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Media Retaliation against the 2015 Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa

The Case of the QFM Radio in Zambia

Hlazo Mkandawire

Abstract

Today's democratic South Africa is figuratively labeled as a "rainbow nation" that embraces and celebrates diversity. However, the country has struggled to deal with socio-economic inequalities based on race and nationality for decades. The recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals, mainly immigrants and refugees, is a manifestation of this long existing divide. High unemployment rate, crime and disease have compounded the above situation, and media coverage of immigrants featuring sensationalism inadvertently promotes stereotypes. This paper discusses two actions taken by the QFM Radio in Zambia as acts of media retaliation to protest against the 2015 xenophobic attacks. The first was banning air play of all South African music on its radio station. The second was initiating an anti-xenophobia protest logo that facilitated civic engagement and participation in an effort to stop xenophobia and attract the attention of global media.

Keywords: *Xenophobia, Ubuntu, censorship, civic engagement, democracy, QFM Radio*

I. Introduction

Every year South Africa celebrates its first non-racial and democratic elections in the post-apartheid era on the occasion of Freedom Day, which falls on April 27th. In 2015, the 21st anniversary and commemoration of this day was tarnished by the news of the fatal xenophobic attacks on immigrants, particularly in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. This led to the reported deaths of at least seven people and left several others injured. More than 5,000 people were displaced and several shops were looted and raided (Smith, 2015). These xenophobic attacks spurred anti-immigrant sentiments and the annual Freedom Day celebration of diversity in South African democracy came under the media spotlight, both within and outside the country. Discussions ensued to re-examine the role of the media in

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provoking these attacks, on one hand, but also its efforts in promoting diversity and co-existence on the other.

Since the 1990's, the main cause of xenophobic attacks in South Africa has weighed in on immigrants who are continuously "accused of spreading disease, stealing jobs, and sponging off basic government services like electricity, running water and healthcare" (Patel & Essa, 2015). However, the latest attacks were largely attributed to the Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini. During a speech he remarked that immigrants should "pack their bags and leave" (Mhlongo, 2015). King Zwelithini initially denied saying these words, but after the media carefully translated his speech and produced a verbatim it became clear that these were indeed his words. He later denied inciting violence and called for peace, heaping blame on the media by claiming that he was misrepresented and his words were taken out of context.

However, the damage was already done as the news of the xenophobic attacks against immigrants in South Africa, mainly Africans, caused a huge uproar from other African countries. Mozambique reacted by pelting South African vehicles with stones. Malawi stopped South African nationals entering its country, and Kenya offered to evacuate its nationals from South Africa before the violence spread any further. Nigeria also threatened to close all South African businesses and cut bilateral ties. The African Union (AU) Chairperson and Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, expressed his "shock and disgust" at the "horrible" xenophobic attacks in a 30 minutes speech (News24, 2015). The media in Africa also reacted and the potential for wider implications of xenophobic attacks dawned.

In 2012, South African restaurant chain *Nandos* produced a satirical television advertisement that seemed to celebrate diversity in South Africa. After the 2015 xenophobic attacks, however, this television advertisement resurfaced and the video went viral on YouTube attracting over 1.8 million views. The 53 seconds advertisement opens with the lines, "You know what's wrong with South Africa? All you foreigners. You must all go back

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to where you came from: you Cameroonians, Congolese, Pakistani, Somalis, Ghanaians and Kenyans.”¹

These words are uttered while the pictures show what looks like a bunch of immigrants with suitcases illegally entering South Africa through a big hole in the wire fence boundary protecting the national borders. Then, the immigrants start disappearing one by one in puffs of smoke in different scenes. The advert ends with an indigenous Khoisan South African carrying hunting equipment and saying, “I am not going anywhere. You *\$#@#* found us here” (Gander, 2015). While many saw the *Nandos* television advertisement as a promotion of diversity in a rainbow nation, others saw it as an indirect gesture awakening South Africans to the national divide that exists in a democratic country. This is evidenced by the over 740 contradictory comments under the official YouTube video of the *Nandos* advertisement.

