

COVID-19 and the Opportunity for Cohesion: Addressing the Conflict between Local and Migrant Communities in South Africa

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Introduction

The fragility of a South Africa built around the dream of a rainbow nation continues to come under violent scrutiny in the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has exacerbated the tensions of an already strained relationship between local communities and migrants. This is evident from the discordant messages that have been issued by key government personnel on whether or not migrants locked in South Africa should be the recipients of various reliefs by the government to alleviate the hardship occasioned by the crisis. Some citizens have taken to social media suggesting that the limited resources of the country and the present dire needs of citizens, do not afford the luxury of supporting foreigners. Thus, we are witnessing an additional layer to an already strained relationship between locals and migrants, as has been evident in a past, cluttered by tensions and in extreme cases, dramatic waves of xenophobic violence perpetrated against African nationals.

This article attempts to provide an overview of the present experiences of migrants in the current situation in light of the clear constitutional provisions that frame the idea of social cohesion as one in which South Africa belongs to all that live in it. The article relies heavily on current literature and research on post apartheid South Africa, migrant communities and social cohesion, particularly data collected and analysed by migration networks, migrant and refugee organizations, media and government sources to analyse the experiences of migrants within South Africa. It will rehash some of the research that has been carried out on the tensions between local and migrant communities, highlighting critical driving factors fuelling these tensions. This discussion is critical as it informs the relatively different treatment of

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migrants by government and various institutions during the present crisis and what can be done, within the context of the pandemic, to build an inclusive society where migrants feel a sense of belonging. The unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis should also be viewed as an opportunity to build cohesion between local and migrant communities. Many societies have emerged at their best when faced with severe crisis. COVID-19 presents such a prospect where society can reflect upon the underlying values that have founded this country and emerge from the crisis more inclusive, cohesive and jointly invested in creating a better South Africa.

The Experiences of Migrants

While most (though not exclusively) of the pre-1994 migration was mainly internally, in the post 1994 period, inflow migration now included migrants from Africa and Asia (Segatti, 2011). This is explainable as it was not until 1993 that South Africa finally recognised the principle of asylum, accepting local integration and the responsibilities for the provision of social welfare to refugees and asylum seekers (Odunayo, Asuelime & Okem, 2017). At the same time, when one reviews some of the major conflicts that broke out in Africa post 1990, it comes as no surprise that South Africa soon became a destination for refugees fleeing human rights abuse, collapsed states, conflict and war (Odunayo, Asuelime & Okem, 2017). Many migrants entering the country were drawn by a number of pull factors. For example, the access to business facilities, market of consumers and transport infrastructure (Dinbabo & Nyasulu, 2015). These advantages were apparent to both skilled migrant labour force and unskilled African migrants, who preferred to live closer to the CBD than in geographically marginalised and underserved peripheral areas that apartheid had created (Segatti, 2011). It was also within the CBD that many organisations provided services to refugees. The result at the end of these phases of migration has been the creation of areas with a multi-cultural identity that includes parts dominated by the historical exclusive white apartheid suburbs.

In terms of social cohesion, living in these areas continues to be the centre of multiple challenges associated with urban populations including the complexities of harmonizing distinct socio-cultural elements amidst the economic impacts that in-migration produces in these assorted spaces

(World Economic Forum, 2017). Juxtaposed over these complexities are the historical convolutions associated with the legacy of apartheid and its pre-occupation with racial separation, the result of which has been a spatial system that places black people on the economic fringes where poverty and unemployment is rife (Chutel, 2017). One can readily see how the entry of migrants into these spaces can lead to outcomes that are in dissonance with South Africa's international obligations to protect vulnerable asylum seekers. Local and migrant communities sharing these common spaces are brought into competition for acute economic opportunities resulting in inter and intra-community tensions that have manifested in the past in overt and covert forms of xenophobia (or as some researchers have suggested – Afrophobia – given the unique form the resentment takes against Africans foreign nationals, in particular) (Dube, 2019). There's has been much discourse around the nature of this hostility and its causes. Many of these factors are symptomatic, while others require an examination of the disaffections and anger that continues to seethe at deeper level. It will also be observed that these factors are interrelated. Below is a summary of some of the factors that have been highlighted:

▪ **Marginalisation:** Generally, the anger and frustration amongst South Africa's poor can be traced back to decades and centuries of apartheid and colonial oppression and marginalisation. Inequality in South Africa was institutionalised, and the country's resources were skewed towards the white minority. Under the new South Africa, a combination of social and economic realities continues to confine many locals to the periphery leaving them with a deep sense of frustration (Chutel, 2017). These frustrations present a poignant basis of anger that can be directed against persons perceived to be the source of the socio-economic realities (Choane, Shukila and Mthombeni, 2011).

