

LbE 2012 “Everyone’s different – Respect for Minorities

Episode 06

A Hostile New Home – Xenophobia in South Africa

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Characters

<i>Narrator</i>	female	about 30	english
<i>Marie</i> <i>(pseudonym)</i>	female	in her mid 30s	english
<i>Baruti Amisi</i>	male	in his mid 40s	english
<i>Jahmil Qubeka</i>	male	in his early 30s	english
<i>Collage of 3</i> <i>South Africans</i>	2 female voices 1 male voice		english

Intro:

Welcome to episode six of our Learning by Ear series about respect for minorities in Africa. Today we're focussing on the complex issue of xenophobia in South Africa. Xenophobia is defined as an unreasonable fear of foreigners or strangers. These hostile feelings occur all over the world and are not unique to South Africa. But a few years ago violent attacks against foreigners on the southern tip of the continent escalated sharply. Today, unfortunately, life for immigrants in South Africa is still very hard and even dangerous, especially for African immigrants. But there are also initiatives aimed at preventing violence, and these are having some success.

1. Sound: Durban Downtown

2. Narrator:

The streets in downtown Durban are notoriously busy. Taxis are hooting to attract new customers, people are crossing the street in large groups, sidewalks are covered with little stands where women are selling anything from fruit and vegetables to phone cards and plastic containers. To my eyes, Marie doesn't stand out from the crowd. She's pushing her baby girl along in a pram, her hair neatly braided, wearing a pink shirt and a long white skirt. But 36-year-old Marie is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She tells me that locals always know that she's a foreigner, and they make clear to her that she isn't welcome.

3. Marie:

We are living here in South Africa by the grace of God, because we know these people don't love us. Every time saying: "Hey Makwerekwere!" If you are going to the market and you don't know the language, it's a problem. They use their language and when you don't understand they say "Hamba, Makwerekwere!" They chase you.

4. Narrator:

"Makwerekwere" is a derogatory slang word used by South Africans to intimidate and insult foreigners, specifically African immigrants. It has violent associations since 2008, which saw an outbreak of xenophobic attacks in the townships - the poor areas where black people were forced to live under apartheid. All across the country immigrants were beaten and burned to death. Others were injured; their shops were looted and their houses destroyed.

KW begin

Marie, who fled war and trauma in her own country and is still too afraid to use her real name, remembers those weeks of constant fear.

5. Marie:

They say: "Hey, you are a foreigner, what are you doing in our country? Go back to your country." They can assault you. They can do anything they want to you. And at that time we were running to the church and living there. We were doing that for 2 to 3 months, in the church, without going outside. The pastor brought food there. The children never went to school for these 3 months, because it was too bad.

KW end

6. Narrator:

The situation was especially serious in 2008; but xenophobia was not a new phenomenon then, and it's still rife in the poor areas in and around the cities today, as Baruti Amisi stresses. He also came to South Africa from the Democratic Republic of Congo as a refugee, and now works as a researcher at the University of Kwazulu Natal.

7. Baruti Amisi:

I am in South Africa since 1997. We have witnessed a lot of cases of xenophobia: I have seen people are being stabbed simply because they couldn't speak some local languages, and I've seen people being killed for that. In Western Cape people are being killed and cut into pieces. So you can see how far people's anger can push them. They kill people and they cut the body into pieces. And that was before 2008.

8. Narrator:

Of course not all South Africans hate foreigners. Many offered support when the violence was at its peak, while others like the young filmmaker Jahmil Qubeka started speaking out publicly against xenophobia in 2008.

9. Jahmil Qubeka:

I felt very ashamed to be a South African at that time. I was like: "Oh my God, not in our name. Why is something like this happening?" You can't understand it. We as South Africans, during apartheid, we were refugees in other countries. Now we are so intolerant of other people. That was a major issue for me.

10. Sound: Township

11. Narrator:

But the situation, especially in the urban townships, is still tense. African immigrants and refugees, who came to South Africa hoping for a better life, are still being attacked. Competition for jobs and housing often fuels the violence in poorer areas. These three South Africans say what many people are feeling.

12. Collage:

We have got a problem with these foreigners. They don't grow the economy in South Africa. They just take and go.

(woman)

People are furious. They can even kill in order to get a house.

(young man)

We don't want them here. South Africa is for South Africans only. We fought for this South Africa. Now it is for us. The freedom is for us.

(woman)

13. Narrator:

Ironically, it is this freedom that attracts other Africans from poorer and conflict-ridden countries. Estimates of the total number of both legal and illegal immigrants in South Africa range from 3 to 7 million. Tens of thousands who fled the areas of xenophobic violence in 2008 are still living in churches and other shelters, too scared to return to the townships.

14. Sound: Apartment, distant traffic and voices

15. Narrator:

Marie, her husband and their five children are living in one of the high-rise apartment blocks in Durban's city centre. The place is tiny: one bedroom, and a living room which turns into the children's bedroom at night. The rent consumes most of their income, but at least they feel relatively safe.

