

Can Africa Achieve Open Border Migration?

Abstract: Globally, the population of the African continent is increasing at a significant rate, and intracontinental migration is also increasing. Africans are moving more frequently within their own continent for social, political, medical, economic, and sometimes safety reasons. Given the significance of intracontinental mobility, the African Union has suggested an open border or borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration. Therefore, in this paper, I seek to advance the arguments that question the viability of open-border migration in Africa. My task follows two main lines of reasoning: (1) Using Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi's views on Ubuntu, I seek to show how the issue of xenophobia that many Africans encounter on the continent would prevent the goal of open-border mobility being successful. Considering the various xenophobic atrocities in South Africa, I question the relevance of Ubuntu, which stands for shared, reciprocal humanness and a strong sense of community that is also welcoming to migrants. In response, I question Ubuntu's significance amid these xenophobic attacks and its utility once an open-border policy is put into place. (2) I seek to question the merits and benefits of open borders for immigration to African nations that are experiencing (ethnic) conflicts and wars. I will show that even if open borders for migration is made possible, many migrants' lives will be lost and many nations will be in disarray (if not destroyed) if the continent fails to adequately address and provide practical solutions to xenophobic attacks, (ethnic) conflicts, and wars.

Keywords: *Africa(n), (Open) Border, Migration, Ubuntu, Xenophobia*

Introduction

African leaders intend to create 'seamless borders' throughout their continent by issuing a single passport that permits unrestricted travel between countries (Henderson, 2016). Having a common African passport that will provide free movement of people is one of the Flagship Projects of Agenda 2063 programme endorsed by Africa's political leadership. This plan to hasten continental integration also aims to increase intra-African trade and growth (African Union, 2015). In addition, the programme aims to alter Africa's laws, which continue to place significant restrictions on people's freedom of movement despite political commitments to abolish borders, support member states' granting of visas, and improve the free movement of all African citizens in all African countries by 2018 (African Union, 2015).

With an annual growth rate of 2.7 percent, Africa's population was projected

to be 1.3 billion in 2019 (African Union, 2021) and is growing at the fastest rate in the world. Between 2016 and 2050, its population is projected to increase by half, to 2.5 billion (Okunade, 2021). As the population increases so does its intracontinental migration. People in Africa are travelling around more often for social, political, medical, economic, and sometimes safety reasons. Because of the importance of intracontinental mobility, the African Union has pushed for an open border or borderless Africa with smooth intracontinental migration. The AU believes that achieving this will improve regional development and integration, as well as help the continent come together to realize its renaissance.

In view of the above, this paper seeks to advance the arguments that question the viability of open-border migration in Africa. In the first section, I discuss the concept of migration and engage the open border or borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration proposed by the African Union. In the second section, I discuss xenophobia, specifically in South Africa. In the third section, I use Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi's views on Ubuntu, to show how the issue of xenophobia that many Africans encounter on the continent would prevent the goal of open-border mobility being successful. Considering the various xenophobic atrocities in South Africa, I question the relevance of Ubuntu, which stands for shared, reciprocal humanness, and a strong sense of community that is also welcoming to migrants. In response, I question Ubuntu's significance amid these xenophobic attacks and its utility once an open-border policy is put into place. In the final section, I question the merits and benefits of open borders for immigration to African nations that are experiencing (ethnic) conflicts and wars. Taking Nigeria as an example, I will briefly show that even if open borders for migration are made possible, many migrants' lives will be lost and many nations will be in disarray (if not destroyed) if the continent fails to adequately address and provide practical solutions to xenophobic attacks, and (ethnic) conflicts and wars.

African Union and Open-border Migration

Many African countries are still battling for political and economic stability decades after gaining their independence. For many of these countries, the idea of 'good governance' has been reduced to a myth, and for many African residents, it has become an all-too-common adage thrown at them whenever a politician takes the stage. Whatever the idea of good governance might be, it is clear from the numerous socio-political problems that the African population is currently facing that the continent has not been able to effectively implement it. The socio-humanistic experiences of Africa and Africans have remained largely unchanged due to ongoing challenges such as social conflict, widespread human

rights abuses, and government failures. Hence, many African countries are now widely recognized as having ineffective leadership and bad/weak governance (Sanni, 2022).

