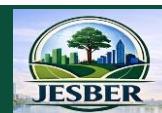


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Research article

Xenophobia and Fear of Migrants in Africa: Applying Eneyo's Acquaintance and Love-Fear Methods to Nigeria-South Africa Relations

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ABSTRACT

Xenophobia remains a serious threat to African solidarity, regional integration and the safety of migrants. In South Africa, recurring hostility towards African migrants has frequently been connected to fears concerning unemployment, crime, pressure on public services, irregular migration and cultural difference. Nigerians and other African nationals have sometimes become symbolic targets onto whom wider frustrations arising from inequality, state incapacity and economic insecurity are transferred. This study critically examines xenophobia as a problem of mismanaged, manipulated and relational fear. It applies Michael Eneyo's Fearological Ethics, using Acquaintance Method and Love-fear Method in addressing Nigeria (including other black race)-South Africa relationships to achieve continental harmony. The work adopts a qualitative comparative philosophical approach involving conceptual clarification, critical interpretation and normative analysis of scholarly literature, migration reports, political speeches, diplomatic statements and documented public attitudes. The article argues that legitimate concerns about migration become xenophobic when they are generalised, separated from reliable evidence and converted into collective blame, humiliation, exclusion or violence. Eneyo's acquaintance method is developed as an approach based on accurate knowledge, structured intergroup contact, dialogue and humanising encounters. His love-fear method is interpreted as an ethical model of leadership communication in which genuine risks are acknowledged truthfully but addressed through care, proportionality, practical solutions and respect for human dignity. The article proposes an Acquaintance and Love Fearological Framework for bilateral relations, migration governance and community leadership. It concludes that Nigeria (other African countries) and South Africa must move beyond episodic diplomatic reactions towards sustained fear mapping, evidence-based communication, structured people-to-people engagement, lawful migration management and joint mechanisms for preventing xenophobic attacks.

KEYWORDS

acquaintance method, fearological ethics, fear of migrants, love-fear method, migration, Nigeria-South Africa relations, xenophobia

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INTRODUCTION

Human Migration is the movement of people from their usual place of residence to a new area or country, either permanently or temporary. The Encyclopedia Britannica, reports that as at 2026, the global data for international migration has surge to over 304 million people worldwide. Migration is not an abnormal interruption of African history. African societies have always been shaped by mobility for trade, education, employment, marriage, security and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, contemporary public discourse frequently represents African migration as an uncontrollable crisis. Flahaux and de Haas (2016) caution that popular images of a continent characterized by unprecedented mass migration are often based more on stereotypes than on empirical evidence. Migration remains largely regional, with many African migrants living in neighboring or other African countries rather than moving outside the continent. South Africa is one of the continent's most important migrant destinations because of its comparatively developed economy, educational institutions, commercial opportunities and regional influence. According to Statistics South Africa (2024) and Eneyo & Eneyo (2025), the 2022 census recorded approximately 2,418,197 international migrants, representing about 3.9% of the national population. The same report showed that approximately 83.7% of the migrant population originated from the Southern African Development Community region. These figures do not support exaggerated claims that foreign nationals constitute an overwhelming proportion of the country's population.

Yet South Africa has experienced recurring hostility and violence directed against foreign nationals, particularly black African migrants. Scholars have used both xenophobia and Afrophobia to describe the phenomenon. The term Afrophobia highlights the apparent selective display of hostility towards black migrants from other African countries rather than towards all foreigners equally (Lötter & Bradshaw, 2022; Eneyo, 2025; Eneyo, 2026a). However, Dube's (2019) analysis of nine rounds of the South African Social Attitudes Survey warns against portraying all black South Africans as uniformly Afrophobic. Xenophobic violence is real and recurrent, but it should not be converted into another stereotype that condemns an entire national population.