This paper attempts to highlight the wider implications of the 2015 outbreak of xenophobic attacks by exploring how the QFM Radio in Zambia retaliated in protest against the news of the attacks on immigrants living in the democratic South Africa. The paper will also attempt to underscore how the QFM Radio – as a conduit of the social values of *Ubuntu* – championed a positive public campaign that facilitated civic engagement and participation to call for an end to xenophobia and attracted the attention of global media.

II. The Media and the Dominant Immigrant Narrative

Mass media perform several functions in society, and one of the most important is that of providing news and information. “Contemporary research shows that the media do not just transmit information to the public, but rather, they also produce certain ideologies and discourses that support specific relations of power” (Smith, 2009, p. 18). Hence, the media can also influence and/or create public perceptions through the way its choice of news and

¹ Nandos South Africa diversity advertisement accessed from their official YouTube account. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_R7vu9SuxaQ

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information content is packaged and given salience. The media also have a social responsibility of providing fair and accurate reporting without bias on relevant issues in society.

However, there exists a dilemma in the debate on the media and immigrant narrative that partially borders on this notion of fair and accurate reporting. On the one hand, it seems to indicate that the media have assumed a biased role in this discussion and continue to contribute to public stereotypes towards immigrants, consciously or otherwise. On the other hand, of course, the media have occupied a central role in bringing attention to the vices of stereotyping immigrants and championing campaigns to overturn this dominant negative public attitude. Suro, Rosensteil, Kaplan, Dionne and Akdenizli (2008) argue that the debate about media coverage of migrants –referring to the American scenario in the year 2000 – is one that has created an overall impression of chaos, controversy and contradictions. It is almost impossible to disassociate the influence of media coverage from public perception towards immigrants. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that media scholars around the world have dedicated their time and effort researching this topic to understand the dialectical relationship that exists between media coverage and the dominant immigrant narrative.

Several studies conducted on media coverage of immigrants over the years have shown that negative news portrayals of immigrants increase stereotypic attitudes in the public (see Danso & McDonald, 2001; Janis & Kroll, 2013; Schemer, 2012; Suro, Rosensteil, Kaplan, Dionne, & Akdenizli, 2008). The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom (UK) published a report on the portrayals of immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the national British newspapers between 2010 and 2012. One of the key findings of the report was that “the most common descriptor for the word *immigrants* across all newspaper types is *illegal*, other negative words such as *failed*, *criminals*, and *sham*

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were also used” (Allen & Blinder, 2013, p. 2). The results of the report are strikingly similar to results from other comparable studies elsewhere.

A study commissioned by The Opportunity Agenda from 2012 to 2013 resonates the *illegal immigrant* narrative during their analysis of the media coverage of immigrants in newspapers and on television in America. In addition, Janis and Kroll (2013) also found that although the term *illegal immigrant* continues to be used extensively in news coverage, other terms such as *undocumented*, *unauthorized*, *without papers*, *new Americans* or *aspiring citizens* also constitute the immigrant narrative. “Content analysis of media coverage has also uncovered problems of accuracy, distortion and use of stereotypes in the language used” (Balch, 2015).

There are many kinds of stereotypes that form part of the negative immigrant narrative that is present in the media today. The *Nandos* advert alluded to earlier illustrates stereotyping of immigrants in the broad sense, but there are also specific kinds of stereotypes. For example, on July 20, 1997 an attractive blonde was stopped at the airport in Israel and denied entry into the country under suspicion of being a prostitute ... the story attracted media coverage and is an illustration of stereotypes of female immigrants (Lemish, 2000, p. 333). However, I do not wish to singularly decipher each kind of stereotype in this paper, but what is of interest is to highlight the most important stereotypes associated with the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. In 2001, Danso and McDonald conducted a study on South African print media’s coverage of cross-border immigrants and how it affects public opinion and policy making and concluded that media coverage is:

Highly sensationalized, Africanized and negative reporting of migration issues is generally in the form of superficial, statistics-happy articles that do little to inform the reader about the complexities of migration or how it fits with broader social, political and economic developments in the country/region. (Danso & McDonald, 2001, pp. 132-133)

