

## Tribalism and Ethnophobia Among Black South Africans

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the consolidation and implications of tribalism and ethnophobia among black South Africans. South Africa is considered a xenophobic country. With the demise of apartheid and the subsequent increase in undocumented migration, tensions began to develop, not only against black foreign nationals but also among black South Africans themselves. This paper focuses on how tribalism and ethnophobia have divided black South Africans and removed the need for unity and social cohesion in a post-apartheid era. This paper employed a qualitative research approach where a literature review was undertaken. The othering theory was used as a theoretical lens. Findings reflect that although South Africa is recognized as a rainbow nation because of its many different cultures and customs, it is hidden beneath ethnic and tribal emotions that have stifled the idea of unity and social cohesion. South Africa is still far from eradicating tribalistic and ethnophobic sentiments amongst its black population. Apart from ethnicity and tribalism, race continues to divide South Africa. The political transition of 1994 lacked effective frameworks to unite the various ethnic groups that were for decades segregated by apartheid; instead, the focus was on building a new South Africa. However, this approach missed the mark by not focusing on the importance of ethnic unity and tolerance among black South Africans. Unless these tribalistic and ethnophobic sentiments are addressed, unity and social cohesion in the South African black community is unlikely.

**Keywords:** apartheid, blacks, ethnophobia, South Africa, tribalism.

Tribalism and ethnophobia in the South African context are described as a pandemic that tears apart black African societies and is perceived as colonizers' strategy to enforce their divide-and-rule ideology to perpetuate instability and black-on-black violence (Samman, 2006). Hahn (2015) raised a great concern that the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 was used as an instrument to lay a solid foundation for perpetuating xenophobia, tribalism, and ethnophobia amongst black Africans. This transpired when colonizers divided the continent according to their needs; people from diverse backgrounds were separated and placed in groups according to designated boundaries. In South Africa, the apartheid regime, led by the Nationalist Party, which governed the country from 1948–1994 followed suit.

Many studies on xenophobia from a South African perspective have mainly been premised on the supposed hatred black South Africans have towards foreigners, especially those from Africa (Choane et al., 2011; Kerr & Durrheim, 2013; Tshishonga, 2015). A plethora of reasons have been given for this hate, e.g., migrants are stealing jobs, contributing to crime, and are involved in drug trafficking and prostitution (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010). While the

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authenticity of these reasons has always been doubtful, they have been sufficient in allowing South Africans to blame black African foreigners for the country's social ills and economic misfortunes. However, this paper ventures into uncharted debates and argues that black South Africans themselves are characterised by ethnophobia which is manifested through the intolerance of one's ethnicity and cultural association, as reflected by Baloyi (2018); while apartheid has gone, tribalism and ethnicity continue to divide South Africans. This intolerance has led to hatred and disunity among black South Africans.

While successive ANC-led governments in post-apartheid South Africa have often boasted about socio-economically improving the lives of those previously disadvantaged under the white, minority-ruled regime (black, colored, Asian, and Indian peoples), the growth of ethnic intolerance has often clouded such achievements (Ndletyana, 2007). Apartheid contributed to the tribal and ethnic divisions South Africa is witnessing today: its segregation policy was ultimately aimed at building tribal exceptionalism and superiority, which would make one tribe feel superior to the other (Makhado & Tshisikhawe, 2021). Marwala (2021) argued for the need to move away from tribalism and ethnic discrimination and work towards a cohesive, united, and developmental South Africa, which caters for the needs of all those who live in it.

Ethnic intolerance amongst black South Africans has consolidated self-hate, where ethnic groups/tribes seek superiority and recognition, and groups compete ideologically and view the thinking and cultural ways of other groups as insignificant to their own and thus redundant. The concept of unity amongst black South Africans post-1994, which saw the transition from the National Party government to the African National Congress (ANC), is a ruse. Considering its history, it becomes difficult for South Africans to remove themselves from the tribal and ethnic debates, mainly because such narratives have infiltrated the country's political space, where leaders are seen as a mere extension of one's tribal and ethnic affiliation. This was further reflected by Gumede (2019), who stated that when the then South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma was fired in 2005 by Former President Thabo Mbeki, he rallied support from Zulu-speaking people to secure his reinstatement. Hence, in the 2007 Polokwane conference, he used his Zulu ethnicity to win the ANC presidency. Ironically, one of the founding values of the ANC was to promote social cohesion among South Africans despite race, gender, language, and tribe to embrace diversity in a democratic dispensation.

