

Lexical Collocation as Linguistic Representation of Xenophobia Crisis in South African's Print and Online Media

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an increase in the intensity of xenophobia in South Africa, with a corresponding increase in the discourse surrounding the crisis. Therefore, this paper seeks to investigate ideas, views and communicative intentions that the linguistic resource of lexical collocation is deployed to represent in South African print and online media discourse on xenophobia. To this end, the paper examined occurrences, patterns and usage of lexical collocation in South African print and online media. Data were drawn from four print and online newspapers in South Africa between 2015 – 2019, namely, Daily Sun, the Citizen, News24 and Daily Dispatch. Situated within the theory of systemic functional linguistics, the study utilised the conceptual framework of lexical collocation as an analytical tool. Analysis revealed that lexical collocations were used to represent pungent views, dispositions, emotions and attitudes of contributors to the discourse of xenophobia in South Africa. The study identified four themes in which the patterns of the deployment of lexical collocation converged and these are “the social identity of the perpetrators of xenophobic acts,” “forms of xenophobic acts,” “conceptual descriptions of xenophobic violence,” and “forms of non-violent xenophobic acts.” The findings showed that lexical collocation is a succinct linguistic mechanism through which writers enact and reinforce their worldviews and communicative intentions. The study concludes that the findings in the study can serve as a tool for informing public policy toward solving the problem of the xenophobia crisis in South Africa.

Keywords: collocation, xenophobia, representation, South Africa, print/online media

Introduction

For over a decade, xenophobic acts taking place in South Africa have been widely reported in both print and online media. The horror and massive destruction of lives and properties they have left in their wake have attracted global outrage and condemnation, as well as curiosity. While xenophobic occurrences are not new on the African continent, none of the acts witnessed across Africa has exhibited the kind of violence launched on foreign African nationals living in South Africa (Dauda, Sakariyau & Ameen 2018; Umaru & Audu 2022; Jarvis & Mthiyane 2022). More worrisome to this tragic phenomenon is the fact that it is fast becoming perennial in its occurrence (Mlilo & Misago 2019; Mgogo & Osunkunle 2021). In view of this, xenophobic acts have become a topical discourse in the print/online media in South Africa. Aggrieved South Africans on the encroachment and excesses of foreigners that precipitated attacks do use print/online media to ventilate their concerns. Likewise, government officials in South Africa have been using different media platforms to address the problems, especially articulating their efforts to restrain the perpetrators, douse the tension, provide succour to the victims and seek the cooperation and understanding of the international community in managing the crisis. Besides, concerned South Africans have also been utilising the print/online media to express their views and opinions on the xenophobia debacle. Discourses in this direction, therefore, offer a rich repertoire of linguistic data upon which language scholars can base their academic research to investigate patterns of linguistic choices in the context of xenophobic discourse.

Therefore, this study explores how distinctive lexical choice of collocation is deployed in the print and online discourse of xenophobia in South Africa to describe and articulate the feelings, attitudes and opinions of South Africans regarding the xenophobia crisis. In other words, the study sought to identify how the lexical feature of the collocational mechanism is utilised as a linguistic device to represent the concerns and worldviews of contributors to xenophobia discourse in South African print and online media. To this end, the study explores the conceptual definition of xenophobia and situates it within the context of its incessant occurrences in South Africa. Likewise, the media attention

that xenophobia has attracted and the deliberate space the media in South Africa has given to the discourse is also highlighted. The study discusses systemic functional linguistics as the theoretical anchor and elucidates lexical collocation as its analytical framework. The data for the study are presented, analysed, and the findings are discussed and the conclusion for the study is drawn.