▪ **Unmet Expectations:** For millions, the dawn of democracy signalled hope of an end to poverty and marginalisation. However, 26 years into democracy, this hope seems elusive. The ongoing difficulties associated with accessing basic services such as health, social welfare and education, coupled with the scramble for

employment opportunities and other resources, connive in the creation of an individual and collective sense of disempowerment (Claassen, 2017). It is no wonder that settlements that have recently experienced ‘xenophobic’ violence have also been the site of violent and other forms of protest around other issues, most notably service delivery (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008).

▪ **Stigmatisation of Migrants:** From the onset migrants experience systematic exclusion rooted in the acquisition and societal recognition of their identity documents, resulting in their marginalisation in diverse areas including access to primary health care, housing, employment and business permits. The result of such marginalisation at policy and institutional level is the creation of social norms and values within the community where migrants are stigmatised and discriminated against (Miller, 2018). Violence and hostility towards the migrant is seen as a supplement and extension of this institutional position reflected in the immigration policy of the state. The response to this sense of marginalisation by the migrant community has been to disengage from a society they perceive as unwilling to accommodate them, exhibiting a level of apathy when it comes to their participation within various community structures.

▪ **“Othering” or Insider – Outsider Perceptions:** Various researchers ascribe it to the outsider-insider phenomenon – the tendency to attack those that we see as “other”, those who are more vulnerable and seen as outsiders (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2008). A mixture of bio-cultural affinity, use of language and accompanying distortions of information available to the public, create an environment conducive to “othering” – a process through which sections of society are defined as good contradistinction to bad outsiders. Migrants are widely subjected to mechanisms of “othering” through the application of various bio-cultural features, which are used to justify attitudes exhibited against “the other” (SAHO, 2018). The extent in which physical and inalienable characteristic such as language, skin shades, religion,

staple diets, dress and hairstyles etc as well as other cultural embodiments such as language continue to be used to perpetuate deeper hostile attitudes cannot be underestimated. Through this “othering”, migrants attitudes and prejudices are developed about foreigners making it easy for them to be blamed for a wide range of ills including spreading diseases, crime etc.

▪ **Manipulation by Opinion Makers:** It is easy to comprehend how this view of the ‘inferior other’ can translate into extreme violence, which can be easily manipulated by persons in positions of influence. Dating back to 1994, anti-foreigner sentiments have been expressed by government ministers, various government departments and citizens. In the more recent past it was been suggested that the 2015 wave of violence was the result of negative statements associated with monarch of the Zulu nation, King Zwelithini (Chutel, 2019; SAHRC, 2016). Several commentators have drawn a link between what such authorities say and the unleashing of violence against migrants (Landau, 2011). In this regard, the ability of authorities to inflame locals in this manner should be viewed in light of these insider-outsider perceptions.

▪ **Approach towards Nation Building:** The project of nation building can present difficulties towards building an inclusive identity that is in line with the constitutional principle that South Africa belongs to all who live in it (Institute of Security Studies, 2015). As with many parts of the world, South Africa’s post 1994 nation building project has had to confront the challenges of globalization that have diminished the relevance of the nation-state. This has triggered the phenomenon of international migration on an unprecedented scale. In these circumstances the process of nation building on the basis of unity around homogeneous history, ethnicity etc. has come under increasing challenge as states have seen the growth of large sections of immigration. In this context, South Africa could repeat the errors of many African countries which sought to enhance in-group solidarity, inadvertently strengthening out-group hostility. This risk is heightened by a sense of superiority

that flows out of the discourse of South African exceptionalism, which entrenches views that the rest of Africa is inherently inferior to South Africa (The Conversation, 2017). This kind of patriotic pride can translate into condescension and a disassociation with the continent.