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The coverage of migrants in the media in South Africa tends to mainly happen in terms of stereotypes. It was discovered that the most substantial kinds of stereotypes present in the print media's coverage of immigrants in South Africa include racial and nationalist biases (Danso & McDonald, 2001). In addition, "the media typically produces and/or reproduces three stereotypes; that of immigrants stealing jobs, creating crime and being *illegals*" (Valji, 2003, p. 9). For example, the South African media stereotypes Mozambicans as car thieves, Nigerians as drug dealers and Somalis as corrupt cash-carrying entrepreneurs who do not put their money in the bank but save it at home instead, essentially making them easy targets for criminals.

The above stereotypes are not really puzzling in a country that still is in transition and endures a multitude of race and class differences, even though it celebrates diversity and co-existence in its democracy and has been labeled a "rainbow nation." After holding its first democratic elections in 1994, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, a 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner, coined the metaphor "rainbow nation" to describe post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa's "rainbow nation" metaphor refers to "the incredible diversity of its people and is intended to encapsulate the unity of multi-culturalism. There is hardly a nation on Earth that is not in some way represented in this diverse country."²

South Africa's first black President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, also a 1993 Nobel Peace Prize winner, echoed this metaphor in his first month in public office to emphasize diversity in a new South Africa – "a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world," he remarked. However, the concept of the "rainbow nation" still remains just as a metaphor. There are many underlying socio-economic and class divides that South Africa as a nation has been struggling to erase or overcome.

² "Rainbow nation" definition extracted from an article on the South African Tourism website accessible on the URL: <http://www.southafrica.net/za/en/articles/entry/article-southafrica.net-south-africas-rainbow-nation>

III. A Short History of Media Coverage of Xenophobia in South Africa

This paper does not focus on providing an extensive history of xenophobic attacks, but it is imperative to highlight the “humble” beginnings of xenophobia in South Africa and trace the role the South African media have played in this background. This will help us better understand and recognize the efforts led by the media to stop xenophobia and also the research based results which indicate that the media are involved in biased coverage of immigrants by creating stereotypes that act as catalysts of the xenophobic violence.

According to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) Equality Report, “racism has been a problem in South Africa for over three centuries ... the country continues to battle socio-economic inequalities, which are largely the legacy of this historical process” (2012, p. 10). Xenophobic attacks are just a manifestation of these deep-rooted tensions orchestrated by a history of social-economic and institutional divisions. SAHRC (1999) defines xenophobia as “the irrational fear and deep dislike of non-nationals” (p. 12).

Evidence shows that indigenous black South Africans are the ones who carry out xenophobic attacks on immigrants. Of course, they too were – and probably still are – on the receiving end of racial divides dominated by white supremacy in a “rainbow nation.” Racial divisions and xenophobia share common prejudices, as they both operate on the basis of profiling certain identified people and making negative assumptions about them. “The profiling in the case of racism is on the basis of race, while in the case of xenophobia it is on the basis on nationality”(South African History Online, 2015).

The main cause of xenophobia cannot be restricted to a single factor. This topic is contentious and several factors are attributed to its causality, including the media in some cases. Findings by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) indicate that:

With instability and wars continuing in other parts of the continent, many people turned to South Africa to seek asylum and refuge. Nationals saw the arrival of

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immigrants from other African countries as a threat. They viewed the newcomers to be coming into the country to take their jobs and as a competition to the access of economic resources (as cited in Mtwana & Bird, 2006, p. 10).

Since 1994, South Africa has seen rising levels of xenophobic attacks on immigrants and the media have been reporting these cases but also actively engaging with other stakeholders to promote messages to stop xenophobia. What started as isolated acts of retaliation by youth gangs who destroyed homes and property owned by immigrants in Alexandra Township, Gauteng Province in 1994 and 1995, would soon escalate into attacks on individuals, and eventually lead to death:

In September 1998, two Senegalese and a Mozambican were thrown out of a moving train in Johannesburg by a group of individuals returning from a rally organized by a group blaming foreigners for the levels of unemployment, crime, and even the spread of HIV/AIDS. (SAHO, 2015)