Xenophobia: An Overview

Xenophobia is a universal concept because it is a phenomenon that manifests globally (Wessels 2012; Akinola 2018; Tarifa 2018; Gordon 2019). It is a socio-political term in which people of a culture or region consider people of a different culture as a threat to their own well-being (Babalola 2019). Xenophobia is a struggle of the inner group against the perceived subversion and encroachment of the outer group which invariably creates a superiority versus inferiority polarity within a geographical space (Olifile, Chakala, & Mothelesi 2019). Fundamentally, xenophobia is about the negative perception of immigrants as threats to the socio-economic welfare of the local population; thus, it is an interplay of relationships between the citizens and the foreigners (Adjai 2010). Furthermore, xenophobia is a form of paranoia that can occur across racial groups, occupational groups, and gender, in the media and among government officials and it can be an advanced form of antagonism which is expressed through discrimination (Mohammed 2011). According to UNHRC (2013), instances of xenophobia are usually triggered by deep-seated ill feelings against people that are regarded as outsiders or strangers to a nation or country and it is a deliberate act, and the overall motive is to humiliate, harass, hunt, dispossess, intimidate or even eliminate, or kill the target person or group of persons.

Similarly, Onyido (2018) is of the view that xenophobia is an outburst of discriminatory ideas, hurtful sentiments, societal stereotyping and harmful prejudices that are in many cases disguised as nationalism. Its dispositions are both social, economic and psychological anomalies that seek to endanger the principles of tolerance, social cohesion, peaceful co-existence; individual and group differences in the society and replace them with social dislocations and thereby entrenching social turmoil and

fragmentations. Xenophobia, therefore, is negative in its orientation and manifestations as it is borne out of intolerance and hatred of foreigners (Gordon 2019).

Xenophobia in South Africa

One indisputable reality of post-apartheid South Africa is the general incidences of anti-immigrant attacks which have resulted in massive dislocation, distress, trauma and death (Mlilo & Misago 2019; Masikane, Hewitt & Toendepi 2020). Tarifa (2018) and Jarvis and Mthiyane (2022) contend that the outbreak of anti-immigrant violence in May 2008 in the Johannesburg township of Alexandra and subsequent similar occurrences have been designated as xenophobia in the media, academia and popular literature. Unfortunately, anti-immigrant sentiment, otherwise called xenophobia, spreads and grows by the day and the peace and well-being of black immigrants are threatened and decimated. For Kersting (2009), the term xenophobia in South Africa is the construction of the media and political elites. Accordingly, xenophobia in South Africa is not a spontaneous act of criminal elements but an eruption of bottled-up ill feelings due to the complexity of immigration issues in the Republic of South Africa (Akinola 2018).

While incidences of xenophobia are common in many countries across the globe and especially in Africa, South Africa has been exceptional because it has become recurrent and widespread with attendant violence which often leads to physical bodily harm, destruction of properties and loss of lives (Dauda, Shakariya & Ameen 2018; Hiropoulous 2020). To substantiate the perenniality of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, the table below indicates the frequency and pattern of attacks.

Table 1 Incidents of Xenophobia Acts in South Africa: 1994 - 2018

Forms of Xenophobic Acts	From (1994-2018)	In 2018 Only
Total sum of occurrences	529	42
Deaths	309	12
Physical assaults	901	29
Displaced	100 000+	1 145
Shops looted	2 193	139
Threats to property	257	23

Source: Mlilo and Misago (2019)

In addition, Wilson and Magam (2018) report that more than 66 deaths of immigrants were recorded between 2015 and 2017, 116 were physically injured, 571 shops were looted and set alight and over 11,140 immigrants were displaced. In view of this, xenophobic acts have become a pervasive characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa with dire consequences for both the victims and the international reputation of South Africa and this echoes a debilitating social division in which the natives are regarded as the legitimate owner and the foreigners as the illegitimate parasite and interloper that must be dealt with (Nenjerama 2000). According to Misago, Freemantle and Landau (2015), xenophobic acts cut across every stratum of South African society as government officials, traditional leaders and political leaders make pronouncements that influence public opinion against foreigners; public servants at times deny immigrants access to services they are entitled to; law enforcement agents are particularly known for extortion, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary detention and selective enforcement of laws while some sections of the public often engage in or condone collective violence against the foreigners. The manifestation of xenophobia in every sector of society implies that all the provinces of South Africa are affected. In this regard, Mlilo and Misago (2019) assert that there are clear shreds of evidence of xenophobic acts in each of the nine regions of South Africa.