South Africa cannot stop xenophobic attacks directed toward foreign nationals without resolving the internal ethnic hate which has consolidated the "othering" of black South Africans based on ethnicity. Nationalistic sentiments associated with ethnicity have defeated the need for unity amongst black South Africans and, thus, compounded South Africa's quest for inclusive development. Ethnophobia has even found its way into the country's political scene, where political recognition has become an ethnic and racial affair (Gradín, 2019). This ethnophobia has created internal hate amongst black South Africans, eroding the need for unity and placing ethnic belonging at the forefront, alienating the need for black South Africans to work together to address past injustices.

While acknowledging the wrongs of apartheid, the former Public Protector of South Africa, Professor Thuli Mandozela, as cited by *The Citizen* (2019), argued that the blame apartheid excuse is wearing thin and that the poor are being betrayed by corruption. Therefore, the lack of progress concerning unity, cohesion, and constructive nation-building cannot be solely blamed on apartheid 28 years after South Africa gained its freedom.

This paper acknowledges that while successive African National Congress (ANC) led governments have preached the need for unity and cohesion, we argue that immediately after 1994, this plea was more directed towards reconciliation between the minority and the majority, the oppressor and those who were oppressed. We declare that this is where the process was flawed. While there was the need for reconciliation, there was also an urgent need to reconcile

and re-integrate black South Africans who were for decades oppressed, discriminated against, and made to see each other from the confines of tribes and ethnicity. The government's focus on reconciling black and white South Africans ignored the considerable effort needed to remove the hate, discrimination, and tribalistic and ethnophobic sentiments instilled by the apartheid regime on black South Africans. As a result, post-1994, when borders were relaxed and there was an increase in undocumented migration (Mokoena & Balkaran, 2018), hate and discrimination among black South Africans became apparent in their disdain for black Africans whom they saw as outsiders. Thus, xenophobia and social tensions began to cripple South Africa's concept of inclusive nation-building. Despite the various interventions from the government and other stakeholders that have been implemented to address xenophobia and its associated drivers, there is still a dearth of research in understanding tribalistic and ethnophobic sentiments, which continue to compromise the democratic and constitutional values of South Africa.

Apartheid, like colonialism, had no respect for African indigenous communities and their heritage; it wanted to enforce its own rules and way of life (Osman, 2020). Thus, the post-apartheid government needed to reflect on these legacies and institute an all-encompassing reconciliation process underpinned by inclusive nation-building between white and black and among black South Africans. Failure to do this meant the reconciliation process was not going to be effective nor reflect the current trends in South Africa's racial, tribal, and ethnic divide.

However, South Africa is not alone in the battle to eradicate tribal and ethnic sentiment within society. Pinto (2019) asserted that in a post-colonial era, Sub-Saharan Africa has struggled with its attempt to consolidate unity and equality. Tribalism and ethnic backgrounds continue to shape the politics and social dimensions of countries in the region. More worryingly has been the acceptance of tribal and ethnic politics in Africa at the detriment of nation-building.

This paper interrogates three questions to understand the ethnic issue in South Africa. Firstly, do ethnic and cultural associations inform the hate amongst black South Africans? Secondly, to what extent has ethnophobia affected the concept of black unity in South Africa and finally, to what extent have ethnic differences given rise to internal hatred among black South Africans? This paper employed a qualitative research approach rooted in African knowledge and centered on how tribalism and ethnophobia divided Africans. A literature review on tribalism and ethnophobia in Africa, particularly South Africa, was undertaken to interrogate its underlying arguments. The selected literature covered several themes using peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, gazettes, and newspaper articles. These themes were used as a point of departure to the discussion of tribalism and ethnophobia in the South African context.

