

Social Media, Historical Memory, and Xenophobic Discourse in Africa: from "Ghana Must Go" to Anti-African Sentiments in South Africa

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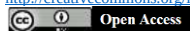
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ABSTRACT

Social media has transformed historical memory into a dynamic communicative resource capable of shaping contemporary public opinion, identity formation, and intergroup relations across Africa. Against the backdrop of recurring xenophobic violence in South Africa and the enduring remembrance of Nigeria's 1983 and 1985 "Ghana Must Go" expulsions, this study examined how digital platforms reconstruct historical memory to shape contemporary xenophobic discourse and Pan-African identity. Specifically, it explored dominant social media narratives on xenophobia, analysed the reconstruction of the "Ghana Must Go" episode in online discourse, compared historical and contemporary migration narratives, and examined their influence on public perceptions of African migrants and Pan-African solidarity. The study adopted a qualitative historical-content analysis design, integrating historical inquiry with Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Data comprised historical documentary materials and 72 criterion-based selected social media artefacts drawn from X, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram during major xenophobic episodes in South Africa between 2015 and 2026. The findings reveal that contemporary digital discourse is dominated by narratives of economic nationalism, exclusionary identity and migrant criminalisation, while historical memory is selectively reconstructed and mobilised to legitimise or contest xenophobic attitudes. The study further establishes that social media simultaneously amplifies Afrophobic narratives and facilitates counter-discourses promoting Pan-African solidarity. It concludes that digitally mediated historical memory has become a critical determinant of contemporary migration discourse in Africa and recommends coordinated digital literacy initiatives, historically informed public communication, and continental policy frameworks that promote lawful migration, intercultural dialogue, and the Pan-African ideals of justice, fraternity and shared belonging.

1. Introduction

Migration remains one of the defining features of human civilisation, facilitating the exchange of cultures, labour, ideas, and identities across geographical boundaries. In Africa, migration predates colonialism and has historically served as a mechanism for economic survival, regional integration, and cultural interaction. The establishment of regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) further institutionalised the ideal of African mobility and solidarity, promoting the vision of a continent in which Africans could move, trade, and coexist beyond the artificial borders imposed by colonial rule. Despite these aspirations, contemporary Africa continues to grapple with recurring episodes of xenophobia, exclusion, and hostility toward fellow Africans, exposing a profound contradiction between the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the realities of national identity politics. Scholars have argued that economic insecurity, political competition, and social anxieties often transform migrants into convenient scapegoats during periods of national crisis, thereby fostering exclusionary attitudes and practices (Daly, 2023).

The phenomenon of xenophobia has become increasingly visible across the African continent, particularly in societies experiencing economic hardship, rising unemployment, and heightened social inequality. Xenophobia refers to fear, hostility, or prejudice directed against foreigners or perceived

outsiders, often resulting in discrimination, stigmatisation, and violence. Although often associated with Europe and North America, xenophobic sentiments have emerged with considerable intensity within African states themselves, challenging assumptions about a shared continental identity. In recent years, South Africa has become a focal point of scholarly and media attention due to repeated attacks on African migrants, including Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Ethiopians, Ivoirians, Mozambicans, Ugandans, and Ghanaians. These attacks have frequently been justified through narratives that portray migrants as responsible for crime, unemployment, and declining public services, despite limited empirical evidence supporting such claims (Crush & Ramachandran, 2017; Misago, 2019). The persistence of these sentiments has raised concerns about the future of African integration and the practical viability of Pan-African ideals.

Long before the emergence of contemporary anti-immigrant violence in South Africa, West Africa witnessed one of the most significant episodes of mass expulsion in postcolonial African history. Popularly remembered through the phrase “Ghana Must Go,” the 1983 expulsion of undocumented migrants from Nigeria forced over one million West African nationals, predominantly Ghanaians, to leave the country within a short period. The event was driven by economic recession, increasing unemployment, declining state resources, and political pressures associated with economic nationalism (Aremu, 2018; Daly, 2023). Although frequently remembered as a uniquely Nigerian phenomenon, historical evidence suggests that it was part of a broader pattern of migration restrictions and expulsions that characterised several African states during periods of economic uncertainty. The episode remains deeply embedded within the collective memory of West Africans and continues to function as a symbolic reminder of the fragility of African solidarity during times of crisis.