Notwithstanding these challenges, many Africans migrate to other African countries that they perceive as better than their own or that offer job or business opportunities, or the safety they desire. Their movement benefits their communities and families, which benefits their country. Less bureaucracy is what these migrants require to keep them secure and productive (Achieng, 2020). Today, the issue of migration is at the forefront of policy discourse in both Africa and much of the rest of the world (African Union, 2020). The African Union (2020) in its launch of the first edition of the Africa Migration Report in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reveals that almost 80% of migration in Africa is intra-continental. This shows that people migrate across Africa frequently, thereby placing the continent at the centre of global migration. Nearly all African countries participate in migratory processes and ‘the focus is always on the economic impact and/or role migrants play in their countries of origin and/or host countries’ (Achieng, 2020: 2).

According to Maureen Achieng (2020), up to 30,000 individuals may cross the border between the towns of Rusizi and Goma on the border between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo each day. Approximately 75% of them are women. The majority are travelling merchants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who supply the marketplaces in Rusizi with things like bananas, pagne (fabric), and other items. Some Rwandese traders cross the border to import packed products from further away, such as clothing, small gadgets, and other finished goods. In a similar vein, Southern Africa’s busiest road border station continues to be Beitbridge, which serves as the political border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. More than 30,000 individuals travel every day between South Africa and Zimbabwe for trade and other purposes thanks to the border post’s 24-hour opening. By offering inexpensive goods and competing for those that are not readily available on the market, cross-border trade responds to the economic opportunities between the two nations and is crucial in meeting consumer requirements in both (Achieng, 2020). This is of great importance as it also benefits the economies of both nations by fostering business growth, given that the economies of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe, and Musina, South Africa, both strongly rely on cross-border trade and trucking (Achieng, 2020). The border post between Nigeria and Benin is another example. Similarly, the opening of the Seme-Krake joint border post between Nigeria and Benin in October 2018 was anticipated to completely transform cross-border trade and travel within the broader Economic Community of Western African States

(ECOWAS) region. The border post will encourage regular migratory pathways and boost cooperation because it is strategically placed along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor, which accounts for 70% of all transit trade in the subregion (Achieng, 2020).

With a median age of 30.9 years, Africa was the continent with the youngest population of international migrants in 2019. The African Union reports that there has never been more intra-African mobility, with global migration to Africa rising from 13.3 million to 25.4 million migrants between 2008 and 2017 (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Surprisingly, the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) of the IOM reports that, when asked about migration in 2017, 80% of Africans stated that they had no interest in leaving the continent or moving elsewhere permanently (International Organization for Migration, 2020). This indicates that African migration is intracontinental.

As noted earlier, one of the Flagship Projects of the Agenda 2063 programme agreed to by Africa's political leadership is to have a common African passport that will enable the free movement of people, thereby expediting continental integration (African Union, 2015). The controversial European Union Schengen agreement, which eliminated numerous internal borders to permit passport-free travel within the bloc, served as the inspiration for the controversial African Union proposal (Henderson, 2016).

Thus, a borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental mobility is the goal of the 54 countries that are members of the African Union, which has made advancing regional integration and development a priority. Before allowing Africans to travel throughout the continent without a visa (the elimination of visa requirements for all African people in all African countries is envisaged), the bloc produced a single continental passport and first distributed it to state leaders. The endeavour was formalized in the AU Protocol on Free Movement of Persons two years later (Okunade, 2021). However, the continent's self-imposed deadlines for implementing the AU passport and establishing free mobility have failed to materialize. What appears to exist in the place of a borderless Africa is an intricate web of border controls that only partially permit unrestricted travel between some nations for some people (Okunade, 2021). According to Samuel Okunade (2021), the ECOWAS subregion, whose people can readily enter and remain in other member states without a visa, is the best example of this. The only nations that grant visa-free entry to all Africans are Benin, the Gambia, and the Seychelles, which are also the most liberal nations on the continent.