Furthermore, this approach was employed to contextualize the understanding of ethnophobia and the narratives informing the debates and arguments within South Africa's political and public domain. The research approach in this paper was selected following the paper's aim and included the related conceptualization of tribalism and ethnophobia concepts (Honta et al., 2019). It was essential to understand what drives tribalism and ethnophobia in South Africa: how does this affect the process of nation-building and social cohesion? What role should the government play in addressing these issues and to what extent has South Africa's political space contributed to consolidating tribalism and ethnophobia? Therefore, the paper focused on the debates, arguments, and theoretical literature informing this contemporary issue. Considering the ethnic intolerance in post-apartheid South Africa, these narratives became integral in reaching a meaningful conclusion.

## Theorizing Ethnic and Cultural Differences in South Africa

This paper employed the othering theory as a theoretical lens. The othering theory originated in the post-colonial theory Spivak devised in 1985. Othering happens when groups or people with different beliefs (customs, traditions, religions) in a social setting are defined and labeled as not fitting within the norms of a social group, often a dominant social group (Staszak, 2009). Such differences eventually led to those people being seen as inferior and not worthy of fitting into a more comprehensive section of society. Othering happens when attributing negative characteristics to people or groups that differentiate them from the perceived normative social group. The “us versus them” way of thinking about human connections and relationships underpins this concept (Cheery, 2020). This process involves looking at others and saying, “they are not like me” or “they are not one of us.”

Zevallos (2011) discussed that othering is central to understanding how majority and minority identities are constructed. This is because groups control the representation of different groups within any given society with greater political power. Othering is based on various attributes, including age, disability, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender identity, sex, and language (Cheery, 2020).

Othering has the potential to create a tense environment which, if not addressed, can lead to confrontation. Building on those insights, the elements of othering among black South Africans have been observed, which can be attributed to the multi-ethnic nature of the composition of the black population in South Africa. Thus, because of the different ethnic composition in South Africa and the subsequent effects of apartheid segregation, the demise of apartheid in 1994 did not unite the black multi-ethnic population. Rather, some ethnic clans/tribes are seen as more powerful and influential (especially those in large numbers), which has given rise to ethnic/tribal discrimination.

This othering (ethnic/tribal discrimination) is observable through statements on social media and, at times, by politicians and citizens. For example, statements such as “Zulu people are violent and like conflict” and “Xhosa women love money” have directly given rise to the othering. This othering, however, has not been limited to ethnicity and one tribe; at times, it has become provincialized. For example, KwaZulu-Natal “is a dangerous province because of violent Zulus” and “Gauteng has a large concentration of people; hence one is likely to get mugged there.” However, this paper focused on ethnic and cultural othering. Vichiensing (2017) stated that othering makes people feel inferior to others as if they are clones and do not share the sense of belonging as others in society.

The concept of othering cannot be viewed in isolation from socio-economic and political events that have come to shape the world. Issues such as cross-border crime, undocumented migration, and terrorism have consolidated the othering in society. The events of September 9, 2001, in the United States of America (USA), changed how societies categorize people from certain countries and their associated religions or beliefs. For example, individuals associated with Islam have been suspected of radicalization, which has given rise to othering and discrimination (Farhadi, 2020). This was also seen in Germany when 1,200 women were sexually assaulted on New Year’s Eve by non-Europeans, fuelling hate and xenophobia (Bielicki, 2018). Undocumented migration from Africa to the EU has also given rise to the othering evident in statements like they are un-European and do not share our values. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban asserted that all terrorists are basically migrants (Kaminski, 2015).

In the USA, the othering and xenophobic sentiments were observed when former president Donald Trump argued for the need to construct a wall across the Mexico/USA border. Mr. Trump argued that criminal gangs shipped vast quantities of illegal drugs, which resulted in thousands of deaths (Phillips, 2017). Such views become consolidated in American society,

and migrants are seen as criminals and drug dealers rather than people searching for a better life.

Within Europe itself, there has always been discrimination and the othering of those who come from eastern Europe, which is seen as less developed compared to the western part. This also reveals an ethnic attachment of western Europeans which drives them to feel that those from the east do not fit into the culture and values of western Europeans. Politicians also drive tribal and ethnic sentiments. Migrants from Latin America searching for a better life hoping to reach the USA have been labeled as criminals, drug paddlers, and menace to American society. Political statements have seen them being discriminated against and given all sorts of labels.