These incidents of cruelty and violence against immigrants captured the attention of civil society organizations working with refugees and human rights, and they decided to embark on a campaign to roll back this violence. As a result, two workshops were held in 1998. “The first in October resulting in the Braamfontein Statement and the second in November when the Roll Back Xenophobia Plan of Action was developed” (SAHRC Fourth Annual Report, 1999, p. 12). There were several activities that followed these workshops in an attempt to combat xenophobia, and the media were identified to play an influential role and seen as critical in transforming negative attitudes towards migrants:

Two pamphlets, a magazine and a comic booklet were printed and distributed and a radio series broadcast on community radio stations countrywide. Various seminars on forced migration, xenophobia and refugee rights were held at Universities, including a TV series. (SAHRC Fourth Annual Report, 1999, p. 12)

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However, the influential role of the media did not yield immediate results. In fact, reports by SAHRC and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) revealed that the South African media contributed to xenophobia by promoting negative immigrant narratives that influenced public attitudes and perceptions towards African migrants through media sensationalism and stereotyping (Mtwana & Bird, 2006). MMA also “found that much of the media coverage is simplistic and that the media often fails (*sic*) to acknowledge the complexities inherent in discussions around xenophobia and the experiences of African migrants in South Africa (Mtwana & Bird, 2006, p. 13). Hence, it is not surprising that civil society organization’s massive investment in media campaigns in 1998/9 against xenophobia hardly yielded any positive results.

By the year 2000, the xenophobic attacks increased and the method of the attacks became more subtle, calculated and cruel. The victims were shot execution-style. Some families were hijacked and others stabbed, beaten or burnt to death. The media reporting of xenophobic attacks seems to peak during moments of greater or more significance. The most shocking came in 2008 when 342 shops owned by foreign nationals were looted, 213 burnt down, thousands left homeless and the death toll rose to a record high of 56 deaths (SAHO, 2015). “The response of the government, especially President Thabo Mbeki, was to deny xenophobia as a source of the violence and dismiss it as ordinary crime by unemployed youths and gangs, ruling the townships” (Touwen, 2009, p. 13).

The 2008 outburst of xenophobic attacks represented a turn around in the way the media were reporting the violence, and initiatives to coordinate the reporting started surfacing. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT’s) and social media ensured that the public got involved in the process. Online archives were developed to document xenophobic violence and using the *Ushahidi* concept, platforms were developed for social activism and public accountability using crowdsourcing. The *Ushahidi* concept started in

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Kenya as an aftermath of the disputed 2007 Presidential elections to collect eyewitness reports of violence.

Ushahidi (meaning “testimony” in Swahili) is a free and open source platform “that allows citizens to send information in a quick and easy way through cell phones and Internet with the purpose of coverage during crisis” (Salazar & Soto, 2011, p. 58). It is now possible to map reports of the current xenophobic attacks through “crowd-source” newsgathering on unfolding crises in remote areas via e-mail and mobile phones. The idea is to get immediate attention and relief to strife zones and fill the gap left by news organizations as the public can actively participate by adding data to the map (Bahree, 2008).

Xenophobic violence was again reported in February 2013 when eight South African Police Officers tied a 27 year old Mozambican man to the back of a police van and dragged his body down the street for parking his taxi on the wrong side of the road. A citizen captured the violence on video. Subsequently, the man died in a police cell from head injuries (SAHO, 2015). Three months later, two Zimbabweans were killed in a separate attack. Without underestimating these attacks and subsequent deaths, the biggest media frenzy on xenophobic violence in South Africa came between January and May 2015 as described earlier in the introduction of this paper. This came as no surprise and resulted in protests from other African countries that felt their nationals were being targeted. Zambia, through the actions of the QFM Radio, joined the rest of Africa and the world in bringing attention to the barbaric xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa.