▪ **Media Biases:** The media seems to have attracted a level of culpability for its acquiescence, and in some cases active reinforcement, of the “othering” of migrants. The media not only shapes public opinion but has the power to cultivate perceptions around identity and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within society. The concern with the media in South Africa lies in the manner information communicated creates and perpetuates certain perceptions about different segments of the community (Al-jazeera, 2015). Widely exaggerated figures and statements circulated in the media in respect to the numbers of immigrants present in the country continue to stoke the image of a country that is overridden by immigrants (Africa is a country, 2018). These inaccuracies within the media (evident daily reporting about crime, labour concerns and the reasons behind the presence of migrants in South Africa) sow misconceptions and disseminate myths that further confine migrants to the fringes of society. Research has also shown how the media rarely reported positively on the Africa continent, and thus reinforcing virulent stereotypes against people originating from these countries (Adekoya, 2013). Little surprise that South Africans view Africans from other countries as having nothing to contribute to the community.

▪ **Competition for Resources:** Research has established that a large number of South Africans feel that migrants use up resources intended for South Africans (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2008). Many believe that migrants take up jobs that should have been given to South African nationals (Masikane, Hewitt and Toendepi, 2020). These views are understandable when one considers that years after democracy, many South Africans are yet to access their basic socio-economic rights. In the environs of

such acute shortages, migrants have been painted as competing for scarce resources with millions of poor South Africans (Maina et al., 2011). In these representations, migrants compete unfairly and undeservedly with South Africans for resources that they are not entitled to. This has prompted many local communities to blame the government's management of cross-border migration for the growing numbers of migrants, suggesting that it was this exacerbated competition over resources such as housing, trading opportunities, formal employment etc, that bred resentment for migrants among host communities (Afro Barometer, 2019). A corollary to these sentiments is the feeling that migrants are more attractive to employers as they often are more susceptible to labour exploitation (Vettori, 2017). In these circumstances, they end up competing for low skilled jobs with locals, where they are obviously preferred. This in turn results in further acrimony with locals who accuse them of being more than willing to tolerate low wages and aiding a race to the bottom.

▪ **“Scapegoating” Hypothesis:** This thinking is compounded by excuses made by authorities about their limited capacity to provide services amidst this overwhelming presence of migrants (Tella and Ogunnubi, 2014). Dubbed by researchers as the 'scapegoating hypothesis' this thinking suggest that service providers are unable to keep up because of the high levels of in-migration into South Africa and the constraints that this puts on the limited available resources (Johnson, 2019). This however ignores the fact that most of South Africa's migration is internal, consisting of South Africans moving within the country, causing the same challenges in terms of access to resources on one level, with similar consequences of stratified exclusionary tendencies being exercised against new comers into the area who are South Africans. It appears that space continues to define access to resources and services and ultimately patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Amidst this set of social relations it is most obviously the “strangers”/ “foreigners” who are seen as excluded from community rights and access to resources, and become easy scapegoats for associated socio-economic challenges.

▪ **Political and Institutional Factors:** The pivotal role of leadership (particularly at the local level) towards building intra-community relationship remained a key feature cited in relations to concerns around credibility and the gap of mistrust between legitimate leadership structures and the community at large. The causes of this erosion of trust have been the subject of a number of research reports. For example, it is felt that there was a failure by existing leaders to understand the role that democratic and public institutions are meant to play in enhancing public participation (Crush and Ramachandran, 2014). Instead, corruption and ineptitude in these institutions perpetuated a maze of bureaucracy deliberately restricting the flow of information in order to further the interest of a few “connected” individuals. This loss of confidence in legitimate authority structures presents an entry for the growth of dysfunctional structures (formal and informal) driven by self-interest and willingness to manipulate concerns through divisive techniques which apportion culpability for concerns on certain sections of the community (Misago, 2019).

▪ **Psycho-social Dimension:** Many of the present threats to today’s migrant/local relationships were rooted in generations of gross violations experienced during apartheid. This manifested in virtually every aspect including – the psychosocial responses of individuals; the current crisis in skills shortages flowing out of decades of denial of educational development; and the impact of years of political and economic isolation of the country and its interaction with the greater continent. Researchers have highlighted this psychosocial dimension illustrating how the violence against African migrants has been consistent with structural exclusion and racial devaluation that took place during the apartheid period (Matsinhe, 2011) It has been suggested that these complexes and psychological feelings of shame continue to be projected to African immigrants, suggesting that xenophobia occurs at a level of visible difference where lighter skin has been associated with better socio-economic standing while darker skin is often associated with criminality and poverty.