The issue has particular consequences for Nigeria–South Africa relations. Nigerians constitute a visible West African migrant community in South Africa and are involved in education, commerce, professional employment, religious practice and cultural activities. However, they are sometimes tag with a bad label. Granted that they can be a few eggs amongst the migrants who are in that country pursuing their legitimate businesses, but often times when the few bad eggs indulge in acts of criminality and are caught the tendency for generalization is high. The narrative becomes, migrants are destroying our country. You can hardly find in South Africa today a migrant who's being celebrated for establishing a business in south Africa that creates jobs for her citizens. The migrants are the scapegoats, they are being blamed for all the insecurity, fraud violence all Xenophobia remains a serious threat to African solidarity, regional integration and the safety of migrants. In South Africa, recurring hostility towards African migrants has frequently been connected to fears concerning unemployment, crime, pressure on public services, irregular migration and cultural difference. Nigerians and other African nationals have sometimes become symbolic targets onto whom wider frustrations arising from inequality, state incapacity and economic insecurity are transferred. This study critically examines xenophobia as a problem of mismanaged, manipulated and relational fear. It applies Michael Eneyo's Fearological Ethics, using *Acquaintance Method* and *Love-fear Method* in addressing Nigeria (including other black race)–South Africa relationships to achieve continental harmony. The work adopts a qualitative comparative philosophical approach involving conceptual clarification, critical interpretation and normative analysis of scholarly literature, migration reports, political speeches, diplomatic statements and documented public attitudes. The article argues that legitimate concerns about migration become xenophobic when they are generalised, separated from reliable evidence and converted into collective blame, humiliation, exclusion or violence. Eneyo's acquaintance method is developed as an approach based on accurate knowledge, structured intergroup contact, dialogue and humanising encounters. His love-fear method is interpreted as an ethical model of leadership communication in which genuine risks are acknowledged truthfully but addressed through care, proportionality, practical solutions and respect for human dignity. The article proposes an Acquaintance and Love Fearological Framework for bilateral relations, migration governance and community leadership. It concludes that Nigeria (other African countries) and South Africa must move beyond episodic diplomatic reactions towards sustained fear mapping, evidence-based communication, structured people-to-people engagement, lawful migration management and joint mechanisms for preventing xenophobic attacks.

Opara (2022) and Eneyo (2026b) noted that West African migrants in South Africa experience not only direct violence but everyday forms of exclusion, identity insecurity and social othering. The continuing relevance of the subject became especially evident in 2026. The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that the Federal Government had evacuated 1,490 Nigerians from South Africa following what it describes as xenophobic attacks. During the same period, the South African Government acknowledged widespread concerns about migration, employment, public services, crime and border control, while insisting that only authorized State institutions could enforce immigration law and that xenophobia, intimidation and vigilantism were unacceptable. This study argues that xenophobia should be examined not only as prejudice, racism, criminality or failed migration governance but also as a crisis of fear. Fear of unemployment, crime, economic displacement, cultural differences and institutional abandonment is frequently transferred from complex structures onto visible migrant communities. Migrants, in turn, develop fears of assault, dispossession, deportation, arbitrary policing and abandonment by their home countries. Xenophobia is therefore a relational fear system in which host communities, migrants, governments, political organizations, policy makers, businesses and the media influence one another. Michael Eneyo's philosophy of fear provides an African philosophical framework for understanding and transforming this relationship. Eneyo (2022) proposes two methods for overcoming negative fear: the acquaintance method and the love-fear method. His later application of fearological ethics to Nigerian insecurity argues that violence may be sustained by manipulated fear, fear of abandonment, fear of cultural extinction and fear of the Other. Rather than merely demanding the elimination of fear, fearology seeks to understand its causes, relationships and ethical direction (Eneyo, 2026; Eneyo 2026c). This study seeks to address three questions;

1. How are social and economic anxieties transferred onto African migrants in Nigeria–South Africa relations?
2. What ethical principle distinguish legitimate migration concerns from xenophobic fear and collective scapegoating?
3. How can Eneyo's acquaintance and love-fear methods be institutionalized in leadership, diplomacy and migration governance?

Meaning of the word xenophobia;

The term xenophobia comes from two Greek words *xenos*, meaning “stranger” or “guest” *phobos* “fear”. As a word, xenophobia means the irrational hatred or dislike of people from other cultures, countries or state. Essentially, those we consider as non-indigenes, or foreigners. There are different shades of xenophobia, which includes;

1. **Immigrant xenophobia:** The fear of people who are immigrants.
2. **Cultural xenophobia:** Fear towards foreign traditions languages, foods and other factors like social norms.
3. **Economic xenophobia:** Hostility towards foreigners driven by the belief that foreign workers take domestics jobs.