IV. *Ubuntu* as a Guiding Principle in Media Coverage of Immigrants

The cumulative xenophobic attacks on immigrants in South Africa not only contradict the social values of *Ubuntu* in the African context but also represent the potential to affect all realms of social, economic, cultural and political life. This situation indirectly affects public perceptions and the way South Africans themselves are treated (or mistreated) in other

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African countries. The media in South Africa and indeed across Africa have to embrace the social values of *Ubuntu* in order to successfully rollback xenophobic attacks and change the negative immigrant narrative associated with media coverage. *Ubuntu*, just like many other African concepts, is very difficult to define mainly because a lot of the meaning gets lost when an attempt is made to define an African notion using a foreign language. *Ubuntu* can be used in varying contexts, and the most important aspect is to focus on the social values it represents in the context of African societies.

However, not much has been written about how the African media can be conduits of *Ubuntu* by promoting the social values it represents. There is a vacuum in media theoretical construction that is left by the continued absence of the emphasis on African media being conduits of the social values of *Ubuntu*. This approach has the potential to rollback not only xenophobia and change public perceptions, but can also prove invaluable to overturning the dominant negative immigrant narrative present in the media today. “This notion of *Ubuntu* sheds light on the importance of peacemaking through the principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples ... and provides a rationale for guiding society to promote reconciliation” (Murithi, 2006, p. 29). *Ubuntu* can mean different things but speaks to the very essence of being human and other scholars describe it as:

A philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness, and morality; a metaphor that represents group solidarity, where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources. (Mokgroro, 1998, p. 2)

Ubuntu has the capacity to bring together and unite people from different social and cultural backgrounds. The African media’s coverage of immigrants from the standpoint of the social values of *Ubuntu* has the potential to eliminate negative messages or stereotyping of immigrants in the media. I will analyze two related actions that the QFM Radio in Zambia

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exhibited in retaliation to xenophobic attacks in South Africa: one that undermines the principles of *Ubuntu* and another that consolidates its social values. I will include a short theoretical reflection on each action as it is presented. Firstly, it is important to add context to the discussion by giving a short introduction of the QFM Radio.

V. The Significance of the QFM Radio and Preamble to Media Retaliation

Research on the debate about media coverage and the immigrant narrative has tended to focus more on content analysis of print media (mainly newspapers) and television content (Allen & Blinder, 2013; Danso & McDonald, 2001; Janis & Kroll, 2013). There has been very little, if any, analysis of radio content in relation to the immigrant narrative in Africa. The several roles radio can play in today's sophisticated media landscape to roll back the immigrant narrative remain inadequately explored, especially in Africa. In Zambia, where the main medium of communication is radio, this becomes an important source for the coverage of the immigration narrative, and consequently the retaliation that radio exhibits to protest against xenophobia in South Africa attracts a wide local audience.

The QFM Radio is one of the biggest privately owned Frequency Modulation (FM) radio station broadcasting from the heart of Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. It was established in October 2001 as a commercially oriented and viable entertainment, music and information hub with the slogan "Africa's modern Radio." The station transmits 24 hours a day and identifies with its modern listeners by way of a target-oriented music mix (QFM Radio, 2015). The QFM Radio is a market leader in the entertainment arena and sets the pace for today's radio audience in Zambia.

The QFM Radio also broadcasts online 24/7 and is accessible not only to Zambians living in the diaspora, but worldwide to any listener who has Internet connection on a computer or mobile phone. The radio station also actively maintains a Facebook Page where it has attracted more than 160 000 followers, and this is a significant number in a country with a

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total Facebook user population estimated at 980 000 users (All In 1 Social, 2015). According to the Africa Media Barometer (AMB) 2013 report, the radio reaches every corner of the country in Zambia, and “it is the most accessible medium of communication. 87 per cent of the households own one or more radio sets and 88 per cent listen to radio almost every day” (p. 27). Hence, when the QFM Radio takes a controversial stance on an issue, it catches the attention of the Zambian public – the masses who own and listen to the radio, those who follow the QFM Radio on Facebook, and also listeners world over who regularly tune in to the radio station online.

By using secondary research, also known as desk review, the author was able to synthesize and analyze official documents, online material and other secondary data sources to highlight two ways in which the QFM Radio in Zambia retaliated against the 2015 outbreak of xenophobic attacks on immigrants in South Africa. Firstly, the radio station blacked out and boycotted the playing of South Africa music and also developed an anti-xenophobia protest logo that contributed towards the campaign to end xenophobic attacks.