▪ **Culture of Violence:** Another dimension of this psychosocial aspect, and which has been the subject of much documentation, relates to the psychological impact of the past atrocities, including political violence in 1980s, towards creating a culture of violence often reflected today in the violent service delivery protests; the brutality of crime; vigilante responses in defiance of the rule of law; the culture of impunity; and the violence that accompanies the phenomenon of xenophobia (South African Government News Agency, 2010). The isolation theory argues that apartheid isolated the country incapacitating the exposure of its people to the populations of other African countries sowing the seeds for less tolerance of difference, the fruits of which currently manifest in the xenophobic prejudices exhibited towards African nationals (Harris, 2002). Certainly, one cannot dispute that apartheid did create powerful ideologies of difference and promoted stereotypes, which encourage biased perception of foreigners as criminals and carriers of disease.

The above factors are relevant in the present context of the pandemic and the general response by the authorities to it. It has been observed that the pandemic deepens fissures present in different countries. Some have gone as far as suggesting that the pandemic exposes the construct of the state and national identity programmes it carries out. In the context of South Africa, one can therefore expect the pandemic to illuminate many of the factors discussed above given the direct and indirect impact it is having on the socio-economic conditions of those living in South Africa (Deutsche Welle, 2020). As observed, these conditions have played a dominant role in the perceptions towards migrants and how they fit into the national project of social cohesion. Other psychosocial factors discussed above are also likely to be amplified during this period. For example, if migrants are viewed as outsiders, one can expect these perceptions and what fuels them to drive an even wider wedge between them and local communities (Garba, 2020). Juxtaposed upon all of this is the role that leadership can play in furthering social cohesion. In the past as observed, many leaders have thrived on opportunism where migrants form convenient scapegoats for the ills facing the country (Shoki, 2020). The pandemic once again is likely to expose any

crisis of leadership that exists in this regard, as observed in various other parts of the world where leaders have leaned upon ideologies based on extreme nationalism that is exclusionary, instead of building a society undergirded by shared values (Shoki, 2020).

COVID-19 and Social Cohesion

The lockdown by government in response to the rising cases of COVID-19 cases has been lauded severally on the international front (Bearak, 2020). From a health perspective, it has been praised as being scientific sound and providing the necessary lead time for building within the healthcare system, the capacity to cope with the pandemic (Bateman, 2020). However, as the lockdown drags on, concerns are being raised about its effects on the economy and the impact that this may have on the most vulnerable of the population (Garba, 2020). To this end, the government has made several announcements to alleviate the plight of these groups including the provision of various grants and food parcels, business stimulus and concessions around healthcare (Dhever and Hinckermann, 2020; South African Government, 2020). All of these efforts aim at ensuring that the impact of the pandemic is not just mitigated but, all sectors of society feel included at this critical time. These actions are cognizant of the fact that poverty, unemployment and inequality have been identified as critical driving factors that impede social cohesion and have the potentially of accelerating social disintegration (Lefko-Everett, 2016). These factors create a sense of exclusion, which translates to apathy and disinvestment in the project of nation building (Estivill, 2003). In taking action to mitigate the intensity of these factors, the government is stemming the potential fragmentation and collapse that could occur, if appropriate action was not taken.

It is clear that the exigencies created by the present COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and the acute dangers facing large sections of vulnerable groups in South Africa, has once again brought to the fore the question of how to design a society that is inclusive of all its members. While the predominant narrative has focused on various citizens on the left of the economic periphery, it is crucial that the place of migrants in this overall debate is not forgotten within the overall scheme of its responsive actions. The lockdown has not brought about severe consequences on citizens alone. Migrants have

been equally affected by these measures. Actually, their plight during this period may be unique on several accounts. Owing to their documentation, majority of them are barred from the social security systems of the country (Taran, 2015). They are unable to access the grants and other alleviations currently provided by the government on account of their lack of South African citizenship (Ebrahim, 2020). To add to this, the ambiguity by the government on whether these forms of assistance extend even to those that are not South Africans creates what some suggest is a continuation of institutionalised xenophobia (France 24, 2020). In the past, faced with the reality of the absence of governmental support, most migrants have tended to fend for themselves through the informal business sector. Now amidst the lockdown, they find themselves confined in their homes and cut off from any form of income generation. The situation is exacerbated by the closures of international borders, which basically leaves them trapped within South Africa. Given the sensitivity with which the government has approached the vulnerable among its citizens, is it not time that a similar ‘business unusual’ approach was adopted for migrants?