It's important to note that the xenophobia attacks in South Africa that has threatened Nigeria/other African countries and South Africa relationship is been triggered by the last type of xenophobia, which manifest in discrimination, social exclusions, stereotypes, social exclusion etc.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopts a qualitative comparative philosophical and documentary research design. It is comparative because it examines the construction and management of migrant-related fear within South African host-community discourse and Nigerian diplomatic and public responses. The comparison does not assume that the two countries occupy identical positions. South Africa is principally examined as a migrant-receiving state, while Nigeria is considered as a country of origin, a diplomatic actor and, during periods of retaliation, a location in which South African interests have also been threatened. The philosophical dimension combines conceptual analysis, critical interpretation and normative evaluation. Conceptual analysis clarifies fear, xenophobia, Afrophobia, acquaintance and love-fear. Critical interpretation identifies assumptions within political and public narratives. Normative analysis evaluates those narratives according to truthfulness, proportionality, human dignity, responsibility and nonviolence.

2.2 Sources of data

1. The documentary materials include:
2. Eneyo's publications on fear, fear management and fearological ethics;
3. peer-reviewed studies on xenophobia, migration, intergroup threat and contact;
4. Statistics South Africa migration data;
5. labour-market and economic reports from the OECD and International Labour Organization;
6. official statements by the Nigerian and South African governments;
7. presidential speeches and bilateral communiqués;
8. scholarly analyses of public attitudes, crime narratives and migrant identity; and
9. documented responses to the xenophobic crises of 2019 and 2026.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications and official sources. Media reports were treated as supplementary materials for understanding public narratives rather than as unquestionable evidence.

Analytical procedure

The analysis followed four stages:

1. **Fear identification:** identifying fears associated with employment, crime, public services, cultural difference, border security and national identity.
2. **Fear attribution:** determining whether those fears were attributed to individuals, migrant groups, employers, institutions or wider structural conditions.
3. **Ethical evaluation:** assessing whether the fears were supported by evidence and whether proposed responses respected dignity, legality and proportionality.
4. **Fear transformation:** applying the acquaintance and love-fear methods to develop constructive leadership and policy responses.

Limitation

This is a conceptual and documentary study. It does not claim to replace interviews, ethnographic observation or original public-attitude surveys. Its contribution lies in constructing and defending an African philosophical framework that can subsequently be empirically tested.

Conceptualizing Xenophobia as Relational Fear

Xenophobia, Afrophobia and othering

Xenophobia refers broadly to hostility, fear, distrust or rejection directed towards people perceived as foreigners. It may appear through discriminatory speech, exclusion from services, employment discrimination, forced displacement, attacks on businesses, physical violence or institutional neglect. In South Africa, the term Afrophobia has been used because hostility has frequently targeted migrants from other African countries and beyond like,

Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia. However, the distinction between xenophobia and Afrophobia should not obscure the wider ethical problem. Both involve the transformation of difference into danger. The migrant ceases to be encountered as a person and becomes a category: job thief, criminal, drug dealer, illegal foreigner, cultural intruder or burden on public services. Once such a category becomes socially dominant, an individual migrant may be punished for actions in which that person had no involvement. Olonisakin & Adebayo (2024) and Eneyo (2026d) situate African xenophobia within the historical weakening of collectivist worldviews and human connectedness. They argue that colonial experiences contributed to ethnic discord and a conception of the social world as dangerous. Their position suggests that xenophobia cannot be fully explained by immediate competition alone; it also reflects inherited political boundaries, historical divisions and damaged forms of African solidarity. African communalism is built on the pillars of ubuntu philosophy “I am because we are”. The spirit of solidarity was key. And the authenticity of the African person was evidence with such spirit. Uduigwomen and Oti (2023), opined that, they are their true self if they are able to maintain the right kind of relationship, with each other. They negate their true being if they can’t maintain the right kind of relationship with each other.

Legitimate concern and xenophobic generalization

Not every concern about migration is xenophobic. A state may legitimately regulate its borders, prosecute trafficking, prevent document fraud, enforce employment standards and deport persons whose removal complies with domestic and international law. Citizens may also raise genuine questions about unemployment, housing, healthcare, policing and commercial competition. The ethical problem emerges when five forms of category slippage occur: Irregular migrant → all migrants → all African foreigners → criminals → legitimate targets of punishment. This movement replaces individual responsibility with collective guilt. It also transfers responsibility from institutions that control borders, regulate businesses, plan public services and enforce labour laws onto people who are often the least powerful within the system. President Ramaphosa’s June 2026 address illustrates both sides of this distinction. He recognized public concerns about jobs, services, security and migration management, but stated that irregular migration was not the cause of all South Africa’s economic problems. He further insisted that immigration enforcement belongs to the state and that individuals must not demand proof of nationality or attack people perceived as foreigners.