An Overview of Xenophobia in South Africa

Xenophobia is a form of discrimination towards a particular group of people because of their foreign origin or nationality (Jearey-Graham and Böhmke, 2013). Xenophobia is hatred and prejudice against foreigners (Laher, 2009). Attacks motivated by xenophobia can take many different forms, such as verbal abuse, indirect insults, and even chasing away and killing foreign nationals. In general, a xenophobic attack is any act of collective attack (by local communities, organizations, or crowds) directed towards foreigners or outsiders because they are strangers or foreigners (Misago, 2019). In South Africa, xenophobia can take many different forms, from routine street harassment to governmental discrimination and harassment as well as recurrent incidents of widespread xenophobic violence of all sizes and intensities. Strong evidence exists that those who are outsiders — a group that includes foreigners, domestic migrants, and others — and who live and work in South Africa encounter discrimination (Misago *et al.*, 2015: 20). Misago, Freemantle, and Loren Landau (2015) explain that citizens, government representatives, the police, and private companies hired to run and supply services, encourage urban development, or run detention and deportation procedures all contribute to this discrimination. More precisely, outsiders, including but not limited to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) persons of concern (PoC), encounter disproportionate challenges in finding work, housing, financial services, and health care, in addition to extortion, targeted corruption, arbitrary arrest, incarceration, and deportation. While research over the past 20 years reveals that such practices are regularly carried out in ways that are not only highly biased but also frequently extend well beyond legal limitations, arrest, imprisonment, and deportation and are important elements of a country's immigration process (Misago *et al.*, 2015: 20).

Xenophobia is not a recent phenomenon in South Africa, as it is in other regions of Africa and the rest of the world. In South Africa, violence against foreign nationals can be traced as far back as the 1990s. According to Misago *et al.* (2015), studies have repeatedly shown that since the 1990s, both the public and government officials have strong negative attitudes and antagonism towards foreigners. Mamabolo (2015: 144) suggests that 'the origin of xenophobia in South Africa is older than the outbreaks of 2008, traceable to the immediate post-1994 period' (2015: 144). Misago *et al.* (2015) affirm this when they state that xenophobic violence has become a persistent aspect of post-apartheid South Africa. Due to their position as outsiders or foreign nationals, tens of thousands of individuals have been harassed, attacked, or killed since 1994.

The recurrence of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals residing in South Africa, particularly foreign nationals from other African countries, is one of several violent events that have shocked the world in recent years. It should be emphasized that the country has had numerous xenophobic incidents over the years, the two most famous of which were in May 2008 and April 2015. In the xenophobic attacks in May 2008 there were ‘at least 62 dead, 670 wounded, dozens raped, more than 100,000 displaced’ (Misago et al., 2015: 20). The second incident in 2015 is thought to have resulted in seven fatalities and several other displaced victims (Okyere-Manu, 2016). Global media attention was drawn to these xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals, and several nations expressed grave concerns about the level of brutality and violence involved. Also, according to the African Centre for Migration and Society’s (ACMS) Xenowatch Dashboard, there were 1,011 instances of xenophobic discrimination in South Africa between 1994 and 1 May 2023, 124,706 displacements, 5,111 shops looted, and 659 deaths (ACMS, 2023; Misago, 2019). Despite instances of hospitality, tolerance, and South Africans standing up for the rights of foreigners, there is considerable evidence that South Africans are usually uneasy about the presence of Black and Asian non-nationals in the country (Misago et al., 2015).

Xenophobia is not a pleasant experience, nor is it an uncommon occurrence in other countries of the world. However, xenophobia is not as pervasive and violent as it is in South Africa (Mamabolo, 2015: 144). In South Africa, xenophobia is now associated with violent abuse and attacks against African immigrants. To this end, Mamabolo (2015: 144) notes that African immigrants from countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia, and Egypt have been the targets of xenophobic attacks, which is also consistent with their reputation as the most prosperous small and micro-business owners operating in towns, cities, and other locales. The above have not changed despite the apparent accomplishments of the formal and unofficial businesses run by foreign residents from nations other than Africa. Consequently, considering discussions thus far, it could be argued that free border migration in Africa and into South Africa in particular, would not be viable.

Ubuntu: The Concept

The central task of this section is to briefly discuss the concept of *Ubuntu*. As there are numerous works pertaining to Ubuntu, I do not intend to provide a detailed explanation and discussion of the concept¹.

¹ See, among others, authors like Mogobe Ramose (2000; 2003b; 2005), Augustine Shutte (2001), Michael Onyebuchi Eze (2008), Leonhard Praeg (2014), and Barbara Nussbaum (2009).