An approach that is inclusive of the plight of migrants would not only be in tandem with the tenets of the Constitution but would go a long way towards signifying that the government is invested in all persons living within South Africa. In turn, such persons are likely to become invested in the country that they reside. It is no secret that the achievement of a nation’s developmental vision is tied to the loyalty and buy-in of the people that live within its borders. People devoted to a country are likely to pour in their resources (financial, human, innovation etc.) towards the development of the country that they are a part (International Organization of Migration, 2020).

Countries like the Singapore, United States of America and Australia, have been particularly good at capturing this loyalty and transforming immigrants into citizens. Often this has been done during times of societal or individual crisis when individual migrants are searching for acceptance and belonging. In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis could present an opportunity for South Africa to firmly communicate its commitment to these groups and break past signals that view migrants as burdens and not resources (Garba, 2020). Through a crisis of this nature, it is possible to set in motion initiatives where

migrants and locals forge a common front against a common danger. Nothing less should be expected if we are to effectively respond to a pandemic that knows no boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender or nationality.

Opportunities for Cohesion

Past attempts have been made to provide solutions to the tensions posed by the presence of migrants in South Africa within the wider framework of the nation building projects. Some of these attempts reflect extreme views of people who believe cohesion is only possible through exclusion of migrants. Such views find expression in simplistic proposals such as the erection of a wall along the South African border (Gqirana, 2017). Regretfully, history indicates that migration will remain a reality in a globalised world and no amount of effort to seal up boarders will impede the movement of people from one country to another (Aleshkovski, 2017). What is required in this area are more complex approaches recognising the long-term prospects of assimilating migrants into the nation building project of creating a cohesive South Africa that resonates with the ideals of its Constitution. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to accelerate measures that can be taken to realise this goal of cohesion (McAuliffe and Bauloz, 2020). Its potential to accelerate societal responses has been observed across various sectors and is tied to manner the crisis exposes society's most vulnerable points, thereby demanding urgent actions on the part of those concerned. For example, the pandemic has exposed the crisis of inequalities in the education sector and induced innovative ways of resolving these inequalities (McDonald, 2020). Similar observations can be made regarding the fragmentation of our society, as exposed by our society, and innovative ways through which rapid interventions can be made to strengthen social cohesion. What follows is a discourse around the role that different actors can employ in coming up with innovative measures to leverage the present crisis and attain the ultimate goal of constructing a national identity that incorporates migrants.

Government as a convener of social cohesion

Government possess enormous social capital when it comes to dictating how different elements of society interact with each other. It is hoped that it will use its social capital as a convener and promoter of social cohesion to initiate a societal change campaign during this time to create debate and dialogue

that challenges discriminatory perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that trigger, among other things, racism, and xenophobia. If there is one thing that the pandemic has shown everyone is that it does not discriminate. Lives have been lost and all manner of persons have been affected irrespective of gender, age, race or nationality. This truth forms a ready-made platform for a broad social cohesion initiative. In this regard, and within the context of the current social cohesion, the vision of such an initiative should underlie the following principles:

- Although crafted against the backdrop of social cohesion and the exclusion of migrants, the initiative should recognize that the symptoms of this kind of polarization as part of a wider trend of social disintegration within South African society. Government is particularly wary of the potential for this social disintegration during this period of crisis. The impact of the pandemic is likely to widen income inequalities, which in the context of South Africa take a racial hue (Harvie 2020). More than ever, the pandemic presents an opportunity for an initiative to bridge this fraught divide. Already countless number of individuals, corporates and civil society has begun their own initiatives in solidarity with the most vulnerable of society. These include food schemes and other forms of much needed assistance. As earlier noted, government has also made provision to support many vulnerable citizens. The basis for this support is to avert the feeling of exclusion by many groups sitting on the periphery. This rationale is likely to be undermined if any of these groups – such as migrants – are left out. Thus, efforts in this direction should place a premium on rebuilding the relational foundations for a socially cohesive society, including the restoration of trust, accountability and respect among individuals – irrespective of their nationality.