In South Africa, ethnic and cultural othering is largely prevalent because certain ethnic tribes/clans view their beliefs, culture, and traditions as superior to the others, undermining the existence of other beliefs, cultures, and traditions associated with other ethnic groups in the process (Muyanga, 2017). The consolidation of the othering concept among South Africa's ethnic groups has hindered the need for unity; instead, unity has become relegated to one's sense of ethnic belonging. The term "rainbow nation" was used to describe South Africa post-1994 because of its varied cultures, customs, traditions, and histories. However, while applauded globally, the concept has not resulted in the social cohesion and unity of black South Africans because culture and tradition still reign supreme and dictate a sense of belonging.

### **The Concept of Ethnicity and Ethnophobia**

The quest to find a holistic and all-encompassing definition of ethnicity hinders on the understanding of the attributes and characteristics that form an ethnic group. Ethnicity cannot be viewed in isolation without considering the environment in which people live and what values inform their ethnic sense of belonging. Hamer (2020) argued that, in the quest to have a unified understanding of ethnicity, it becomes essential to understand the many definitions that have emerged from different disciplines and schools of thought. Apart from this, it becomes essential to understand how politics has become intertwined with the conceits of ethnicity and ethnophobia and what social implications this has for cohesion and nation-building, especially in developing countries. In sociology, ethnicity refers to shared values amongst a group in society; these values are intertwined in terms of history, language, religion, and culture (Introduction to Sociology, 2016). In cultural anthropology, an ethnicity is a group that a person identifies with or feels a part of to the exclusion of other groups. Language (e.g., Hispanics), geography (e.g., Somalis), religion (e.g., Jews), and race are some features embedded in the definition of ethnicity (Bonvillain, 2010). In international relations, ethnicity is an identity category that signifies membership in a group bounded by shared descent, history, myths, symbols, and cultural practices (Waterbury, 2016).

All the assertions reveal one crucial aspect: an ethnic group is bound by many features that unite and create a sense of belonging. However, there has been considerable confusion in the quest to differentiate between ethnicity and tribalism. Often these concepts have been used interchangeably. To differentiate these concepts, Bonvillain (2010) revealed that an ethnic group is a group united with similar characteristics and values. Hence, this gives a united sense of belonging. Hamer et al. (2020) defined an ethnic group as people who share the same background of language, race, nationality, country, or city of origin. These characteristics help consolidate a sense of belonging.

Alternatively, a tribe is an ethnic group having a common national or cultural tradition (Kormoh, 2020). A tribe is a social division comprising families or communities linked by blood ties with a common culture and dialect. A tribe is a social division consisting of families or communities linked by blood ties with a common culture and dialect, having a recognized

leader. People belonging to one ethnic group can live in several geographical locations. In the quest to define ethnicity, there are different types of ethnic groups, and these groups are differentiated from each other by an array of characteristics that bind them together. Isajiw (1993) named primary and secondary ethnic groups, folk-community and nationality-community ethnic groups, majority and minority ethnic groups, and young and old ethnic groups. The author noted that primary ethnic groups exist in the same place, historically, where they are formed. They are indigenous groups, e.g., Native Americans in the Americas (Isajiw, 1993).

A folk community consists of those whose members are predominantly of peasant backgrounds. Folk-based ethnic groups lack a developed conception of the group's history as a legacy. Nationality ethnic groups are culturally highly self-aware. Their members share an image of themselves as collectively united by a distinct culture rather than their kin or clan. Legacy is essential in these ethnic groups (Suzuki et al., 2015).

Most ethnic groups determine the character of the society's basic institutions, especially the main political, economic, and cultural institutions. They determine the character of the norms of society, including the legal system and their culture, which tends to influence the society in which they live (Isajiw, 1993; Safran, 2008). Minority ethnic groups do not yield considerable power or influence in society; hence, they are often overlooked in developmental matters. Furthermore, the authors distinguish between young and old ethnic groups. Young groups, i.e., those made up predominantly of the first—the immigrant—generation and whose second generation is either small or young. The old groups are those already established in the larger society, i.e., they have at least a high proportion of adult second and adult third or consecutive generations (Hempel, 2009; Isajiw, 2000).