Fear transfer and migrant scapegoating

This study uses fear transfer to describe the process through which anxiety generated by complex social conditions is redirected towards a visible group that can be blamed more easily than an abstract structure. The process commonly follows four stages:

1. **Structural insecurity:** unemployment, inequality, crime, weak services or state incapacity produces fear.
2. **Simplifying narrative:** political or media discourse identifies migrants as a principal cause.
3. **Personalization:** the foreign-looking person becomes the embodiment of the wider problem.
4. **Permission structure:** hostility, exclusion or violence becomes portrayed as community protection.

Tewelde (2023) argues that xenophobia in South Africa must be examined through structural arrangements rather than solely through the moral failures of individual perpetrators. Likewise, Hiropoulos (2020) and Eneyo (2026e) explains that migration is often represented as a national crisis even when the empirical scale and consequences of migration are more complex. Fear transfer does not mean that people’s hardships are imaginary. It means that the object selected as their cause may be inaccurate or grossly exaggerated. The anger of an unemployed citizen can be genuine while the conclusion that African migrants are responsible for national unemployment remains unsupported.

Theoretical Foundations of Migrant Fear

Realistic and symbolic threats

Stephan et al. (1999) identifies, several threats associated with prejudice against immigrants. Realistic threats concern, employment, economic resources, physical safety and political power. Symbolic threats concern values, beliefs, identity, language and culture. Intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes reinforce both forms of threat. In South Africa, fears that migrants take jobs, commit crimes or burden public services represent realistic-threat perceptions. Concerns that foreigners do not respect local customs, languages or identities represent symbolic-threat perceptions. Such perceptions do not have to be empirically accurate to influence behaviours. Once people believe that migrants threaten their survival or identity, they may support exclusionary policies or collective punishment. Esses et al. (1998) similarly argue that perceived competition for scarce resources can generate negative attitudes towards immigrants. The key word is perceived. Competition may exist in particular locations or economic sectors, but public narratives can generalize a local experience into a national claim about all migrants.

Political production of fear

Fear is not merely an individual emotion. It can be politically motivated and strategically amplified. Robin (2004) shows that public authorities and political actors may use fear to obtain obedience, legitimize coercion or redirect attention from structural injustice. Bauman (2016) similarly examines how migrants become anchors for anxieties produced by insecurity and rapid social change. In the migration context, leaders may gain support by promising to remove an allegedly dangerous foreign population. The migrant becomes politically useful because the person is visible, comparatively powerless and easily represented as being outside the moral community. Some leaders use the presence of the migrants in their domain as an excuse for their non performance. They blame their failures on the aspects of insecurity, lack of employments opportunities and other basic amenities on the presence of the migrants. This does not mean that every migration restriction constitutes manipulation. It means that leaders must be judged by the evidence they provide, the distinctions they maintain and the consequences of their language.

Intergroup contact

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis proposes that interaction between groups can reduce prejudice, especially where contact involves equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of 515 studies and 713 independent samples found that intergroup contact generally reduces prejudice and that the benefits can extend beyond the immediate individuals involved. Contact does not automatically guarantee benefits. Unequal, competitive or humiliating contact can intensify resentment. A local trader who encounters a migrant only as an economic competitor may not become less prejudiced. Constructive contact must therefore be organized around cooperation, truthful knowledge, shared goals and reciprocal recognition. Recent Africa-wide evidence also supports the relevance of contact. Dzordzormenyoh's (2025) study of 28,685 respondents across 28 African countries examined foreign exposure, neighborhood violence and immigrant acceptance. The findings demonstrate that economic perceptions, regional location, border-control attitudes and personal exposure all interact in shaping the acceptance of migrants.