- Such an initiative should recognize the complex, multidimensional and structural antecedents of violence in South Africa that has become even more evident in the context of the crisis (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2019; SaferSpaces, 2019). While the lockdown was crafted to achieve specific health

outcomes it had the undesirable outcome of uncovering the scale of gender-based violence within the privacy of homes (ENCA, 2015). During the lockdown, police have been inundated with calls of distress by many vulnerable women trapped in homes and unable to resort to escape to places previously used for solace and refuge such as work, religious centres, schools etc. This has amplified the work of various researchers who have pointed at the unique characteristic within the country of using violence against the most vulnerable of society. This is not only evident in the context of gender-based violence but can similarly be observed in other settings of vulnerability such as migrants and locals, farm workers, domestic workers. The common pattern in all of this is the unequal power relations and contemporary manifestations of exclusion and marginalization. The crisis presents the unique opportunity to burrow into the historical psychosocial antecedents that undergird this kind of violence and emerge with a long-term approach.

- The initiative would be founded upon the values of ubuntu, human rights and principles of equity, equality, non-discrimination, human dignity, non-violence, participation, inclusion, accountability, social solidarity and unity in diversity (Odiaka and Oriogu, 2017). While many South Africans may be conversant with these values, the pandemic presents an opportunity to create a society that is a living embodiment of the values. What these values mean, and their importance, is most readily displayed during times of pervasive suffering and societal distress. In such times, it is not difficult to illustrate the significance of ubuntu or inclusion. It is also in such moments that society understands the power in solidarity pulling together the collective strength it possesses in its diversity (Odiaka and Oriogu, 2017). An integral part of the discourse around these values should include how they relate to migrants, as indeed it would be hollow attempting to build a society founded on these values to the exclusion of others.

- The initiative should be linked to the aspirations of Agenda 2063, a vision developed by the Africa Union that promotes the

emancipation process and renaissance idealised by leaders that established the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Agenda 2063 as a roadmap for attaining the goals of an economic and cultural prosperous continent that is in solidarity and driven by its own citizenry (African Union, 2020). As observed, constructing a national identity on the basis of extreme nationalism can pose a danger to those living within and without the state (Crabtree, 2019; Zalewski, 2019). The history of the 20th Century and its flirtation with fascism remains a strong warning for those who would pursue an endeavour steeped in national superiority (Harrison and Boyd, 2018). In this regard, researchers have pointed at the dangers of propagating a narrative of South African exceptionalism within the context of the continent. This only perpetuates the legacy of apartheid in so far as it sought to etch a history of superiority with the rest of the continent. Linking migrants, social cohesion and the futuristic agenda of Africa mitigates pressures that may emerge in this way.

- The heart of the initiative should leverage social change through fundamental shifts in the attitudes and values of individuals and communities. This is in contrast to a number of interventions, currently operating within the terrain, whose focus is almost exclusively on external behaviour and influencing the policy domain. It has been suggested that many of the present fractures in society are the result of interventions aimed at the symptoms and not the root cause. Major interventions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have been criticized for being event based, and failing to understand the long-term efforts in a continuing process of healing and inclusion (Toshihiro, 2014). Government should take into consideration these valuable lessons in its initiatives to promote social cohesion amidst the crisis created by the pandemic. While the pandemic is not going to be with us forever, great efforts should be made to ensure that the work initiated continues many years beyond the crisis.

It is important to state that while government has a critical role to play in building social cohesion, any initiative it may come up with must recognize the inherent value that subsists within communities to address their own challenges (Bauloz, Vathi and Acosta, 2019). Government's interventions should therefore be designed to optimize communities' capacities to identify their own priority concerns, resources and social networks to address these and ultimately come up with innovative solutions to enhancing the tenacity of the glue that holds society together. In this regard, one envisages a situation where government will enter into strategic partnerships with a range of international and national organizations; government departments and statutory institutions; media houses; universities and schools amongst other stakeholders to collaborate on the implementation of initiatives that would collectively promote the integration of migrants as part of a national social cohesion project.

Media, Outreach and Dialogue

As one would anticipate the crisis generated by the pandemic has dominated media discourse. There have been several strands to this discourse. While much of it has straddled health and safety concerns, there has been a fair amount of reflection around the nature of society in so far as its response to the present crisis. Amidst the growing inequality divide exacerbated by the pandemic, there are increasing calls for the creation of a more equitable and inclusive society. There is an equal sense of urgency within the current messaging in calling for the end of unacceptable practices that the crisis has highlighted such as gender-based violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, amongst other things. In all of this is there is an opportunity for the media to adopt a narrative that is more inclusive of the migrants (Guadagno, 2020).