In Africa alone, more than 3,000 different ethnic groups speak more than 2,100 different languages (Orr & Keppeler, 2021). The people practice various religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and traditional religions specific to their ethnic group. However, one cannot seek a holistic definition of ethnicity without understanding how someone relates to their ethnic background. Hence there is a need to understand one's ethnic identity. Ethnic identity can be defined as how persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically concerning one or more social systems and perceive others as locating them concerning those systems (Isajiw, 1993). The quest to define ethnicity is underscored by the need to consider the many elements that make up the concept.

### **Africa, Unity, and the Problem with Ethnicity**

Ethnicity and tribal sentiments often go hand in hand. According to Baloyi (2018), many reasons give rise to ethnic tensions in a given society. For example, in countries such as South Africa and Nigeria, ethnic communities violently compete for property, rights, jobs, education, language, social amenities, and good healthcare facilities. Additionally, Muiga (2019) reflected that in Africa, especially in times of elections, many votes cut heavily across ethnic or regional lines. Ethnic politics in Africa is commonplace.

Nnoli (1980) published empirical examples relevant to socio-economic factors of ethnic factions in Nigeria that look like the problems between Malamulele and Vuwani in South Africa. Historically, there have been unfortunate histories of unresolved ethnic or tribalistic tensions and conflict, which have also manifested themselves in post-apartheid South Africa. The disputes between Vuwani and Malamulele have resulted in protests, arguments and counterarguments, advocacies and counter-advocacies, and in some instances, property damage (Mugovhani, 2021). Before that, Vhavenda and Vatsonga lived peacefully together, and there was no discrimination concerning one's ethnicity or tribe. The majority-Tsonga-speaking Malamulele town and its surroundings are part of the Thulamela municipality. The Vatsonga

populations in Malamulele town and the surrounding areas claim that Vhavenda receives better services, especially since the Thulamela municipality's administrative center is in Thohoyandou (Mugovhani, 2021). In this town, VhaVenda people dominate in population, which has always been at the center of the conflict between Vatsonga and Vhavenda.

Likewise, the Xhosas, Zulus, and other ethnic groups in South Africa mobilize to compete for resources. Deng (1997) and African Skies (2020) argued that the problem of ethnicity in many African countries is that the modern African state is the product of Europe, not Africa. To attempt at this late date to return to ancestral identities and resources as the basis for building the modern African nation would risk the collapse of many countries. Traditional African societies and even states functioned through an elaborate system based on family, lineage, clan, tribe, and, ultimately, a confederation of groups with ethnic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics in common (Deng, 1997).

Colonization ripped the social fabric that kept the relations between the different ethnic tribes and turned them against one another (Garcia-Olp, 2018). They were placed in new administrative frameworks governed by new values, new institutions, and new operational principles and techniques (Blanton et al., 2001). As a result, the effects of ethnic conflict (civil war, genocide) still plague Africa. The need for inclusive development driven by leaders who have people's interests at heart has been replaced by an ethnic division that has infiltrated the very heart of Africa's political formation. Etefa (2019) communicated that while ethnic conflicts in Africa have been viewed from the confines of climate change and competition for natural resources, other background factors, such as marginalization, non-inclusive political systems, misuse of state resources, and the politicization of ethnicity and tribalism has given rise to the destabilization of Africa.

Cherry (1994) asserted that before 1994, the specters of Bosnia and Angola haunted South Africa. In Bosnia, an atrocious plan to ethnically cleanse Bosnia between 1992 and 1995 was carried out by the deliberate, systematic, and industrialized slaughter of non-Serbs, the majority of whom were Bosniak Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Over 11,000 people were killed during the Sarajevo siege, including 1,600 children (The Guardian, 2022). Sarajevo residents were vulnerable to sniper assaults and daily shelling between 1992 and 1995 and were cut off from the outside world.