An Exposition of Eneyo's Philosophy of Fear

Fear as an existential and relational reality

Eneyo's contribution begins with the rejection of a one-sided understanding of fear. Fear is frequently described as an emotion that must simply be defeated. Yet fear can alert people to danger, stimulate scientific progress, encourage preparation and protect life. The task is therefore not the unconditional elimination of fear but the transformation of negative, distorted or paralyzing fear into constructive awareness and responsible action. For him, the fear that is generated from a positive perspective can become a catalyst for growth and development. Within this framework, he weaved his idea of positive fear into what he describes as acquaintance and love-fear methods, which can serve as a moral compass for growth and development in all spheres. Eneyo (2022) proposes the acquaintance and love-fear methods as responses to negative fear. In his later application of fearology to security, he describes violence as potentially sustained by misunderstood and manipulated existential fears, including fear of abandonment and fear of the Other. He advocates a movement from force-centered intervention towards systemic fear reduction and from isolated individual fear towards relational fear analysis (Eneyo, 2026). If we are to apply this approach to the phenomenon of xenophobia within the leadership conversation. Instead of simply telling citizens, "Do not fear foreigners," responsible leaders should ask:

1. What exactly are citizens afraid of?
2. What are migrants afraid of?
3. Which fears are supported by evidence?
4. Who benefits from intensifying these fears?
5. Which institutions have failed?

How can the fears of both communities be reduced without sacrificing justice? To attempt an answer to the foregoing a look at fearological ethics is important.

Fearological ethics

For this article, fearological ethics is defined as the ethical examination of how fear is produced, interpreted, communicated, distributed and transformed within relationships and institutions. Fearological ethics asks:

1. Is the identified danger real, exaggerated or fabricated?
2. Has responsibility been assigned to the correct actor?
3. Is fear being communicated to protect people or to dominate them?
4. Does the proposed response respect individual dignity and legal responsibility?
5. Are people given practical means of reducing the danger?
6. Does the response create a greater danger than the one it seeks to prevent?

Fearological ethics does not condemn fear itself. It evaluates the moral use of fear. It recognizes Fear can become constructive when it leads to vigilance, proactiveness, policy reform and protection of vulnerable persons. It becomes destructive when it produces panic, undue blame, humiliation, unauthorized vigilantism or violence.

The acquaintance method

The acquaintance method proposes that negative fear may be reduced by gaining accurate knowledge of constructive familiarity with the feared object. In this case, the feared object can represent the migrants/foreign nationals. In the context of migration, the acquaintance method is opposed to lumping all category of migrants into one basket. It involves more than just physical proximity. It includes: learning accurate migration statistics, distinguishing citizens, regular migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented persons, engaging migrants as individuals rather than stereotypes, creating structured dialogue between migrants and host communities, understanding migrants' economic and cultural contributions, acknowledging misconduct by particular migrants without transferring guilt to entire communities of migrants, and developing cooperative projects through which communities pursue common goals. The philosophical importance of acquaintance is that the feared stranger becomes a knowable human being. Bauman (2016) observes that strangers generate anxiety partly because they are unknown. Eneyo's approach responds by advocating for a transformation of the unknown Other into an encountered person whose, activities, responsibilities, weaknesses, strength and contributions can be monitored and examined.

The love-fear method

The love-fear method does not advocate for the denial of danger. It requires that fear and warning be guided by care for persons and the common good. Fear should be a moral compass to do good even when you are not on the spot light. The fear of the consequences of not doing good should propel free moral agents to do good. In this context, love should not be reduced to sentiment. It means goodwill, concern for human welfare, recognition of dignity and refusal to exploit vulnerable stakeholders. Again, Eneyo's love-fear warning has five characteristics:

1. **Truthfulness:** the warning is based on verifiable evidence.
2. **Precision:** it identifies specific unlawful conduct without condemning a whole group.
3. **Proportionality:** the response corresponds to the seriousness of the threat.
4. **Efficacy:** it provides practical actions that can reduce the danger.
5. **Equal dignity:** it protects citizens and migrants from violence and exploitation.

The method is compatible with Witte's (1992) extended parallel process model. Witte distinguishes between messages that help people control danger and messages that merely increase fear. Where people perceive a serious threat but have no effective response, they may deny, avoid or defensively react to the message. Effective communication therefore requires both credible threat information and credible means of responding (Maloney et al., 2011; Witte, 1992). As a leader, and head of government who have bilateral relationship with other countries, it is irresponsible to warn repeatedly that migrants threaten jobs, perpetuate crime without explaining what government will do to tackle labour exploitation, border corruption, unemployment, housing, policing and the provision of other social services. Such information communication creates fear without efficacy and leaves communities vulnerable to vigilantes who claim to provide a solution.