According to Mogobe Ramose, to affirm one's humanity by acknowledging the humanity of others and, based on that recognition, to build humane relationships with them is what it means to be a human be-ing. The essence of this aphorism is Ubuntu, which is defined as be-ing human (humanness) and having a human, respectful and polite attitude towards others (2003a). Ramose claims that the word "Ubuntu" is two words combined into one, namely, *ubu* and *ntu*. *Ubu* is concerned with be-ing in general because 'it is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity' (Ramose, 1999: 50). He explains that the unfolding of this enfolded be-ing is its constant orientation. This indicates that this enfolded be-ing seeks constant continuous concrete manifestation through certain forms and modalities of being. In this way, *ubu-* is always pointed in the direction of *ntu* (Ramose, 1999: 50). *Ntu* also depicts an ongoing unfolding process. *Ubu* and *ntu* are thus two facets of one be-ing. Ramose explains that:

Accordingly, *ubu-ntu* is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people. It is the indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of ontology and epistemology. *Ubu-* as the generalised understanding of be-ing may be said to be distinctly ontological, whereas *-ntu* as the nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be distinctly epistemological (1999: 50).

The word *umu-* and the word *ubu-* both possess the same ontological property. *Umu-* goes towards the more particular, whereas *ubu-* has the broadest range of generality (Ramose, 1999: 51). So, when these two words are joined together, they become *umuntu*. *Umuntu* means the human being. Ramose explains that 'in ubuntu philosophy, a human being in the world of the living must be *umuntu* in order to give a response to the challenges of the fundamental instability of be-ing' (1999: 64). And at the core of Ubuntu is the fundamental principle that 'a person is a person through the other persons'—'*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*'. Ubuntu 'signifies a shared, reciprocal humanness with a strong sense of community that is also hospitable to outsiders and is sometimes also strongly linked to respect for the natural environment' (Prozesky, 2009: 9). According to Thaddeus Metz and Joseph Gaia, the way to develop one's humanness is to relate with others in a positive way. Or, to put it in another way, 'one cannot realize one's true self in opposition to others or even in isolation from them' (Metz and Gaia, 2010: 275). To develop one's humanness or to become fully human one needs to be in community with others. Lesley Le Grange elucidates that Ubuntu 'conveys the idea of becoming human, the notion that humanness unfolds as an ongoing process in relationship with wider human and biophysical communi-

ties' (2012: 143). Also, 'to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them' (Ramose, 1999: 52). Humanity entails appreciating and respecting, among other things, the dignity, worth and integrity of others. This is not visible during xenophobic attacks, (ethnic) conflicts and wars.

According to Barbara Nussbaum, Ubuntu 'is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community' (2009: 100). Augustine Shutte simply asserts that Ubuntu is 'humanity' (2001). Reverend HM Dandala (1996: 80) defines Ubuntu as 'a bedrock of a specific lifestyle or culture that seeks to honour human relationships as primary in any social, communal or corporate activity. It is a key factor that lies at the core of human relationships, innovation and ultimately productivity.' Johann Broodryk gave a summary of the philosophy of Ubuntu that captures its essence. He encapsulated Ubuntu as follows: U-Universal, B-Behaviour, U-United, N-Negotiation, T-Tolerance, U-Understanding. For Broodryk (2005: 175), the African meaning of Ubuntu incorporates the terms global, intercultural brotherhood, human (humane), caring, sharing, respect, compassion (love, appreciation), solidarity, community, bond, family, consensus, democracy, patience, diplomacy, and empathy (forgiveness, kindness). In a nutshell, the maxim 'I am because we are' is frequently used by scholars to describe Ubuntu as communitarian ethics. In other words, the definition of Ubuntu places a strong focus on communitarian ethics and way of life. But attacks motivated by xenophobia, (ethnic) conflict, and war obscure the above.

Ubuntu, Xenophobia and Open Borders in Africa

A key concept in African literature is Ubuntu and, on which, African academics have concentrated their efforts to create an all-encompassing communal philosophy of the African culture. Ubuntu has been utilized in many contexts to demonstrate how African cultural values can impact its way of life. It embodies the essence of African humanity and the African ontology of humanness. In South African society, the rhetoric surrounding ubuntu is a mantra. In South African culture, the discussion of Ubuntu is universal and it could be argued that the ethics of social relations in South Africa are influenced by Ubuntu. However, due to the xenophobic attacks, on closer inspection, I am apt to say that ubuntu both as a way of life and as an ethical theory is at its end. By failing to recognize that our humanity is both a necessary and sufficient prerequisite for establishing and recognizing the humanity of others around us, xenophobic attacks undermine Ubuntu both as a way of life and as an ethical theory. It also

calls into question the concept itself.