16. Marie:

Oh, in the townships it is worse. We are scared to live there because of crime. They can kill you. Who will look for you? No one. They can take everything you have. That is why all foreigners are living in town. Life is difficult, because we are living here: rent high, electricity high, water. There in the townships it is cheaper. But we can't live there.

17. Sound: Durban street & voices

18. Narrator:

But even here in the city, xenophobia is a daily experience. Immigrants from other African countries aren't necessarily attacked, but they get sworn at, they are discriminated against, exploited and abused.

KW begin

Marie and her family have experienced a lot of that. Her children are called names in school. Their former landlord kicked them out of their last apartment, supposedly because he wanted to renovate it. He didn't care that the family didn't have anywhere else to go.

KW end

Researcher Baruti Amisi, who also is the CEO of the Kwazulu Natal Council of Refugees, has heard plenty of stories like this.

19. Baruti Amisi:

Some landlords are willing to give their space to non-South-Africans. Why? They won't complain about maintenance, they'll be threatened easily, they don't know their rights. They can be abused easily, because nobody cares about them. Because if I call the police now, they will come tomorrow, because they hear my accent. Our children are not accepted in all schools on the assumption that we cannot afford school fees. Refugee women have been traumatised when they are going to give birth, simply because they are not South African. So I can list different forms of xenophobia here. You can't believe it.

KW begin

20. Sound: Church, singing / Or repeat Sound 14 apartment

21. Narrator:

The hatred of foreigners is even being spread in church, says Marie, as her nine-month-old daughter plays on her lap. Marie is a Christian, and like many of her Congolese friends she belongs to a charismatic church in Durban which offers support and shelter to refugees in distress. She was shocked when she heard a South African pastor preaching the gospel of xenophobia.

22. Marie:

Imagine - he is a pastor, he knew we are there, but he said: We are tired of you foreigners. They must go back to their home. They are stealing our work, they are stealing our daughters to be their wife. He is saying that in public, a bishop with a big church, telling them how to deal with the foreigners. That is why we say: These people from here, they can't love us.

23. Narrator:

Marie shakes her head in a mixture of disbelief and resignation. She doesn't understand why many people here, in the so-called Rainbow Nation, can't see other Africans as their brothers and sisters. A question which has also been raised by researchers.

KW end

Baruti Amisi has studied the causes of this widespread hostility against foreigners and found a number of answers. The unemployment rate is high; South Africans are accusing immigrants of stealing their jobs by offering work for low wages. There is competition on the retail market; foreign shop-owners are regularly the victims of xenophobic violence. There is a lack of proper housing in the poor areas, which also leads to conflict. And in spite of the South African legislation, people on the streets don't differentiate between refugees and economic migrants.

24. Baruti Amisi:

When you don't make the distinction between those coming here to look for jobs and those who are coming here because their lives are being threatened, the easiest understanding of people's presence here is that they are coming to take our jobs. So the assumption is that they are here to steal our women, they are coming here to steal our jobs, they are coming here to bring diseases and crime.

KW begin

So from that perception of threat, of being invaded, the normal reaction is to protect themselves. So they need to attack people before they begin to attack them, because they are criminals, they are selling drugs, they are bringing diseases, they are stealing women and jobs.

KW end

25. Sound: Refugee council, distant voices

26. Narrator:

Baruti Amisi is sitting at his desk in the tiny office of the Kwazulu Natal Council of Refugees in central Durban, an umbrella body constituting nearly two dozen migrant communities in the province as well as other organisations. Besides the day-to-day support volunteers offer to refugees, they also try to organize workshops in the poor areas in and around town.

27. Baruti Amisi:

We are creating space for what we call social cohesion, where South Africans are coming together with non-South-Africans to discuss their own and common issues, to discover their own humanity. Because in the process, people usually discover that they are all suffering. So instead of fighting one another, they should come together.

28. Narrator:

Focussing on the challenges that both poor South Africans and immigrants are facing is an approach that works, Baruti Amisi says with a proud smile.

29. Baruti Amisi:

We are able to prevent xenophobic violence in the townships. One: people are speaking to each other. Two: through the networks that we have on the ground, people are able to point out hotspots, issues which may lead to tensions, tensions which can be defused. And we did it in several townships. So we are making a lot of impact.

KW begin

And generally speaking, when people are moving the focus from antagonism, from enemies, to brotherhood, to community building, to social cohesion; that by itself is a huge success.

KW end

30. Narrator:

Baruti Amisi hopes that there will be more funding for programmes like this in the future, so that xenophobia in South Africa isn't only addressed when immigrants are being killed. In the long term, prevention is the most powerful tool.

Outro:

We hope you enjoyed listening to today's Learning by Ear programme about discrimination against migrants in South Africa. Our reporter was Leonie March. If you would like to find out more, listen to this broadcast again, or to the other Learning by Ear programmes, please visit our website at www.dw.de/lbe. You can also send us your comments at our Facebook-page.

Thank you for listening, and don't forget to tune in again for our next episode. Goodbye.