VI. QFM Radio Bans Airplay of South African Music

On April 17th, 2015, the QFM Radio took a “controversial stance” and surprised the media fraternity and the general public by announcing that it had indefinitely banned airplay of all South African music in protest against xenophobic attacks, although there was no clear indication as to how long this ban would remain effective. QFM Radio Managing Director, Asan Nyama, confirmed this development and explained that this was an act “in solidarity with Africans who have fallen victim to xenophobic attacks ... and the station feels duty-bound to voice out in protest by stopping the airplay of their music” (Lusaka Times, 2015). This position taken by the QFM Radio was reported in South African media (i.e. eNCA) and also other global media including the BBC and CNN and news agencies like Xinhua. The

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banning of South African music is in itself interesting because it happened as an act of media retaliation.

The South African media cover xenophobia as a thematic issue; therefore, it seems relevant that media in other African countries take a position on this topic as well. However, the stance taken by the QFM Radio was a controversial exploit within Zambia. Although it was hardly challenged, it raised some pertinent questions regarding the wider implications and volatility of the media actively taking a position such as the banning or censoring of music on its airwaves. Over the years, the state in Zambia has remained at the centre of this controversy as “gatekeepers” entrusted with regulating the broadcast media and have not hesitated to ban controversial songs from airplay.

The above decision taken by the QFM Radio provides a new twist to this “state centered controversy”. For the first time, the media directly took matters in to their own hands and “self-imposed” a ban on South African music as an act of retaliation. Music censorship is an attempt to “exclude ‘undesirable’ songs from the airwaves” (Baines, 2006, p. 53), and one can argue that the action taken by the QFM Radio to ban the airplay of South African music is closely related to, and cannot be dissociated from, the wider discussion on music censorship.

This act of media retaliation implores for scrutiny that goes beyond just the politics of xenophobia and a ban on the airplay of South African music. The media in Zambia have always cried foul when the state imposed censorship or banned the airplay of certain music deemed “inappropriate,” yet this action taken by the QFM Radio seems to indicate that it is “right” when the media impose this kind of censorship or ban on themselves in total disregard of public or audience preferences. Amidst xenophobic attacks, access to the voices of South African music is denied a platform on the QFM Radio, albeit the work of the music artists

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and the content of their music are totally unrelated to the violent attacks on foreign nationals taking place in their country of origin.

I argue that the free circulation of information, news, opinion and ideas is the cornerstone of a healthy public engagement on civic matters and should be at the centre of any democratic society. The protest by the QFM Radio that culminated in targeted banning of South African music looks very ingenuous on the surface and outrightly justifiable. However, it sets a dangerous precedent on censorship and the whole idea of the media taking a deliberate stance on similar issues. It makes the censorship or banning of controversial opinion or music suddenly thinkable and justifiable and represents the classic slippery slope argument as coined by Warburton.

Warburton (2009) argues that “freedom of speech should be contested on the grounds that to allow a government (or media owner) to restrict such a basic freedom is to take a step down a slippery slope that will almost inevitably end in totalitarian regime or at least something close to it” (p. 1). The stance taken by the QFM Radio has the potential to open up similar future justifications on bans or censorship, whether led by the state or otherwise, and it dilutes the media’s bargaining power to be able to challenge “controversial” bans that are regularly imposed by the state in Zambia. Eric Barendt (2005) makes five classifications that must exist for free speech to thrive, and these are open discussion to the discovery of truth, self-development and fulfillment, citizen’s participation in a democracy, suspicion of government and freedom of publication. In summary, Barendt (2005) argues that “restrictions on what we are allowed to say and write, or to hear and read, inhibit our personality and its growth” (p. 13).

In a democratic Zambia, the state, media moguls or indeed private individuals must not impose any infringements on people’s autonomy or dignity through choosing what people should say and write or hear and read because this reflects failure to respect and recognize

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that people are capable of thinking and deciding for themselves what to say and write, or hear and read. The act by the QFM Radio to ban the playing of South African music on its station amounts to music censorship. If such “restrictions are tolerated, society prevents the ascertainment and publication of accurate facts and valuable opinion” (Barendt, 2005, p. 7).