One of the many things that might distinguish contemporary xenophobic discourse from earlier manifestations is the transformative role of digital communication technologies. The rise of social media has fundamentally altered how migration, identity, and belonging are discussed, contested, and remembered. Unlike traditional media, which operate through institutional gatekeeping mechanisms, social media platforms allow ordinary citizens to create, disseminate, and amplify narratives in real time. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp have therefore become central arenas where perceptions of migrants are constructed, challenged, and negotiated. Research indicates that digital media facilitate the rapid circulation of stereotypes, rumours, and emotionally charged content capable of reinforcing social divisions and deepening hostility toward perceived outsiders (Chiumbu & Moyo, 2018; Mpofu, 2021).

The relationship between social media and xenophobia is particularly significant because digital platforms do not merely reflect public opinion; they actively shape it. Through hashtags, memes, videos, and user-generated commentary, social media contribute to the creation of discursive frames that define who belongs and who does not. In the South African context, studies have shown that online discussions frequently construct foreign nationals as economic competitors, criminals, and threats to national development, thereby legitimizing exclusionary attitudes and, in some cases, violent actions (Moyo, 2020; Wasserman, 2018). Such representations are often reinforced by political rhetoric, sensational media reporting, and algorithmic amplification, creating digital echo chambers in which xenophobic narratives gain legitimacy and widespread visibility. Consequently, understanding xenophobia in contemporary Africa requires attention not only to socio-economic realities but also to the communicative processes through which migrants are represented and interpreted.

Equally important is the role of historical memory in shaping contemporary online discourse. Historical memory refers to the ways societies remember, reinterpret, and mobilize past events in the present. Within discussions surrounding anti-Nigerian sentiments in South Africa, references to the “Ghana Must Go” episode frequently emerge as rhetorical tools through which social media users justify, condemn, or contextualise contemporary xenophobic practices. For some users, the historical expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria serves as evidence that no African nation possesses an uncontested moral authority on issues of tolerance and hospitality. For others, the memory of Nigeria’s extensive political, diplomatic, and financial support for the anti-apartheid struggle intensifies perceptions of betrayal when Nigerians become targets of xenophobic violence in South Africa (Adebajo, 2010; Landsberg, 2012). Historical memory therefore functions not merely as a record of past events but as an active communicative resource employed in contemporary debates concerning migration, identity, and justice.



From media perspective, the convergence of social media, historical memory, and xenophobic discourse presents a critical area of scholarly inquiry. Communication scholars increasingly recognize that media narratives play a significant role in constructing social realities, influencing public perceptions, and shaping collective identities. Through processes of framing, agenda-setting, and discourse production, media institutions and digital platforms determine which aspects of migration are emphasized, which voices are amplified, and which interpretations become dominant within the public sphere (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004). Consequently, the study of xenophobia cannot be separated from the study of communication because media environments constitute the primary spaces through which meanings about migrants are produced, circulated, contested, and normalized. The manner in which historical events such as the “Ghana Must Go” episode are remembered and reinterpreted online may significantly influence contemporary attitudes toward African migrants and the broader project of continental integration.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of xenophobic discourse across Africa, particularly on social media platforms, has exposed a troubling contradiction between the continent’s long-standing ideals of Pan-African solidarity and the realities of exclusionary nationalism. While historical events such as the 1983 “Ghana Must Go” expulsion in Nigeria remain deeply embedded in Africa’s collective memory, contemporary anti-Nigerian sentiments and periodic xenophobic attacks in South Africa have revived debates about belonging, citizenship, and inter-African relations. Social media platforms have become central spaces where these debates are articulated, amplified, and contested, enabling users to draw upon historical memories to justify, condemn, or reinterpret present-day hostilities toward African migrants. Despite growing scholarship on xenophobia, migration, and digital communication in Africa, there remains limited research examining how historical events such as “Ghana Must Go” episode are mobilised within contemporary social media discourse to shape perceptions of Nigerians and other African migrants in South Africa. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of the communicative relationship between historical memory, social media narratives, and the construction of xenophobic attitudes in Africa. This gap necessitates an investigation into how digital platforms mediate collective memory and influence contemporary xenophobic discourse, with implications for journalism, media practice, intercultural communication, and the broader project of African integration.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this work was to examine how social media reconstructs historical memory to shape contemporary xenophobic discourse and Pan-African identity in Africa. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine dominant social media narratives on xenophobia,
2. analyse how *Ghana Must Go* is reconstructed online;
3. compare historical and contemporary migration narratives, and
4. assess how these narratives influence perceptions of migrants and Pan-African solidarity.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant themes and narratives in social media discourse on xenophobia and anti-African sentiments in South Africa?
2. How is the historical memory of the "*Ghana Must Go*" episode reconstructed, interpreted, and mobilised in contemporary social media discourse on xenophobia in South Africa?
3. What similarities and differences exist between the historical narratives of the "*Ghana Must Go*" episode and contemporary social media narratives on xenophobia in South Africa?
4. How do social media narratives and reconstructed historical memories influence public perceptions of African migrants, inter-African relations, and Pan-African solidarity?