How relevant is Ubuntu to migrants during xenophobic attacks? Matolino and Kwindiwi (2013), in their article 'The end of Ubuntu,' make the case that both Ubuntu as a way of life and as an ethical theory ought to reach its end. They contend that the assertion is the outcome of Ubuntu's failure in current African societies, both practically and theoretically. They further contend that the current situation in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent makes it unnecessary to invoke an ethic associated with discussions of Ubuntu, which southern Africans frequently use to describe distinctively sub-Saharan approaches to morality (Matolino and Kwindiwi, 2013). To this end, they state that 'Ubuntu can be characterized as one of the narratives of return' and it can also 'be linked to other narratives of return propounded by political leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda' (Matolino and Kwindiwi, 2013: 198).

The authors further clarify the above by citing two features of such narratives of return identified by Christian B. N. Gade (2011) to show how Ubuntu fits within this category. The first feature is that they are addressed in the context of social transformation, when political figures, scholars, and others try to pinpoint enduring principles that they think ought to guide contemporary politics and social progress. The second feature is the division of history into three phases, the first of which is the pre-colonial era, frequently regarded as the 'golden age,' and which is thought to have been distinguished by harmony and order. The second phase is a time of decline, which is thought to be typified by the invaders' attempts to rob and loot the African people of their dignity, resources, and culture. After achieving political freedom, Africans entered the third phase, known as the recovery phase, in which they try to reclaim their identity and dignity by reverting to traditional values (Gade, 2011: 304–305; Matolino and Kwindiwi, 2013).

Matolino and Kwindiwi (2013) argue that those who have used Ubuntu the most persuasively have done it in ways that serve sinister social purposes, including unnecessarily constraining conversations about how to live. They also assert that the moral principles of Ubuntu are only suitable for a bygone, pre-modern era, and finally conclude that Ubuntu in intellectual and political circles 'has reached its end' since it offers nothing ethically promising for a modern society and because appealing to it serves undesirable goals.

In South Africa, Ubuntu was practically used in every facet of daily life. Ubuntu has gained so much popularity that it could be said it is now everything to everyone who wants to use it (Matolino and Kwindiwi, 2013: 198). Given this,

it could mean xenophobia to someone. This, however, might be a harsh interpretation of Ubuntu. However, how relevant is Ubuntu during a time of crisis? One could argue that xenophobic incidents show a lack of Ubuntu in the individuals involved or in their community. But like Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013), I am compelled to inquire as to whether such a value is shared, acknowledged, or regularly practised by those who participated in the xenophobic attacks. What one might discover in the community(ies) of the participating individuals is a variety of opposing values that are often governed by local law without necessarily attempting to be interpreted in the context of Ubuntu.

I think that Ubuntu as a narrative of return will not help in borderless migration and hence, the latter will not be possible. In its current state, South Africa does not create the sense that its social ontology is governed by Ubuntu ethical principles. The kinds of behaviour and relationships that Ubuntu calls for are not being exhibited in modern South Africa. The continual occurrence of xenophobic attacks simply shows that Ubuntu has no effect here; if it did, such atrocities would not keep repeating themselves. Indeed, one can argue that xenophobic attacks depict a lack of Ubuntu in those involved or in their community. Ubuntu has not been successful or 'in the game' during xenophobic attacks, even as a narrative of return. Ubuntu is no longer what it was during the apartheid and colonial eras. Ubuntu was used to demonstrate the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and the apartheid system and the necessity to end them (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 198).

In South Africa, xenophobic attacks, as discussed above, are nothing new and, as pointed out, violence against foreign nationals has been traceable to the 1990s. However, the continued attacks on foreign nationals makes one question the possibility of achieving open-border migration even more. Furthermore, how significant will Ubuntu be during xenophobic attacks once an open border policy is put into place? From what has been witnessed during these attacks, one can rightly say that it will be of no significance. Rather, it will rather endanger the lives of many innocent Africans. Currently, xenophobia in South Africa is linked to violent abuse and assaults against African immigrants. These African immigrants are accused of either taking or stealing South Africans' jobs and businesses, providing goods at cheaper prices, and the reason for the existence of drugs and drug-related activities in the community. Taking from what Misago, Freemantle and Landau (2015) have argued, South Africans are usually uneasy about the presence of Black and Asian non-nationals in the country. The concept of Ubuntu is, in a way, called into doubt by this unease. Many, but not all, migrants experience attitudes and behaviour from South Africans that involve stereotyping, discrimination, and abuse as part of these macro-so-

biological enablers of xenophobia. Furthermore, there is evidence of hostility among South Africans against street vendors who are not South Africans (Jerey-Graham and Böhmke, 2013). So, if xenophobic attacks are premised on these reasons, how viable is an open-border policy? Given that Ubuntu was not at work (or even in the minds and hearts of the individuals involved) when these xenophobic attacks took place, will it be at work in a borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration? My response is negative.