Print and Online Media and Xenophobia Discourse

Due to advancements in Information Technology, many print media now have their online version while there are also many media organisations that operate through online platforms only. The print and online media are veritable social tools that traditionally perform the duty of informing, educating and entertaining the public (Mgogo & Osunkunle 2021; Adebisi 2020). Generally, the print and online media have an enormous responsibility in a democratic space to keep citizens informed about various happenings in society. However, it is incumbent on them to promote and defend press freedom by encouraging objective and balanced reportage which reflects divergent views of individuals, groups and government officials (Ngamu & Mantzaris 2019).

The print and online media do not only provide knowledge about public

affairs but also put the news in perspective and use this framework to construct social reality (Adegbola 2020; Chistyakov 2020). However, the task of knowledge dissemination, news perspective and construction of social reality is not the exclusive preserve of the media reporters alone, as any interested individuals are equally allowed to use the print and online media as a platform to present or represent their own perspectives on any emerging issues. In other words, apart from news reportage by the journalists in the print and online media organisations, there are also provisions for spaces within the tabloids to accommodate public debate through which concerned social actors, public intellectuals, government officials, social activists, experts and advocacy groups can express their views and opinion on any trending matter of their interest. Various inputs and discussions on these varieties of platforms in the different sections of the print and online media on the subject of xenophobia occurrences in South Africa are designated as the phenomenon of xenophobia discourse in the print and online media (Kersting 2009; Tarifa 2018). The print/online media usually offer a veritable platform for the public to comment and react to any matter of public interest through sections such as opinion columns, viewpoints, editorials, news stories and letters to the editor. This study, therefore, focuses on the discourses of Nigerians and South Africans using such platforms to express their views on xenophobic acts in South Africa.

Theoretical Anchor

As a theoretical and analytic framework, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is considered adequate for the purpose of this study because its emphasis lies in the way language is used for communicative purposes (de Olivera and Smith 2019). SFL considers language as a form of social behaviour which is functional (Halliday 1994) and as something that we utilise and engage with a purpose (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). This implies that language use is goal-oriented and directed. SFL is also interested in language as social semiotic. That is, how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life (Fernandez 2018). SFL provides theoretical categories of unit, structure, class, system and rank and attaches functional significance to them (Fawcett 2017). Thus, the theory, therefore, provides a framework for analysis in this study.

Emphasising the value and relevance of SFL, Norgaard, Montoro and Busse (2010) and Webster (2017) submit that central to Hallidayan linguistics is the concern that language is used in a cultural and situational context and this calls for linguistic choice that is seen as functional and meaningful and the grammatical labelling deployed for linguistic analysis is aimed to indicate semantic function beyond structural form and this functionalist approach has made it possible and more easily to explore the contextual meaning of what language represent in discourse. Thus, in language use, the arrangement of information structure and the meaning the author of the text wants to achieve are issues of choice (Bloor & Bloor 2013). The choice and use of meaning-making devices in texts such as words, clauses and sentences are based on the purposes which they are meant to serve in each context and discourse (Bateman 2017). In this regard, this study engaged SFL as a theoretical guide to investigate the choice and use of lexical collocation as a linguistic mechanism to examine various communicative purposes the use of lexical collocation serves in the print and online media discourse of xenophobia in South Africa.

Lexical Collocation

A collocation consists of two or more lexical items that are used together in a text. They are words that are joined, hang out or located together (Beare 2019). A collocation is a combination of two or more words that can logically go together in language use (Kamalu 2018). Collocation is therefore a word pairing device in English and it is a stylistic mechanism in which an intensifier and a verb can be combined for emphatic expressions (Ononye 2017). It is, therefore, a short expression to represent how a writer or speaker feels about a phenomenon or a situation (Paltridge 2012).

For Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), collocation involves the use of two or more lexical items that co-occur together, having a semantic relationship and serving specific communication functions. It can also occur when two or more words are logically connected in terms of sense relation in the same textual environment (Leech & Short 2007). Thus, collocation is regarded as a lexical unit and functions as a single word either semantically or grammatically though it may comprise two or