Therefore, targeted banning of music is unacceptable and should not be entertained regardless of the reasons behind it, even if it is an act of retaliation to protest against outbreaks of xenophobic attacks. No matter how convincing the reasons might seem to be at first hand, the wider implications always lead towards a culture of suppression of free speech and the state might use it as an entry point to justify their own form of censorship in future. “What should be made clear is that censorship doesn’t work, even if the intentions are noble and accepted” (Lombardi, 1991, p. 15).

VII. QFM Radio Initiates ‘NO!!! To Xenophobia’ Protest Logo

After the banning of South African music on the QFM Radio, the station also launched an attractive anti-xenophobia protest logo on the same day (17th April, 2015) on its Facebook page and on its official website with the message ‘NO!!! To Xenophobia.’ This anti-xenophobia protest logo was an act of *Ubuntu* initiated by the QFM Radio that managed to draw the desired attention to the campaign to stop xenophobic attacks against immigrants in South Africa. The QFM anti-xenophobia protest logo quickly went viral on social media as it was reposted, retweeted and shared numerous times, and it also caught the attention of several mainstream international media and news agencies that reported on the matter. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) republished this anti-xenophobia protest logo on its official website, and it made headlines not only in global media but also within the media in several African countries upholding the social values of *Ubuntu*.

There were two versions of the same QFM Radio anti-xenophobia protest logo, and both served a similar purpose depending on the media landscape in which it was republished. The

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first logo was very colourful with a Zambian flag in the background, and it was predominantly recognized for use within Zambia. This protest logo was also most graphic in nature. It featured a background image on the left side of what appeared to be a male victim of xenophobia being burnt alive. The male victim was engulfed in flames while on his knees, and wooden planks used to propel the fire could be seen tied around his legs to prevent him from running away or saving himself.

There were also two messages that read ‘One Africa’ and ‘NO!!! To Xenophobia’ branded on each side of a black clenched fist shown rising above the background image of the burning male victim. On the wrist of the clenched fist was the official emblem of the QFM Radio. Below is an image of the first protest logo.



Figure 1. The anti-xenophobia protest logo. Adapted from the QFM Radio official website.

Copyright 2015 by QFM Radio in Zambia.

The background image of the burning male victim was adapted from images of xenophobic attacks that surfaced in 2015. However, it was also a subject of controversy as some have argued this was not a 2015 image, and that it was in fact an image from the 2008 xenophobic attacks:

A quick search on Google Images reveals that, while this image was indeed taken in South Africa and it does show violence against foreign nationals, it is not an image of the 2015 outburst of xenophobic violence. This horrific scene actually took place in

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2008 and the victim was Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave from Mozambique who died of his injuries. The image was widely circulated at the time of his death, with many people referring to him simply as the “flaming man.” (France 24, 2015)

Hence, it is important to note that false images also circulate during outbreaks of xenophobic attacks, especially on social media to dramatize the extent of violence by mostly overzealous individuals. These false images have the potential to exacerbate the extent to which other African countries react to the violence. Therefore, the media have a moral and social responsibility to ensure that such images are carefully checked and verified before they are published or used in anti-xenophobia protests or campaigns of a similar nature.

The second QFM Radio anti-xenophobia protest logo – which was republished mainly by global media – was featured in black and white with a clear white background. Conspicuously, the controversial image of the “flaming man” was missing from the second protest logo and the background of the Zambian flag was also removed. The logo carried the same messages of ‘One Africa’ and ‘NO!!! To Xenophobia’ and had the QFM Radio official emblem implanted on the wrist of the clenched fist as in the first protest logo. Below is the second protest logo for comparison.



Figure 2. The anti-xenophobia second protest logo. Adapted from the QFM Radio official website.