As earlier observed, the media has been a silent accomplice when it comes to how migrants are viewed, and stereotypes that ultimately lead to their discrimination (Ngcamu and Mantzaris, 2019). The landscape created by the pandemic provides an opportunity to re-write this discriminatory narrative COVID-19 knows no boundaries and does not discriminate (Guadagno, 2020). This is the key message upon which the response of society is being mobilised. No member of society should be left behind including migrants. Every individual living in South Africa ought to be a part of the care required

during this period, as well as the collective response to the pandemic. The media should use the overwhelming realisation of the need for togetherness in responding to COVID-19 to further an agenda of social cohesion that includes previously marginalised groups such as migrants.

It is important that media messaging is not in isolation but supported by a host of outreach activities aimed at schools, youth groups, community and faith-based structures, and migrant communities (Morand, 2015). The pandemic has already accelerated this kind of activity and created an occasion to amplify through such outreach, the message of a national cohesive society that comprises migrants. This message could be boosted through association with multi-media campaigns that coincide with national and international public holidays such as (Human Rights Day, Freedom Day, Day of Reconciliation, Africa Day, Mandela Day, International Human Rights Day and International Refugee Day etc.). These days create public awareness about human dignity and unity in diversity and could be used to initiate virtual and online campaigns across the country through platforms such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other interactive mobile applications. Each of these days presents an opportunity to stimulate dialogue in the public domain to reposition migrants within South Africa with the rest of the country through inspirational unifying messages that promote a common South African identity, unity in diversity, tolerance and respect for human dignity (Njozela and Burns, 2019).

The heart of all outreach activity should rest on dialogue. Dialogue implies a two-way communication that allows for a meeting of minds. It has been suggested that many of the tensions that exist between migrant and local communities are due to the absence of spaces for dialogue (Alps Resilience 2019). Much alienation and misunderstanding occur in the gaps created by the absence of such spaces. Dialogue therefore provides a vehicle towards achieving the overall goal of a social campaign aimed at effecting profound change in mindsets and perceptions. South Africa has a rich experience in the area of dialogue having navigated through difficult times of its history by employing inter and intra-community conversation. The resources it has acquired in this journey including the social capital resident in dialogue practitioners scattered around the country, should be utilised to effect the

profound change envisaged in the area of social cohesion. Understanding that such resources may be limited, it may be sensible to run dialogues based on a matrix that prioritises areas where the pandemic's impact intersects with hot spots of past and current patterns of tension and violence against migrants, such as the three big metros of the country: Durban (KZN), Johannesburg (Gauteng) & Cape Town (Western Cape). The overall goal of the dialogues would be to use our common vulnerabilities during the present times to address the root causes of violence and building better relations within between local and migrant communities. There is potential to expand the reach and outcomes across the country into all nine provinces through community to community transfers, out-scaling, up-scaling and real potential for building a nationwide social movement that promises change in the individual, collective and institutional attitudes in managing diversity.

Documentation & Research

The year 2020 will be etched into the memories of the present generation, and these memories will influence future generations. This relationship between the memory, present experiences and the nature of future society highlights the importance of documentation in the context of the journey of creating a more cohesive society (Ladner, 2018). Future generations should look at this moment – a time of upheavals generated by the pandemic – as the instant when South Africa society re-ordered its relationships, re-connected and emerged with greater unity. In this sense, the above enterprises present an opportunity to document community and national initiatives that result in tolerance, respect for human dignity, social justice, which can serve as inspirations and lessons. Such documentation can celebrate communities that have overcome adversarial relationships and emerged more cohesive in a time of crisis. Some have suggested that more could have been done in this respect when it comes to South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. We are at another moment where society is unlikely to emerge the same. Documenting these changes can strengthen the resolve of the country to retain the best parts of what emerges. Inherent in this process of capturing the emerging stories of cohesion is an intense process of documentation that uses various forms of creative expression in the form of art, drawing, plays, and photography or audio-visual recordings (Wildschutz, 2007). All of this provides a *thick description*

that detail contexts, sentiments, social and power relations and the processes of change that occur. In practical terms what one hopes to achieve here will be the production of stringent material – verbal and creative expression and processes, of social, political, cultural and economic dynamics – that reshapes community and social contexts (Christian Aid Myanmar, 2019). In the setting of migrant and local relationship, this reshaping may involve a re-alignment of personal and interpersonal processes as well as power relations that underpin social transactions, providing the foundations for building more cohesive and sustainable communities. The product of such re-alignment could be re-worked in collages or exhibitions of living heritage, and as historic pieces of living memory and memorialisation to celebrate both victorious outcomes as well as the journeys towards this end, as repositories of history for the generations to follow.