The African Union (2020), in its launch of the first edition of the Africa Migration Report in collaboration with the IOM, H. E. Amira Elfadil, an African Union commissioner, spoke about the relationship between free mobility on the continent and how the COVID-19 affected it. Also spoken about was the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the potential for young Africans to create jobs. The commissioner emphasized that no young African person should risk their lives in search of a better life and that no African soul should be lost in the Mediterranean while travelling to Europe (African Union, 2020). While this is a welcome idea, Elfadil failed to address what might hinder the above, namely, xenophobia. Although there is evidence of several instances in which Africans still lose their lives in the Mediterranean Sea, there is also evidence, as shown, of xenophobic violence against Africans in various African countries. One is forced to look for a better life outside of Africa life due to the possibility of encountering xenophobic attacks on the continent. Better racism (outside of Africa) than xenophobia, one may argue.

As a response to Elfadil, it could be argued that losing one's life in the Mediterranean Sea cannot be equal to the savagery of xenophobic attacks. I do not intend to compare the two, but I want to highlight that xenophobic attacks seem more severe to me, considering that the person engaging in such a brutal attack is an African, a human, or a black person whom you consider a brother or sister. Consequently, is it possible to compare an action between two humans to an action between the sea and humans? Why would someone not choose to risk their life while crossing the Mediterranean to get to Europe rather than be slain by another (African) person? Upon closer examination, consider the implications of xenophobia in the context of an open-border or borderless Africa, characterised by seamless intracontinental migration. I am of the opinion that it will be very brutal and devastating. Also, consider the brutality that occurred in South Africa when individuals were accused of theft and other offences in a closed-border context, and imagine how much more severe it could become in the context of open borders.

From the above, it seems that the principles of Ubuntu should have persisted

despite concerns of foreign nationals taking the jobs that South Africans believe belong to them. However, given that time and changing conditions have affected and influenced their practices and values, it is evident that these same factors have had a huge impact on Ubuntu, leading to its decline. This decline explains why it was ineffective in situations where it should have thrived. In South Africa the concept of Ubuntu has changed over time and, as a result, people have neglected it and its core principles. Allowing people to reflect on a concept handed to them many years ago and living up to its demands is necessary for them to live within the bounds of the normative demands of Ubuntu. These include a shared, reciprocal humanness and a strong sense of community that is also welcoming to migrants in the face of existential problems. This, it appears, has proven to be difficult. Therefore, I would argue that the absence of Ubuntu amid xenophobic attacks represents an existential crisis that would have been unimaginable to the traditional Africans who originally practiced it.

(Ethnic) Conflicts, Wars and Open Borders

Many countries in Africa, including Nigeria, South Africa, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi, have gone through (and some still are going through) conflicts and dysfunction brought on by differences between ethnic groups, religious groups, and communities as a result of colonialism. For instance, national unity is not as valued in Nigeria as tribal or regional solidarity. As a result, Nigeria struggles to accept ethnic and religious diversity among its citizens, which is undoubtedly the country's main issue currently (Nwosimiri, 2021; Nwosimiri, 2022). Nigeria is divided because of ethno-religious strife. The colonial invasion that introduced the indirect rule policy through the agency of native rulers in the Northern Protectorate (Hausa/Fulani) and the Southern Protectorate (Yoruba/Igbo) forcing the regions to become a single political entity in 1914 (Falola, 1999) can, in retrospect, be seen as the beginning of the history of ethno-religious conflicts in the country. These native leaders consider religion and ethnicity to be fundamental to effective government. According to Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, this political merger 'into a single Nigeria was [...] inorganic, alien, and transformative' (2008: 109).