Empirical Review

The dominant themes and narratives in social media discourse on xenophobia and anti-African sentiments in South Africa

Raborife, Ogbuokiri and Aruleba (2024) investigated the role of social media in shaping xenophobic discourse in South Africa with the objective of determining whether sentiments expressed on X (formerly Twitter) could explain or predict xenophobic violence. The study was anchored on computational sentiment analysis and digital communication perspectives that view social media as both a reflector and amplifier of public opinion. Employing a quantitative design, the researchers analysed tweets posted between 2017 and 2022 using Natural Language Processing (NLP), sentiment analysis and machine learning techniques to classify attitudes toward foreign nationals. The findings revealed that negative sentiments significantly outweighed positive ones, with discussions largely revolving around crime, unemployment, illegal migration and competition for scarce resources. The study concluded that social media discourse has become a useful predictor of emerging xenophobic tensions and recommended the deployment of artificial intelligence-based monitoring systems to detect hate speech and provide early warning signals for policymakers and security agencies. While the study offers valuable computational evidence of online xenophobic sentiment, it is limited by its reliance on automated text classification, which provides little insight into the historical narratives and communicative meanings embedded within digital conversations. The present study addresses this limitation by employing qualitative reflexive thematic analysis to interpret how historical memory intersects with contemporary xenophobic discourse.

Similarly, a study on **#PutSouthAfricansFirst** (2024/2026 publication) examined how hashtag activism on Black Twitter promoted xenophobic discourse in South Africa. The principal objective was to explore the dominant narratives circulating within the hashtag and their implications for public opinion regarding African migrants. Guided by Agenda Setting Theory and Discourse Theory, the researchers adopted a qualitative netnographic approach and purposively selected tweets posted between June and July 2023 for discourse analysis. The study found that the hashtag was dominated by narratives portraying migrants as criminals, job stealers, and threats to national identity, while political rhetoric reinforced public hostility towards African immigrants. The researchers concluded that social media hashtags function as agenda-setting mechanisms capable of legitimising exclusionary ideologies and recommended stronger content moderation alongside digital literacy initiatives to counter online hate speech. Although the study provides rich insights into hashtag-driven xenophobic mobilisation, it focuses exclusively on a single campaign and does not examine how historical events such as the "*Ghana Must Go*" episode are invoked within broader social media discourse. The present study extends this line of inquiry by integrating historical memory into the analysis of anti-African narratives across multiple social media platforms.

How the historical memory of "Ghana Must Go" episode is invoked, interpreted, and mobilised in contemporary social media discussions on xenophobia in South Africa