Social Cohesion Advocates as Change Agents

Debates regarding the change process and how it is induced continue to abound. Notwithstanding the diversity of opinions in this area, the role of social change agents as catalysts to change is undisputed (Jason, 2013). Incremental change has been radically hastened by the involvement of one or more agents able to inspire and accelerate this process. This is evident when one observes the role played by prominent personalities in effecting changes all over the world including in the important area of social cohesion. The Department of Sports, Arts and Culture has recognised this fact in fostering the role of social cohesion advocates within its wider nation building programme (Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa, 2020a.). These advocates are drawn from leaders in the public, private and civil society sectors including artists, non-profits, and trade unionists etc. that interact closely with their communities (Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa, 2020b.). The advocates are drawn out of the community because of the potential to cascade change within their communities. Part of the process revolves around building their capacity to employ dialogue methodologies that enhance social cohesion. Such methodologies equip the advocates of change through a variety of tools with the capacity to facilitate social change within their distinct spheres of influence.

It is critical, within the broad strategy of employing social change advocates, for government as a potential convenor of a national programme to build social cohesion, to involve all strategic partnerships that it has worked with in the past, including relationships with relevant national, provincial and local government departments, local government and municipal structures, community and faith-based organisations, informal and formal opinion-leaders, community structures, non-government organisations, and other representative formations in the identified communities. In addition, government should utilize existing capacity within organisations familiar with dialogue, migrant/host dynamics and the terrain of social cohesion. In the present context, it may be preferable for such dialogues to be stimulated by joint teams of local and migrants drawn from faith-based, non-governmental government organization and other structures. Such teams could be an embodiment of social cohesion and their co-existence may help promote constructive dialogue within and between South Africans and migrants to build socially cohesive communities. Lastly, and equally important if the conversations are to have a nationwide impact, the dialogues should adopt a coordinated approach at national and local level and have sufficient funding in view of the long term efforts necessary for achieving attitudinal and behavioural shifts.

Conclusion

Post-apartheid South Africa continues to experience a lot of inflow migration particularly from other African countries, a phenomenon which is attributable to a number of push and pull agents. African migrants cite factors such as conflict in their home countries, availability of business and market opportunities in South Africa etc. as some of the reasons for migration. In a country still recovering from the horrors of apartheid, the incessant preoccupation with racial segregation is apparent. This, coupled with other factors such as competition for scarce resources, unmet expectations and frustration with government, media biases, scapegoating, “othering”, political and institutional factors, has led to tensions between locals and migrant communities. In extreme cases, migrants have been exposed to violent xenophobic and “Afrophobic” attacks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these tensions and brought the plight of migrants to the limelight. Lack of access to social security systems and grants as well as the inability to generate income owing to the lockdown are some of the challenges that migrants are facing presently. However, notwithstanding its negative effects, the pandemic presents the country with a unique opportunity to show our collective commitment to the integration of migrants into society and the overall acceleration of the process of social cohesion. The government will play the most important role using its vast social capital to promote inclusion of migrants at national and community level. Strategic partnerships with NGOs, civil societies, communities and local governments will create awareness and promote social cohesion dialogues with a far reaching effect. The media will also be crucial in the process, using its outreach to adapt a narrative which is more inclusive of migrants. Another important aspect is documentation and research, through which we are able to create a repository of the outcomes of cohesion efforts for the consumption of future generations. Lastly, we cannot deny the usefulness of social change advocates in effecting change in important areas such as social cohesion. Collaborative efforts between the government and strategic partners should include social change advocates to stimulate constructive dialogues on social cohesion and inclusivity. In remaining true to our dream of becoming a rainbow nation, we must resist the urge to resort to extreme nationalism and embrace diversity for a more inclusive and cohesive South Africa.

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