more words (Crystal 1999). As a stylistic device, collocation allows a language user to emphasise specific issues and reinforce their meanings (Osisanwo 2010). It enhances cohesive effects in discourse and accentuates the communicative intention of a writer or speaker (Uzodinma 2016). A careful observation of the discourse under investigation shows that through the deployment of collocations, writers portray different forms of xenophobic acts, variously describe the perpetrators of xenophobia and characterise the victims of xenophobia. Therefore, collocation is an identified lexical device in the discourse of xenophobia in South African print and online newspapers through which different writers express their feelings, emotion, attitude and views on the phenomenon of xenophobic acts in South Africa. The instances of the usage of collocation and their stylistic representations in the print and online discourse of xenophobia in South Africa is thus enunciated in this study.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. This research approach is considered relevant because this study focused on language use as a form of human behaviour in the socio-context of xenophobia discourse. Data for the study were derived from five (4) print/online print media in South Africa between 2015 and 2019. These are *Daily Sun*, *News24*, *Daily Dispatch* and *the Citizens*. These print/online media are selected based on being among the most widely read newspapers in South Africa and the fact that they share similar features in terms of wide readership, coverage and popularity (Onanuga 2017; Mgogo & Osunkunle 2021). The period 2015 to 2019 is chosen to allow for analysis of the recent articles on xenophobia in South Africa. Using the purposive sampling method, xenophobic-related articles were selected for in-depth linguistic analysis from each newspaper and particularly from sections such as *letters to the editor*, *viewpoints*, *editorials*, *comments*, *opinions* and *relevant news items*. The selection of sampled data from these print/online newspapers was informed by the rich linguistic features they offered. The sections of the newspapers selected are based on the basis that they represented expressions of social actors, concerned groups, individuals and institutions regarding xenophobic acts in South Africa. For the analysis, four themes that were contextually germane to

xenophobia discourse were identified. Collocational items that were relevant to each of these themes were extracted in the form of excerpts from the selected newspapers and were used for analysis accordingly.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Collocation Related to the Perpetrators of Xenophobic Acts

Excerpt 1

“xenophobic vigilante groups” (Daily Dispatch, March 21, 2016).

Excerpt 2

“criminal elements” (Daily Dispatch, May 19, 2015).

Excerpt 3

“xenophobic looters” (Daily Dispatch, December 9, 2015).

Excerpt 4

“martial-law mob” (News24, April 15, 2015).

Excerpt 5

“notorious Third Force...criminal kingpins...rowdy crowds” (News24, April 15, 2015).

Excerpt 6

“hateful thugs” (News24, April 20, 2015).

Excerpt 7

“Black people” (News24, April 30, 2015).

Excerpt 8

“local hoodlums” (News24, July 10, 2015).

In excerpts 1 - 8, collocation is deployed to represent the identity and character of the perpetrators of anti-immigrant attacks. Stylistically, this implies that the xenophobes are not faceless people; rather, writers on xenophobia discourse in South Africa can use collocation for their identification and description. The summary of the usage of collocation, the lexical patterns and the linguistic representation in this regard are

presented below:

Table 1 Overview collocation related to perpetrators of xenophobic acts

Collocation	Lexical Patterns	Contextual Representation
xenophobic vigilante groups	adjective + noun + noun	Identification of perpetrators.
criminal elements	adjective + noun	Description of their acts.
xenophobic looters	adjective + noun	Description of their acts.
martial-law mob	adjective + noun	Description of their acts.
notorious Third Force	adjective + noun	Description of their character.
criminal kingpins	adjective + noun	Description of their acts.
rowdy crowds	adjective + noun	Description of their manners.
hateful thug	adjective + noun	Description of their attitude.
black people	adjective + noun	Identification of their identity.
local hoodlums	adjective + noun	Identification of their character.

Collocation Related to Forms of Xenophobic Violence

Excerpt 9

“senselessly killed” (The Citizen, February 22, 2017).

Excerpt 10

“horrific attacks” (Daily Dispatch, March 21, 2016).

Excerpt 11

“persistent xenophobic attacks” (Daily Dispatch, September 16, 2019).

Excerpt 12

“violent mob activity” (News24, April 15, 2015).

Excerpt 13

“pure manslaughter” (News24, April 20, 2015).

Excerpt 14

“violent behaviour” (News24, April 30, 2015).

Excerpt 15

“sporadic violence ... arson attack” (The Citizen, February 21, 2017)

Excerpt 16

“atrocious acts” (Daily Sun, September 10, 2015).

Excerpt 16

“aggressive xenophobic action” (Daily Dispatch, May 12, 2015).