The world watched with curiosity to see whether South Africa would disintegrate under the pressure of trying to achieve the goal of forging a single nation out of several ethnic minorities inhabiting the same territory. However, it is essential to note that while ethnophobic sentiments amongst black South Africans have become a highly debated and controversial issue, before 1994, the threat of civil war came from two sides who were both expressing ethnonationalist sentiments and goals: the white Afrikaner and the black Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (Cherry, 1994).

In South Africa, apartheid recognized and stratified races and ethnicities to an unsustainable degree. Post-apartheid South Africa, however, remains poised between a racially, ethnically, and tribally blind democratic system and a proud ethnic self-assertiveness, represented and exploited by Zulu nationalists (Deng, 1997). At the same time, while political commentators and politicians argue that the country is a united front and a rainbow nation, ethnicity still plays a significant role in South Africa in the background. Apart from ethnicity, race continues to divide. For example, the best-known parties all represent radically different perspectives on the race issue, and – at the extremes – there is no crossing the color line (Gottschalk, 2019). Post-1994, there were calls for a non-racial society. However, a non-racial society does not address the ethnic and tribalistic sentiments that have given meaning and a sense of belonging to many black South Africans. One crucial objective of colonialists in South Africa was to deepen the differences between Zulus and Xhosas, Ndebele and Vendas, Tswana, and Qwaqwa, among others. Also, those of mixed race were segregated from the white groups

using culture, residence, occupation, and status (Baloyi, 2018). These differences benefited the elite because they caused conflict.

Tensions relating to ethnicity are largely psychological and driven by fear and insecurity of ethnic groups during the transition (Irobi, 2005). The pre-1994 incident, where all the governments of the former Venda claimed their pensions before coming to the new democratic South Africa out of fear that they may lose their investments if they allowed their pension schemes to be joined to those of South Africa, is a reminder of this. Concepts such as unity and rainbow nation are a smokescreen, as stated by Dr. Uhuru Phalafala of Stellenbosch University, cited in *News24* (2018), tribalism continues to stifle unity and development. Challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality, race coupled with migration have consolidated ethnophobic and xenophobic sentiments in South Africa.

### **Apartheid and The Composition of Ethnicity amongst Black South Africans**

South Africa has diverse cultures, languages, and traditions that make up the country. Post-1994, there was a need for South Africans from all levels of society (regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture) to work toward rebuilding South Africa as a collective and consolidating the spirit of togetherness. Apartheid segregated black South Africans (Maharaj, 2020), giving rise to certain locations in the country designated as Bantustan homelands (thus giving rise to townships) (Egerö, 1991). This forced segregation meant black South Africans could not get to know their culture and traditions. Rather, the regime turned them against each other to further minority rule at all costs. When apartheid ended, not being familiar with one's traditions and culture, ethnic tension began to simmer as some groups felt they were superior to others.

Various pre-and post-apartheid legislation, such as the Population Registration Act of 1950; the Group Areas Act of 1950; the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959; and Pass laws; amongst many others, were all designed and implemented to preserve white rule (Dhiman, 2021). In the process, black South Africans were alienated and not allowed to play a meaningful role in the economy apart from being a source of cheap labor for the mines and farms (Landis, 1961). The aim was to keep black South Africans oppressed. This was not limited to South Africa, as regional countries sympathetic to the plight of black South Africans were seen as enemies of the regime. In response, South Africa's land borders were fortified with electric fences, regular army patrols, and auxiliary civilian commando units. That fortification was intended to establish what officials called a "tripwire" against infiltration by guerrillas from the anti-apartheid movement (McMichael, 2012). At the core of the fortification was the need to ensure that Africans ideologically and sympathetic to the need to liberate South Africa were kept out of the country at all costs. However, such fortification sadly came at a huge expense, especially the flagrant disregard for basic human rights.

As Klaaren and Ramji (2001) pointed out, the torture and killing of people were frequent within South African borders. Designated areas for black South Africans were characterized by underdevelopment, poverty, and service delivery challenges and were not placed at the center of economic activity. The Bantustans were areas where most of the black population was moved to prevent them from living in the urban areas of South Africa. The Bantustans were a primary administrative mechanism for removing blacks from the South African political system under the many laws and policies created by apartheid.

