community integration and can also promote African continental integration or the African Union's vision of a United States of Africa.<sup>28</sup> In addition, practicing philoxenia helps decrease prejudices based on ethnicity and nationality, fostering empathy and mutual respect among cultures.

Amongst other factors that Maseng alludes to as enhancers of social cohesion between African immigrants and South Africans, from the respondents, the economic opportunities available in South Africa serve as a significant draw for immigrants. Respondent A, for instance, mentions her success in setting up a business, a reflection of the potential for financial independence and personal growth that South Africa offers. The ability to establish a livelihood in a new country, even amidst occasional tension, points to the underlying optimism and resilience of immigrants as they navigate challenges.

The findings also reaffirm the importance of enhancers of social cohesion, as identified by Maseng, including shared communal spaces, professional ties, and positive day-to-day interactions

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Oshupeng Maseng, "Migration Vis-à-Vis Philoxenia in South African Context: Implications for African Continental Integration.," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 13, no. 5 (2024): 743–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i5.3353>.

<sup>27</sup> Maseng, "Revealing" Threats" and" Enhancers" to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>28</sup> Maseng, "Migration Vis-à-Vis Philoxenia in South African Context: Implications for African Continental Integration."

between South Africans and African immigrants.<sup>29</sup> These factors promote a sense of belonging and mutual respect, which are critical for achieving social harmony in a multicultural society. In particular, the study highlights that fostering spaces for positive, ongoing interactions, whether through work, community activities, or cultural exchanges, can help bridge the divide between South Africans and African immigrants.

Respondents emphasized that when South Africans and immigrants share common interests or engage in regular interactions, they are more likely to build trust and empathy. This underscores the notion that social cohesion is not merely about tolerance but also about active efforts to understand and appreciate cultural diversity. The notion of philoxenia plays a pivotal role here, as it facilitates a foundation of hospitality that allows immigrants to feel accepted and valued, which can, in turn, lead to stronger community ties.

These cultural events are aimed at enhancing social cohesion between immigrants and South Africans. The practice of philoxenia helps diminish prejudice and fosters mutual respect by promoting authentic interactions between different cultural groups. However, as highlighted in the responses, cultural initiatives in South Africa often focus on surface-level engagement, such as performances or exhibitions, which do not allow for the depth of interaction necessary to foster genuine understanding and empathy. The lack of sustained, authentic cultural exchanges points to a missed opportunity to use philoxenia as a tool for building deeper connections between African immigrants and South Africans. These findings are in line with Maseng, who speaks to various negative encounters which serve as threats to social cohesion between these groups. In addition, the social fabric between South Africans and African immigrants is stressed due to xenophobia and harassment, especially by government agencies like the DHA and SAPS.<sup>30</sup> Hence, Tewolde argues that colour-blind xenophobia primarily targets individuals who are perceived as outsiders, such as Asian, African, and White traders and inhabitants.<sup>31</sup>

However, caution must be made that an overemphasis on philoxenia could lead to cultural relativism, which may threaten the distinctiveness of individual cultural identities. The study findings also indicate that the current cultural interaction initiatives in South Africa appear to lack the depth necessary to cause such a concern, as they are often disconnected from meaningful cultural exchange. As such, the existing literature also suggests that resistance to accepting diversity and tolerance for differences fuels social unrest and threatens national cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants.<sup>32</sup>

The findings suggest that while there are efforts to celebrate cultural diversity in South Africa, these initiatives often fall short in terms of creating lasting impact and meaningful integration. The short-term nature of many events, coupled with a lack of sustained collaboration and genuine cultural exchange, limits their ability to promote long-term social cohesion. The notion of a Rainbow Nation has led some individuals to believe that race no longer plays a role in society, leading to the dismissal of biases, which can manifest as xenophobia. This underscores Tewolde's conceptualisation of colour-blind xenophobia in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> Thus, South Africa is facing challenges of uniting nationals and immigrants due to a lack of meaningful integration programmes and policies. Hence, both groups have negative and positive idealisations of social cohesion and African continental integration.<sup>34</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers propose several recommendations to promote greater social cohesion between South Africans and African immigrants:

- The government and various stakeholders must promote deeper cultural engagement between South Africans and African immigrants.

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<sup>29</sup> Maseng, "Revealing" Threats" and" Enhancers" to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>30</sup> Maseng, "Revealing" Threats" and" Enhancers" to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>31</sup> Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis."

<sup>32</sup> Maseng, "Revealing" Threats" and" Enhancers" to Social Cohesion between African Immigrants and South Africans."

<sup>33</sup> Tewolde, "Reframing Xenophobia in South Africa as Colour-Blind: The Limits of the Afro Phobia Thesis."

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Oshupeng Maseng, "Effects of Cross-Border Migration on Idealizations of Gauteng Residents towards Social Cohesion and African Continental Integration," *Journal of African Union Studies* 8, no. 3 (2019): 7–33.

- The government and various stakeholders must enhance cultural events and education on philoxenia.
- The government must address economic and structural barriers which promote immigrant-host conflict.
- The government and various stakeholders must actively combat and criminalize acts of xenophobia and Afrophobia.
- The South African government should work toward developing clear, fair, and transparent immigration programmes and policies that ensure the protection of immigrants' rights and promote their integration into society.

## CONCLUSION

There are positive effects of philoxenia on social cohesion as they are significant factors in fostering better integration between South Africans and African immigrants. They enhance social cohesion through kindness, inclusivity, and acceptance of these two groups. This helps immigrants integrate into South African society. It also encourages empathy, reduces prejudices, and creates a sense of belonging, which is crucial in a multicultural environment. Philoxenia encourages intercultural exchange and integration. These stem from positive interactions in professional and communal settings, such as workplaces and religious gatherings, which encourage cultural exchange and mutual respect. These shared spaces offer platforms for engagement, which helps both groups to learn from each other and strengthen social bonds. However, African immigrants and South Africans' cultural events in South Africa, which aim to foster social cohesion, are superficial, focusing on performances or exhibitions without allowing for deeper cultural exchanges. While philoxenia has positive effects on social cohesion, it is not without challenges. The presence of barriers such as cultural differences and personal preferences requires ongoing cultural sensitivity and deeper engagement beyond superficial interactions. Furthermore, cultural events, though beneficial, are often limited in their scope and need to evolve into more sustained, meaningful exchanges to achieve true social cohesion.

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