Excerpts 8 – 16 are instances of the usage of collocation to encode varied communicative intentions by different writers. The pervasive use of collocation as a lexico-semantic feature in the discourse of xenophobia in South Africa indicates that collocation is a veritable linguistic tool through which South Africans express their concept, views, opinion and attitude to xenophobic acts. The table below provides a summary of occurrences of collocation, their lexical patterns and their contextual representation.

Table 2 Overview of collocation related to the form of xenophobic violence

Collocation	Lexical Patterns	Contextual Representation
senselessly killed	adverb + verb	To indicate the foolishness of the killing.
horrific attacks	adjective + noun	To describe the attacks as shocking.
persistent xenophobic attacks	adjective + adjective + noun	To label the attacks as relentless and constant.
violent mob activity	adjective + noun + noun	To designate lawful marches as characterised by intense force and disorder.
pure manslaughter	adjective + noun	To foreground killings of human beings as a total and complete crime.
violent behaviour	adjective + noun	To portray the attacks as a destructive form of human acts.
sporadic violence	adjective + noun	To depict how widespread the attacks can be.
atrocious acts	adjective + noun	To portray xenophobic attacks as horrible.
aggressive xenophobic action	adjective + adjective + noun	To render the attacks as unprovoked hostile acts.

Collocation Related to Non-violent Xenophobic Acts

Excerpt 17

“xenophobic march” (The Citizen, February 21, 2017).

Excerpt 18

“xenophobic comments” (Daily Sun, September 10, 2019).

Excerpt 19

“tactless anger” (News24, April 15, 2015).

Excerpt 20

“xenophobic sentiment” (News24, December 18, 2019).

Excerpt 21

“Xenophobic electioneering campaigns” (News24, October 4, 2019)

In excerpts 17 - 21, collocation is used as a linguistic resource to describe xenophobic acts that are non-violent. This convincingly proves that xenophobia can manifest without physical injury to the victims. The stylistic significance of this indicates that in South Africa, there are forms of xenophobic expressions that do not harm the body or the property of African immigrants. The summary of the collocation of non-violent xenophobia is presented in the table below:

Table 3 Overview of collocation related to non-violent xenophobic acts

Collocation	Lexical Patterns	Contextual Representation
xenophobic march	adjective + noun	Describing acts of xenophobia through a parade.
xenophobic comments	adjective + noun	Describing acts of xenophobia through utterances.
tactless anger	adjective + noun	Describing acts of xenophobia through indiscreet annoyance.
xenophobic sentiment	adjective + noun	Describing acts of xenophobia through biased opinions.
xenophobic electioneering campaigns	adjective + adjective + noun	Describing acts of xenophobia through political campaign speeches.

Collocation Expressing Conceptual Views on Xenophobic Acts

Excerpt 22

“black-on-black crime” (Daily Sun, September 10, 2019).

Excerpt 23

“barbaric act” (Daily Sun, April 19, 2015).

Excerpt 24

“shameful acts” (Daily Sun, September 5, 2019).

Excerpt 25

“heinous crimes ... despicable acts” (Daily Sun, September 6, 2019).

Excerpt 26

“barbaric activity” (News24, April 15, 2015).

Excerpt 27

“daylight barbarism” (News24, April 20, 2015).

Excerpt 28

“dastardly actions” (News24, May 12, 2015).

Excerpt 29

“barbaric acts” (News24, April 26, 2017).

Excerpt 30

“mad disgusting” (The Citizen, April 16, 2015).

Collocation usage in excerpts 22 - 30 portrays how different writers utilise collocation as a linguistic tool to articulate and describe their viewpoint, emotion, impression and judgment on the phenomenon of xenophobic acts in South Africa. These varied conceptual expressions on how individuals characterise xenophobic attacks accentuate different but related views on the incidence of anti-immigrant hostility in South Africa. The summary of the usage of collocation in this respect is presented in the following table:

Table 4 Collocation expressing conceptual views on xenophobic acts

Collocation	Lexical Patterns	Contextual Representation
black-on-black crime	adjective + preposition + adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is represented as a crime by black people against black people.
barbaric acts	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is represented as uncivilised.
shameful acts	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is represented as disgraceful.
heinous crimes	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is designated as awful criminality.
criminal offence	adjective + noun	Xenophobia is denoted as lawlessness.
despicable acts	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is labelled as contemptible.
barbaric activity	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is conceived as outrageous.
daylight barbarism	noun + noun	Xenophobic attack is represented as a glaring crudity.
dastardly actions	adjective + noun	Xenophobic attack is regarded as vile thing.
barbaric acts	adjective + noun	xenophobic attack is represented as uncivilised.
mad disgusting	noun + adjective	Xenophobic attack is represented as repulsive.