Khumalo (2016) argued that the newspaper article entitled '*I am not an African, no, I am 100% Zulu*' not only helped to sell the paper but also sketched a picture of tribalism in South Africa (Khumalo, 2016). The slogan of '100% Zulu' was made famous by President Jacob Zuma when he had to face various rape charges. Moloi (2016) indicated that tribalism is not in the past, the danger of tribalism is at our doorstep.



**Figure 1**  
*Bantustans or Homelands for Black People Population*



*Note.* South African History (2011)

Tribalism and ethnicity ensured that black people were divided and placed in tribal zones. This gave rise to the ethnic tensions that still hinder South Africa's black population from truly becoming united (Baloyi, 2018). Dhlamini (2022) asserted that South Africans are skeptical of the notion and values of ubuntu (shared humanity) when it comes to people from a tribe, ethnicity, and nationality other than theirs.

In many aspects, ethnicity within the black community comes before associating themselves with South Africans. This has raised questions about whether black South Africans can overcome these tribalistic and ethnic sentiments to forge unity driven by the need to see a developed South Africa. However, it would be naive to look at ethnophobic sentiments without considering the role of politicians. Indeed Eifert et al. (2010) and Seife (2022) reasoned that, in Africa, politicians in times of desperation always play the “ethnic card,” and, in most cases, the allocation of resources in Africa tends to follow ethnic lines and those elections are the time for deciding who will allocate those resources.

Irobi (2005) claimed that ethnic conflict arose in South Africa because of the denial of the basic human needs of access, identity, autonomy, security, and equality, compounded by the autocratic roles played by the government and the military. However, post-apartheid, there has been a lack of effective frameworks designed to reduce ethnic tension among black South Africans, apart from the holistic assumption that South Africa is a rainbow nation, which is a ruse in the face of ethnophobia, tribalism, and xenophobia.

### **Ethnic Intolerance and Implications for Cohesion in South Africa**

It is essential to observe that tribalism and ethnophobia have no place in the quest for inclusive development. Tribalism and ethnophobia in South Africa have become a barrier to the unity of black people. As a result, every action is observed from the realms of tribalism and ethnophobia, thus blurring the need for inclusive development. Black South Africans were united in their quest to demolish the apartheid regime. However, after the demise of apartheid, the same energy and unity failed to translate into a united and cohesive black population. South Africa cannot expect to develop and implement a well-functioning framework to address xenophobia unless it addresses ethnophobic and tribalistic sentiments that have manifested themselves in every part of the country.

The rainbow nation was a noble ideal as it described the diversity in South Africa, but it did not consider that diversity does not mean unity, and ethnophobic and xenophobic sentiments have proved such (Farred, 2001). Race and ethnicity continue to divide South Africa, increasing unemployment rates, crime, poverty, migration, and inequality, issues that inflame these problems. The belief that black South Africans would be socio-economically well off after the demise of apartheid has also given rise to the competition for resources, power, and influence among black South Africans (Chutel, 2017). This has eventually spilled over to ethnic and tribal avenues. When South Africans witnessed the demise of apartheid, they saw this as an opportunity for economic development. However, the relaxation of border control measures immediately after 1994 increased those entering the country. As a result, the influx of foreign nationals created competition for what black South Africans perceived as limited economic resources. Thus, South Africa today still witnesses the periodic outbreak of xenophobic attacks.

Nevertheless, to a great extent, South Africans present a united front against xenophobia despite their ethnic differences, concluding that perhaps competition from outside is seen as a more significant threat than internal ethnic differences. South Africa suffers from significant structural and system divisions (Lefko-Everett et al., 2018). Post-apartheid South Africa and Africa stand poised between rediscovering its roots—its indigenous values, institutions, and experiences—and pursuing the logic of the colonial state in the context of universalizing modernity, primarily based on Western experience (Deng, 1997). However, rediscovering these roots is bound to create ethnic issues and suffocate the concept of unity.