Mngomezulu and Dube (2019) critically examined the conceptualisation of xenophobia in Africa, using the recurrent references to the "*Ghana Must Go*" episode as an entry point for understanding contemporary anti-foreigner sentiments in South Africa. The objective of the study was to interrogate the appropriateness of the concept of xenophobia in explaining attacks directed mainly at African migrants and to determine whether concepts such as Afrophobia or Negrophobia more accurately describe the South African experience. The study was informed by critical postcolonial perspectives and

conceptual analysis rather than a single formal theory. Adopting a qualitative analytical methodology, the authors relied on documentary evidence, historical records, policy documents and scholarly literature to examine the evolution of anti-immigrant violence in Africa. The study found that the repeated invocation of the "Ghana Must Go" episode in public discourse often oversimplifies historical realities and obscures the unique political, economic and historical circumstances surrounding xenophobic violence in South Africa. The authors concluded that the indiscriminate application of the term "xenophobia" masks the specifically anti-African character of these attacks and argued that "Afrophobia" provides a more accurate conceptual description. They recommended greater conceptual precision in academic and policy discourse to facilitate more effective responses to anti-African violence. Nevertheless, the study concentrated on conceptual clarification and historical interpretation without investigating how historical memories are reconstructed and disseminated through contemporary social media platforms. The present study addresses this gap by examining the digital mobilisation of the "Ghana Must Go" narrative within contemporary online conversations on xenophobia.

Odok (2020) investigated the relationship between social media, nationalism and xenophobic solidarity in postcolonial Africa with the objective of determining how digital platforms reinforce in-group identities and anti-foreigner attitudes across selected African countries. The study was anchored on the concepts of social cohesion, social capital and postcolonial nationalism. Employing a qualitative design, the researcher conducted a systematic review of immigration policies alongside content analysis of Facebook newsfeeds from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The findings demonstrated that social media have become powerful instruments for reconstructing national identities, legitimising anti-immigrant sentiments and strengthening exclusionary solidarities. The study concluded that digital communication increasingly transforms historical migration experiences into contemporary political narratives capable of fuelling xenophobic attitudes across national borders. It recommended strengthening digital citizenship education and community-based interventions capable of promoting intercultural dialogue and reducing online hostility. Although the study acknowledges the historical dimensions of migration narratives, it does not specifically analyse how the "Ghana Must Go" experience is reconstructed within present-day South African social media discourse. This omission provides an important justification for the current study.

How social media narratives influence public perceptions of African migrants, inter-African relations, and Pan-African solidarity in the context of xenophobic discourse

McBrown (2025) examined digital reactions to the Chidimma Adetshina controversy in South Africa with the objective of interrogating how social media discussions construct belonging, citizenship and national identity in relation to African migrants. The study was guided by a decolonial theoretical perspective that interrogates coloniality, identity formation and the politics of belonging within African societies. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the researcher analysed online discussions on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook alongside media reports relating to the Miss South Africa controversy. The findings revealed that social media conversations reinforced competing notions of nationality, citizenship and belonging through hashtags such as #PutSouthAfricansFirst, #ForeignersMustGo, and #WeWantOurCountryBack, while simultaneously providing spaces for resistance and inclusive identity formation. The study concluded that digital media have become central arenas where competing understandings of African identity and citizenship are negotiated. It recommended sustained public dialogue, media literacy and decolonial approaches to citizenship education as strategies for mitigating digitally amplified xenophobia. While the study provides significant insights into digital belonging and online identity construction, it focuses on a contemporary media controversy and does not examine the influence of historical memory on these digital narratives. The present study extends this scholarship by integrating historical memory with digital discourse analysis to explain contemporary perceptions of African migrants.

Pillay (2024) investigated the phenomenon of Afrophobic hypernationalism through the hashtag #PutSouthAfricansFirst, with the objective of explaining how social media contributes to anti-Black African exclusionary politics in post-apartheid South Africa. The study was informed by critical race scholarship and theories of nationalism and identity. Employing qualitative discourse analysis, the

author analysed online conversations generated through the hashtag to understand how migrants were represented within digital spaces. The findings showed that social media discourse consistently portrayed African migrants as criminals, economic threats and illegitimate beneficiaries of public resources, thereby reinforcing hypernationalist and exclusionary identities. The study concluded that digital platforms facilitate the normalisation of Afrophobic ideologies by repeatedly reproducing stereotypes that legitimise hostility towards fellow Africans. It recommended more robust public education initiatives, responsible digital communication practices and policy interventions capable of challenging hate-driven online mobilisation. However, the study primarily interrogated the ideological dimensions of hypernationalism without exploring the historical narratives that participants mobilise to justify contemporary xenophobia. The present study fills this gap by examining how historical memory, particularly the "Ghana Must Go" episode, intersects with digital discourse to influence perceptions of African migrants and Pan-African solidarity.