Discussion of Findings

Collocation as a lexico-semantic feature instantiates aspect of xenophobic discourse lexical selection through which individual contributors to xenophobic discourse represent diverse views, dispositions, attitudes and opinions. In other words, this lexical resource is utilised as a communicative strategy to convey various information on the issue of xenophobic acts in South Africa. This form of lexico-semantic choice, therefore, serves as the linguistic stylistic form to achieve different discourse functions in print and online xenophobic discourse. Thus, the use of collocation as identified in this study, is motivated to provide functional meanings which construct the content and context of xenophobic discourse. As analysis reveals, collocation in the online and print media discourse of xenophobia is used to foreground

varied salient discourse issues. These include the perennial recurrence of xenophobic attacks, how horrific the attacks are carried out; identifying the social category of the people that are perpetrating xenophobic attacks; describing their attitude, and drawing attention to the different forms of xenophobic acts. Besides, the deployment of the collocation illustrates the discourse function of the emotional response of some of the writers regarding their displeasure and concerns about attacks against foreigners in South Africa. These concerns captured by collocation include the sporadic nature of xenophobic riots, international embarrassment caused by xenophobic attacks, and misrepresentation of every black South African as being not their brothers' keeper.

Therefore, in South African media discourse of xenophobia, the utilisation of lexical collocation as a linguistic resource reinforces the passion and emphasis of the writers. Moreover, it serves the stylistic function of using collocation to pungently underscore striking issues in the xenophobia crisis as a perennial phenomenon in South Africa. This finding is similar to the report of Chen (2018), whose study on critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's inaugural speech reveals that Trump deploys collocational linguistic items to articulate his feelings and dispositions towards socio-political issues in the United States, especially his viewpoints regarding foreign policy direction of his administration. The use of collocation as a lexical feature, therefore, attests to the strategic thinking and critical consciousness of Donald Trump on his subject matters. The finding also aligns with the claim of Hoaming (2019) that the pungent use of collocation absorbs readers' attention and arouses their curiosity to reason along with the narrative of the writers. Furthermore, the finding supports Varlamova's (2016) claim that collocation is a grouping of two or more words that are regarded as an indivisible unit of language in use and the meaning of the sequence of words is taken to be a unit of meaning which in most cases is used to articulate important concerns of the language user. The preponderant use of collocation as a representational strategy in the data confirms the finding of Rakpa and Tungyai (2021) that adequate knowledge of collocation and its appropriate deployment helps in constructing coherent discourse in which linguistic form and function can clearly reveal the underlying message of the writer and therefore make language

use more compelling to achieve discourse intension. However, focusing on lexical collocation alone as done in this study, makes it different from Haji (2015), who investigated the use of both lexical collocation and grammatical collocation and avers that the study of the two categories allows for richer textual analysis.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the outbreak of massive anti-immigrant attacks in South Africa in 2008 initiated a genre of discourse described as xenophobia discourse in South Africa. The study drew attention to the pervasiveness of the attacks and the attendant destruction of the lives and properties of the victims. More importantly, the study demonstrated the use of lexical collocation as a linguistic mechanism to represent the views, emotions and attitudes of the contributors to xenophobia discourse. The study identified four thematic issues that collocation is used to explicate, which include the description of the perpetrators of the xenophobic acts, forms of xenophobic attacks, conceptual views on the xenophobic act in South Africa and the enunciation of different forms of non-violent xenophobic acts. Hence, lexical collocation is a linguistic tool that represents and depicts the emotional impulse of the writers to enact the reality of xenophobia as a topical socio-economic conflict in South Africa that impact nationals of other African countries.

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