While South Africa, unlike some of its African counterparts, has not experienced ethnic conflict post-1994, no doubt tensions exist. After the demise of apartheid, there was a renewed focus on building an inclusive South Africa. While this was commendable, there was a lack of focus on the need to unite and remove the element of ethnic and tribalistic sentiments within the black population, which for decades was oppressed and turned against each other by apartheid. In 2009, former President Jacob Zuma argued for South Africans to engage in a national dialogue on unity and social cohesion. At the center of this dialogue was the need for South Africa as a nation to identify and promote that which brings us together (Department of Arts and Culture, 2012). A document titled “*A National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society*” spoke to discrimination: racism, tribalism, xenophobia, and social exclusion. On race, the document noted that while racism was outlawed in 1994 with the abolition of apartheid, social attitudes, access to resources, and life opportunities in South Africa remain largely race-based (Department of Arts and Culture, 2012). In addition, minority and extremist right-wing groups, organizations, and members of such communities continue to harbor and cultivate racist ideas and promote behavior that results in acts of racist abuse in public places and workplaces, on sports fields, as well as in and between communities.

The report argued that tribalism is used as a power base and site of patronage. Tribalism, like racism, undermines equality and merit. As such, it often becomes a source of conflict and disunity that impedes and threatens social cohesion and nation-building (Department of Arts and Culture, 2012). The report noted that migration, generally into urban areas, contributes to the spread or formation of informal settlements and results in competition for limited resources and work opportunities under widespread poverty, frequently resulting in violent confrontations. The discussion supports the notion that the element of unity and cohesion amongst the South African black population is a cover-up, and there is still a long way to go to remove the ethnic and tribal elements that still characterize the black society in South Africa.

## Concluding Remarks

While the political change was welcomed as a positive development for the majority, the socio-economic status of black South Africans has not changed much. While the rich have gotten richer, the poorer have gotten poorer. This disparity is driven by increasing unemployment, poverty, and inequality rates. The wrongs of apartheid will not be addressed overnight. However, little attention has been paid to the need to address ethnic and tribal sentiments.

The events of 1994 have done little to consolidate unity and cohesion among the South African black population. In Africa, one cannot speak of development and improved living standards unless the tribal and ethnic sentiments are addressed, i.e., different ethnic groups may co-exist, however, their commitment to development needs to be unparalleled. Thus, economic development should come first rather than devotion to an ethnic association.

There was a lack of adequate planning concerning, unity, cohesion, and inclusive nation-building post-1994. Considerable attention has been on reconciling the hatred that black South Africans harbored for white people, whom they viewed as oppressors despite being a minority in the country. Successive ANC-led governments have not paid particular attention to the need to remove the tribalistic and ethnophobic sentiments that had already consolidated themselves among black South Africans. As a result, black South Africans first view themselves from the confines of tribal and ethnic associations rather than as South Africans. The lack of reconciliation between black South Africans and the relaxation of border control (which gave rise to undocumented migration) in 1994 gave rise to resentment as black South Africans saw migrants as different people who were going to steal their newfound freedom. Hence, today, South African society is characterized by xenophobia.’

Moreover, South Africa’s political space (like many African states) has also contributed to consolidating nationalist sentiments as politicians always rally support based on ethnicity and tribal association (Duma, 2021). At times, their statements fuel societal tensions among black South Africans. This paper argues that the lack of effective remedies to address tribalism and ethnophobia in SA means the implications will devastate social cohesion and unity. The focus on tribes, and one’s ethnicity suffocates the need for South Africans to work together towards the inclusive socio-economic development of the country.

Tribalism and ethnophobia (especially concerning conflicts that arise because of them) are issues that have gained global attention. In developing countries, one’s tribal or ethnic association has alienated the need for inclusive development. However, actions associated with tribalism and ethnophobia are not isolated to South Africa alone.

Arguably, the discrimination and othering experienced by African migrants reflect ethnic values with the EU, manifested through hate and the othering of those who are seen as different and not conforming with these cultural and ethnic values. While one may not be associated with a tribe or ethnic group, features such as where one comes from, the type of language spoken, skin color, and social status ultimately give rise to othering and discrimination, and these have manifested themselves in a global perspective. Failure to address tribalism and ethnophobia in South Africa will have severe implications for development. It will:

- Hinder the process of inclusive nation-building.
- Increase the social divide between black South Africans.
- Hinder the government’s aim for collective socio-economic development.
- Increase possibilities of confrontations between different black ethnic groups in South Africa.

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