Between 1980 to the present, there have been numerous ethno-religious confrontations in the north of the country. In many places throughout the north, people, churches, and mosques are the main targets for destruction during these clashes. Some of these ethno-religious conflicts include the Kano riots in 1953, the Maitatsine crisis in Kano in 1980, the Kafanchan crisis of 1987, 1999, the Reinhard Bonke riot in Kano, 1991 (and other riots in Kano, 1984, 2001),

the Zangon Kataf crisis in 1992, the Kaduna Polytechnic crisis of 1992, the Jos crises of 1994, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010, and the Boko Haram attacks since 2009 (Sule, 2015; Meagher, 2013). Muslims attacked Christians during these waves of religious conflict, and Christians responded in kind (Nwosimiri, 2022).

Boko Haram, the so-called “Nigerian Taliban” from Northeastern Nigeria, has, since July 2009, escalated its attacks on the Nigerian government and its people. It has launched a systematic campaign of bombings, kidnappings, and drive-by shootings on a variety of government and civilian targets (Agbiboa, 2015), and many lives have been lost because of this. Due to an escalated state offensive against Boko Haram, thousands of Nigerians are fleeing into neighbouring countries out of fear of retaliation attacks and overall insecurity. Women and children constitute the majority of those fleeing (Agbiboa, 2015). Similarly, Harakat Al-Shabab al-Mujahedeen (aka Al-Shabab), the Somali-based Islamist terrorist group has been launching attacks on their region (Agbiboa, 2014). It is evident that migrating to these and similar countries will not be of any benefit and will cause more harm than good.

Thus, ethnic conflicts and wars (and other issues) can hamper the whole idea of open-border migration in Africa. If member states decide to continue with open-border migration, migrants’ lives will be lost and many of their countries will be in disarray. This is possibly the reason why the idea of a borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration has not been achieved. Free mobility across Africa is definitely a potential security danger. Okunade (2021) rightly notes that this seems to be the concern of several member states. Religious extremists, separatist organisations, and other militants have carried out violent crimes and destroyed public and private property throughout the continent, frequently taking advantage of open borders to transfer fighters, weapons, and ideas between nations. Examples include the aforementioned al-Shabab, which evolved from Somalia to become a security concern in East Africa and the Horn, and Boko Haram, which began in Nigeria but eventually spread throughout the Lake Chad basin (Okunade, 2021). The recent formation of Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jammah (ASWJ) in Mozambique and the SADC region’s ineffective response to it has allowed the extremist group the chance to network with other jihadist organizations and there is now the risk of its formation developing into a significant regional security issue. States frequently isolate themselves from their neighbours in response to these dangers, although this tactic frequently backfires. African borders are porous, making it difficult for many states to adequately police their perimeters on their own; this necessitates a concerted regional effort (Okunade, 2021).

If the above issues have proven difficult for a country to manage, this would become more so when they spread all over Africa due to an open-border policy. Unless these issues are addressed, an open-border or borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration will not be possible. Furthermore, Africans need to understand the deeper role of migration. As emphasized by Maureen Achieng, 'A deeper understanding of the role migration needs to play in an Africa that is moving stridently towards continental integration has never been more urgent' (African Union, 2020). This highlights the significance of migration and if this cannot be understood, then the idea of a borderless Africa is merely an illusion. The continent must look for ways to adequately address and provide practical solutions to xenophobic attacks, (ethnic) conflicts, and wars before thinking about an-open border or borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration.

Conclusion

My aim in this paper was to advance arguments that question the viability of open-border migration in Africa. This was achieved by questioning the relevance of Ubuntu, which stands for shared, reciprocal humanness and a strong sense of community, and also questioning the significance of Ubuntu amid xenophobic attacks and its utility once an open-border policy is put into place. The paper also questions the merits and benefits of open borders for immigration to African nations that are experiencing wars and (ethnic) conflicts. In the first section, I discussed the concept of migration and open-border or borderless Africa with seamless intracontinental migration proposed by the African Union. In the second section, I discussed xenophobia, specifically in South Africa. In the third section and using Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindingwi's views on Ubuntu, I showed how the issue of xenophobia that many Africans encounter on the continent would prevent the goal of open-border mobility from being successful. In the fourth section, I showed that if open borders for migration is persisted with, many migrants' lives will be lost and many nations will be in disarray (if not destroyed) unless the continent adequately addresses and provides practical solutions to xenophobic attacks, (ethnic) conflicts, and wars.

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