Theoretical Framework

This study was mainly anchored on **Collective Memory Theory**, originally developed by **Maurice Halbwachs (1925; 1950)** and complemented by **Social Identity Theory**, formulated by **Henri Tajfel (1974; 1978; 1981)** and further developed by **John C. Turner (1975; 1987)**. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how historical experiences are socially reconstructed and how those reconstructed memories shape contemporary identity formation, intergroup relations, and digital communication in Africa.

While Collective Memory Theory explains **how historical narratives survive and are continually reconstructed**, Social Identity Theory explains **why those narratives often produce prejudice and hostility toward perceived outsiders**. Tajfel (1974, 1978, 1981) argues that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups and naturally categorise people into "us" (the in-group) and "them" (the out-group). Turner (1987) further explains that these categorisations become more pronounced under conditions of perceived competition for scarce resources, social uncertainty, or political mobilisation. In digital communication spaces, algorithms, echo chambers, selective exposure, and viral dissemination reinforce these identity boundaries, making historical grievances more emotionally salient and socially persuasive. Consequently, collective memories of migration, economic displacement, or perceived historical injustice are transformed into symbolic resources for legitimising xenophobic discourse against fellow Africans. The integration of the two theories offers a stronger explanatory framework than either could provide independently.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative historical-content analysis design, integrating historical inquiry with Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to examine how social media and historical memory shape xenophobic discourse in Africa.

Data were collected from two primary streams: historical documentary materials on Nigeria's 1983/1985 "Ghana Must Go" expulsions (government policies, newspaper archives, scholarly texts) and 72 purposively selected social media units covering South African anti-migrant episodes (2015–2026). The digital sample was retrieved via targeted keyword/hashtag searches across five platforms: X (24 units; 33.3%), Facebook (16 units; 22.2%), TikTok (12 units; 16.7%), YouTube (10 units; 13.9%), and Instagram (10 units; 13.9%). Sampling applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, filtering out bots, spam, and duplicates until reaching theoretical saturation.

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-stage RTA framework using a dual coding approach: a deductive phase grounded in Collective Memory Theory and Social Identity Theory, alongside an inductive phase capturing emergent contextual nuances. Patterns were mapped across themes including digital nationalism, economic exclusion, Afrophobia, and Pan-African solidarity. Rigour was established using Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness framework, ensuring credibility via data triangulation and prolonged engagement, dependability through a clear audit trail, confirmability via reflexive memoing, and transferability through rich contextual descriptions. Ethical compliance was maintained by analyzing exclusively public data, anonymizing individual user identities, and adhering to internet-mediated qualitative research guidelines.