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The anti-xenophobia protest logos played a significant role in raising awareness of the xenophobic violence within Zambia through civic engagement and participation. Dahlgren (2009) refers to “engagement as a mobilized focused attention on some subject and a prerequisite for participation” (p. 81). He further argues that “for engagement to become embodied in participation and thereby give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to practical, do-able activities, where citizens can feel empowered” (pp. 80-81). The QFM anti-xenophobia protest logos were widely circulated on social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, not only by Zambian nationals, but also by nationals of other African countries and civil society organizations. These acts of online engagement and participation on social media eventually developed into offline engagement and participation in civic activities against xenophobia.

Consequently, the protest logos became a medium of connection for civic agency and were used in demonstrations against the xenophobic attacks, thus enhancing civic engagement and participation within Zambia. On Twitter the hashtag #blackfriday started trending and was used by many Zambians to express their anger against the xenophobic violence alongside the QFM anti-xenophobia protest logos. The BBC reports that a Zambian, Malumbo Siwale tweeted: “Not buying or using South African products today, fight #xenophobia by pressuring the #SA govt to act #blackfriday” (BBC, 2015).

Other Zambian activists also got involved as the discussions went from online to offline activities to protest against xenophobia. An offline activity or protest was planned, and it was called “Black Friday.” Hundreds of Zambians expressed willingness on social media to convene an offline gathering at Crossroads Shopping Mall and march to the South African High Commission to present a petition demanding an end to xenophobia in South Africa (*Lusaka Times*, 2015). This activity represented their democratic right to express civic agency.

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However, the Zambian Police got wind of the planned social media convened protest and quickly issued a statement saying they had cancelled the protest as it did not have the right permit required by the Zambian Law. This intimidated those who were afraid of getting arrested and on the day of the protest only a handful of people showed up. The protest did take place with fewer attendees than expected and since the Police had already achieved their mission, they did not bother to arrest anyone among the few people who demonstrated after all.

However, this did not deter Zambian activists from staging lone protests. The most prominent one was that of Laura Miti, an outspoken female blogger, journalist, and human rights activist. She staged a lone protest outside the largest South African owned discount retailer, Game Stores, in the upmarket Manda Hill Shopping Mall, while carrying a placard with the message “South African Business Is The Biggest Migrant: Speak Out Against Xenophobia.” She was subsequently arrested by the Police but later released in the evening with only a warn and caution statement; no charges were registered. In a recorded video message posted on YouTube, Laura Miti said, “I believe that the South African government, and the South African corporate world could do a whole lot more to prevent these xenophobic attacks that keep coming regularly.”³

The wider implications of the media retaliation led by the QFM Radio helped to bring the issue on xenophobic attacks in the limelight within Zambia, and it also contributed to mobilizing Zambian human right activists to engage, speak out and condemn this vice. There is no doubt that the online broadcasting service offered by the QFM Radio and the anti-xenophobia protest logos captured the attention of global citizens. They also contributed to raising the voice of similar causes in other African nations, South Africa inclusive, to put an

³ The comment is extracted from a video posted on YouTube by Mama Sosa during an interview with Laura Miti as she prepared to stage the lone protest. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hxds1qeQmc8>

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end to xenophobia, enhance democracy through civic engagement and participation and embrace the social values of *Ubuntu*.

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has highlighted the two major acts of media retaliation led by the QFM Radio in Zambia on the backdrop of the 2015 xenophobic attacks reported in South Africa. The QFM Radio reacted to the latest xenophobic attacks on immigrants in South Africa by firstly freezing out the airplay of all South African music on its radio station. Secondly, it launched anti-xenophobia protest logos to contribute to promoting and amplifying the voice of dissent against xenophobic attacks and focusing on the social values of *Ubuntu*, not only in Zambia but in the African context as a whole and the entire world in general.

This stimulated efforts by Zambian human rights activists and private individuals to also join the protest against xenophobia. As conduits of the social values of *Ubuntu*, the media have a huge role to play in facilitating a social environment that is devoid of stereotypes – one that promotes diversity in order to embrace the ‘rainbow nation’ metaphor. The media should not promote a negative immigrant narrative. Instead, it should provide news and information to educate individuals in order to break the myth of negative attitudes and perceptions against immigrants and promote *Ubuntu* and togetherness in one Africa, the united Africa.

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