Data Presentation

Table 1

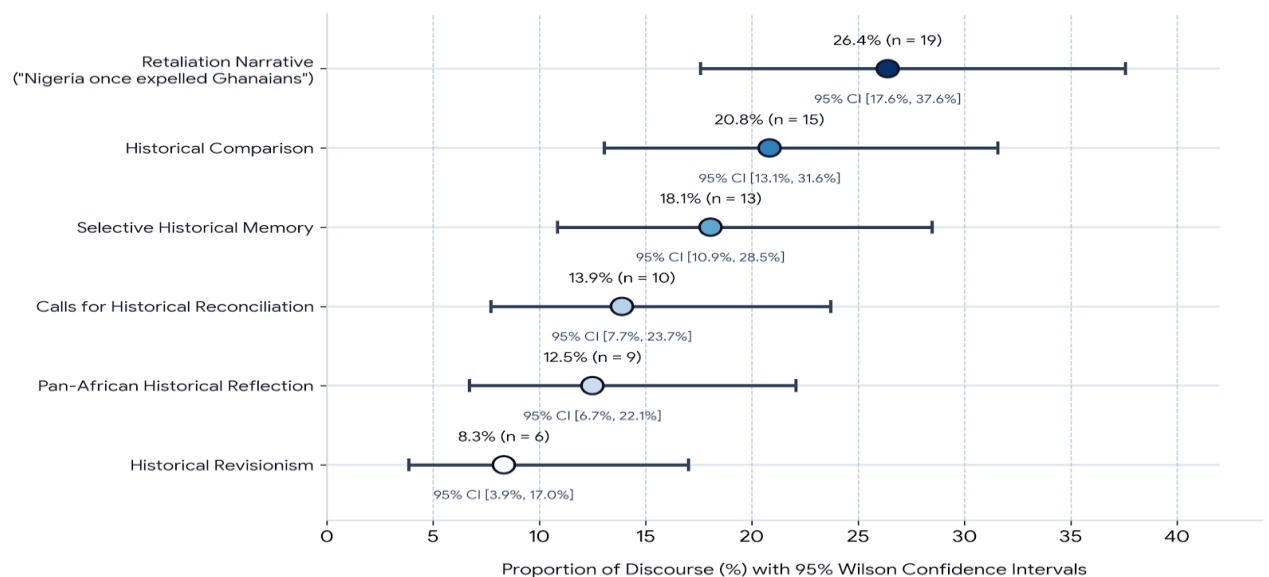
Emerging Themes on Xenophobic Discourse

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Economic Competition	17	23.6
Employment Protection	14	19.4
Criminalisation of Migrants	12	16.7
National Identity and Citizenship	10	13.9
Hate Speech and Hostility	9	12.5
Political Blame Narratives	6	8.3
Pan-African Solidarity	4	5.6
Total	72	100

The dominant discourse centred on economic competition, with many contributors portraying African migrants as competitors for employment and limited public resources. Closely related were narratives advocating employment protection for South African citizens. Other recurring themes included criminalisation of migrants, exclusionary nationalism and explicit hate speech. Although Pan-African solidarity was present, it constituted the least represented discourse, suggesting that exclusionary narratives outweighed integrative ones.

Figure1: Historical Memory Frames

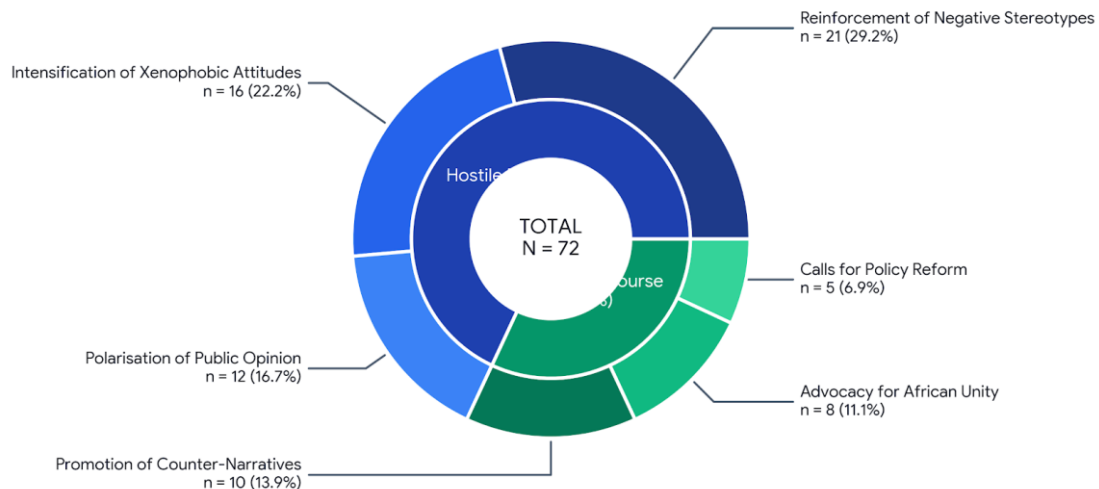
Prevalence of Historical Memory Frames (N = 72)
Statistical Point Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals



Historical memory emerged as a significant resource for legitimising contemporary positions. Many users referenced the "Ghana Must Go" episode to justify present-day xenophobic attitudes, while others employed the same historical event to advocate reconciliation and greater African unity. The findings suggest that collective memory functions simultaneously as a mechanism of division and a resource for peacebuilding.

Figure 2: Perceived Influence of Social Media Narratives

Nested Conceptual Ring Diagram of Discursive Influence (N = 72)
Macro-Thematic Clusters vs. Micro-Discursive Frames



The data indicate that social media contributes significantly to shaping public perceptions of African migrants. Negative stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes appeared more frequently than messages promoting unity and peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, the presence of counter-narratives demonstrates that social media also provides opportunities for promoting Pan-Africanism and challenging hate-based communication.

Table 2

Comparative Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Xenophobic Narratives

Historical "Ghana Must Go" Memory	Contemporary South African Discourse
Forced migration	Calls for deportation of migrants
Economic hardship	Employment competition narratives
National policy decisions	Digital mobilisation and online activism
Regional diplomatic tensions	Online inter-African hostility
Media framing through newspapers	Algorithm-driven social media discourse
Appeals for ECOWAS cooperation	Appeals for African Union intervention
Historical resentment	Digital remembrance and retaliation narratives

Discussion of Findings

The findings relating to the first research question reveal that the dominant themes characterising social media discourse on xenophobia and anti-African sentiments in South Africa revolve around economic nationalism, exclusionary identity construction, criminalisation of migrants, and digital nationalism. These findings substantially corroborate those of Raborife, Ogbuokiri and Aruleba (2024), whose computational sentiment analysis established that negative online discourse was predominantly driven by narratives of unemployment, crime, illegal migration and competition for limited socio-economic resources. Likewise, the findings agree with Pillay's (2024) discourse analysis of the #PutSouthAfricansFirst movement, which demonstrated that digital platforms have become ideological spaces for legitimising Afrophobic nationalism through recurring portrayals of African migrants as economic and social threats. However, whereas these earlier studies primarily identified and classified dominant online sentiments, the present study extends the discourse by demonstrating that these narratives are not merely expressions of contemporary socio-economic frustration but constitute communicative constructions that reproduce exclusionary identities through repeated historical and cultural framing. This divergence is attributable to methodological differences. While the reviewed studies employed computational sentiment analysis and discourse analysis of isolated campaigns, the present study adopted Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis, integrating historical documents with multiple social media platforms to uncover the deeper communicative meanings embedded within the discourse. These findings reinforce Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1987), which

explains that individuals derive social identity through in-group and out-group categorisation. The persistent construction of African migrants as "others" illustrates how digital communication reproduces social boundaries and legitimises exclusionary attitudes. At the same time, the findings suggest that social media functions not merely as a neutral communication medium but as an active participant in constructing and reinforcing social identities, thereby extending the explanatory utility of the theory within contemporary digital environments.

The second finding demonstrates that the historical memory of "*Ghana Must Go*" episode has evolved into a significant rhetorical resource within contemporary social media discussions on xenophobia in South Africa. This finding is consistent with Mngomezulu and Dube (2019), who argued that historical references to "*Ghana Must Go*" continue to shape public conversations on migration despite the vastly different political and historical contexts within which the two events occurred. Similarly, the findings support Odok's (2020) conclusion that digital communication increasingly transforms historical migration experiences into contemporary nationalist narratives capable of legitimising anti-immigrant sentiments across Africa. Nevertheless, the present study departs from both studies in an important respect. Whereas Mngomezulu and Dube concentrated on conceptual distinctions between xenophobia and Afrophobia, and Odok examined digital nationalism across several African countries, the present study demonstrates specifically how collective memory is reconstructed, selectively interpreted and strategically mobilised through hashtags, memes, digital storytelling and online conversations to justify or challenge present-day xenophobic attitudes. This analytical advancement stems from the integration of historical inquiry with qualitative thematic analysis, allowing the study to move beyond conceptual explanation towards communicative interpretation. The findings provide compelling empirical support for Collective Memory Theory (Halbwachs, 1925; 1950), which maintains that societies continuously reconstruct rather than merely preserve historical experiences. The repeated invocation of the "*Ghana Must Go*" narrative illustrates that collective memory is socially organised, politically negotiated and digitally reproduced in ways that serve contemporary ideological interests. Consequently, the theory provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding why historical events that occurred more than four decades ago continue to influence present-day perceptions of migration, citizenship and African identity.

Regarding the third research question, the study found that social media narratives exert considerable influence on public perceptions of African migrants, inter-African relations and Pan-African solidarity by simultaneously amplifying xenophobic sentiments and facilitating counter-discourses advocating African unity. This finding agrees with McBrowne (2025), whose analysis of digital reactions to the Chidimma Adetshina controversy demonstrated that social media has become a contested arena in which competing notions of belonging, citizenship and African identity are negotiated. The findings also support Pillay's (2024) conclusion that online platforms normalise Afrophobic ideologies through the repetitive circulation of exclusionary narratives. However, unlike these studies, which concentrated principally on identity politics and digital nationalism, the present study reveals that social media performs a dual communicative function by simultaneously reproducing hostility and providing a platform for Pan-African resistance, reconciliation and solidarity. This duality explains why the digital environment cannot be interpreted solely as a catalyst for xenophobia but must equally be understood as a space for ideological contestation in which competing visions of African integration coexist. The slight divergence from earlier studies may be explained by the broader analytical scope of the present research, which incorporated historical records alongside social media content, thereby capturing both exclusionary and integrative narratives. Collectively, the findings illustrate the complementary relationship between Collective Memory Theory and Social Identity Theory. While Collective Memory Theory explains the reconstruction and transmission of historical narratives that shape public perceptions of migration, Social Identity Theory explains how these reconstructed memories become embedded within in-group and out-group identities that either reinforce xenophobic exclusion or encourage Pan-African solidarity. The convergence of both theories therefore provides a comprehensive explanation of the communicative processes through which social media mediates historical consciousness, identity formation and contemporary inter-African relations.

Conclusion

The history of modern Africa is, in many respects, the history of a people striving to recover a fractured humanity. From the Pan-African consciousness of Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Anthony Enahoro and, later, Nelson Mandela, the African project has never been merely about political independence or territorial sovereignty; it has been about restoring the dignity of the African person and building a continent where no African is a stranger in Africa. That vision stands fundamentally opposed to every manifestation of Afrophobia, xenophobia and exclusionary nationalism. When an African is dismissed as *amakwerekwere*, branded an economic burden, hunted because of nationality, or reduced to *persona non grata* within the continent that gave birth to all, the injury transcends the individual victim. It becomes a wound inflicted upon the African idea itself, a repudiation of the moral fraternity upon which Pan-Africanism was conceived. The painful memories of the "*Ghana Must Go*" expulsions in Nigeria and the recurring "*Nigerians Must Leave*", "*Put South Africans First*" and related anti-migrant campaigns in South Africa should not be recycled as historical justifications for contemporary hostility but remembered as cautionary moments from which a more humane continental ethic must emerge. Historical memory should illuminate conscience rather than legitimise vengeance.

Yet Pan-African fraternity cannot thrive on sentiment alone. Governments bear the inescapable responsibility of creating secure, prosperous and just societies in which citizens are not driven into involuntary migration by conflict, poverty or institutional failure. At the same time, migration across African borders must be governed by legality, mutual respect and civic responsibility, with migrants complying with the laws of host states and host communities upholding the rights and dignity guaranteed to every human person. To fear one's fellow African simply because he or she comes from another African country is not merely an expression of insecurity; it represents a profound crisis of historical consciousness and a denial of a shared destiny forged through common struggles against colonialism, apartheid and racial oppression. Africa cannot credibly advocate global justice while reproducing internal hierarchies of exclusion among its own peoples. The future imagined by the pioneers of Pan-Africanism will remain unrealised until historical memory becomes an instrument of reconciliation rather than retaliation, social media evolves from a marketplace of prejudice into a forum for continental dialogue, and every African, irrespective of nationality, can journey across the continent with the confidence that he or she is not entering foreign territory but returning home.

Recommendations

1. Governments, the African Union, and social media platforms should collaborate to implement digital media literacy programmes, strengthen content moderation mechanisms, and promote responsible online communication to counter xenophobic narratives rooted in economic misinformation and exclusionary nationalism.
2. Educational institutions, media organisations, and cultural agencies should develop and disseminate historically accurate narratives on African migration, including the "*Ghana Must Go*" episode, to prevent the distortion and weaponisation of historical memory in contemporary social media discourse.

The African Union, regional economic communities, civil society organisations, and communication stakeholders should leverage social media to promote sustained Pan-African dialogue, intercultural engagement, and digital peacebuilding initiatives that strengthen African solidarity and reduce xenophobic attitudes toward migrants.

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