Principal Fears Underlying Xenophobia in South Africa

Fear of unemployment and economic displacement

South Africa's high unemployment and inequality rate create conditions in which migrants can easily be represented as competitors. Citizens who have waited for employment or economic opportunity may experience the success of a migrant trader as evidence that outsiders are advancing while locals remain excluded. The economic evidence, however, does not support the simple claim that immigration reduces national employment opportunities. The OECD and International Labour Organization (2018) found that immigration was not associated with a reduction in the employment rate of native-born South Africans at the national level. Certain immigrant groups were also found to increase employment opportunities, contribute to per capita income and improve the fiscal balance. Some migrants in south Africa have invested and grown their business to the extent that they employ over 15 south Africans working for them. Beyond that they pay taxes from their business to the south African Government that contributes to their GDP. This does not mean that competition never occurs. Competition may be intense within particular informal markets or low-wage sectors. The fearological error lies in attributing labour-market injustice solely to migrant workers while ignoring employers who deliberately hire undocumented migrants at subminimum wages. In such cases, both citizens and migrants are harmed by weak labour enforcement.

The love-fear response should therefore direct public concern towards exploitative employers, corrupt officials, weak local enterprise support and inadequate job creation. The target should be the unjust practice rather than the nationality of the worker. The love-fear principle does not make case for migrants who move to south African from

other African countries or elsewhere with nothing to offer. It makes a case for migrant who have either acquired skills, or other noble resources and are exporting it to make their lives better and also add value to the economy of South Africa.

6.2 Fear of crime

Migrants are often represented as perpetrators of drugs, fraud, robbery and organized crime. Some migrants, like some citizens, commit crimes and should be held individually accountable. However, nationality is not evidence of criminality. Kollamparambil's (2019) multilevel analysis found no evidence that the foreign-immigrant ratio affected most crime categories examined in South Africa, although property crime presented a limited exception. Income inequality and other structural variables were more consistent determinants. Gordon (2020) similarly demonstrates that xenophobic hate crime must be studied as a distinctive social and political phenomenon rather than treated as a spontaneous reaction to foreign criminality. This study agrees with the idea that, crimes at all level whether xenophobic or any other crime should be studied and dealt with based on their own merits. Hence, Fearological ethics requires leaders to distinguish four statements:

1. A particular foreign national has committed a crime.
2. A criminal organization includes foreign and local members.
3. Weak migration systems may be exploited by criminal networks.
4. Foreign nationals are criminals."

The first three claims can be investigated. The fourth is a xenophobic generalization.

Fear of pressure on public services

Most African countries battle with inadequate infrastructure. So, citizens may encounter crowded clinics, schools, housing shortages and inadequate municipal services. Migrants then become the available scapegoat to their ordeal. They become the visible symbols of scarcity. Yet the ethical question is whether migrants have actually caused the scarcity which has led to the overstretching of the infrastructures, or whether in the absence of the migrants, the infrastructures can adequately serve the citizens. Moreover, are the migrants benefiting from those facilities for free, or they pay for the benefits they derive, are the migrants also adding value to their host communities. Where migration creates measurable local pressures, government has a responsibility to plan and allocate resources accordingly. However, service failure cannot justify blocking persons from hospitals, schools or emergency care. The South African Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration stated in June 2026 that unauthorized persons could not demand identity documents or prevent anyone from accessing clinics, hospitals, schools and other public services. A love-fear approach acknowledges the fear of inadequate services while refusing to make vulnerable persons bear the punishment for institutional failure. Instead, it proposes a more pragmatic approach wherein, the government should plan

Fear of cultural difference and loss of belonging

Symbolic fears may concern language, customs, religion, commercial practices and national identity. Host communities may become apprehensive of migrants with the feeling born out of the sentiments that their indigenous cultures, religion etc may be eroded. These concerns can become especially powerful because they involve belonging rather than measurable economic loss. Opara (2022) shows how West African migrants can exist in an uncertain transnational position in which they are connected to both home and host societies yet fully accepted by neither. Their exclusion may continue even where they possess legal status, employment and long-term community relationships. The acquaintance method responds by creating spaces in which cultural difference is encouraged rather than imagined. It does not demand complete cultural assimilation. It seeks reciprocal understanding, respect for local laws and recognition that African societies have historically developed through movement and cultural exchanges.

Fear generated by misinformation

Migration narratives are increasingly shaped by social media, manipulated videos, unverified crime claims and exaggerated population figures. Moyo and Mpofu (2020) explain that media framing can either reinforce stereotypes and othering or challenge the representations that support xenophobic violence. During the 2019 crisis, President Ramaphosa stated that misinformation circulated through social media contributed to violence in South Africa and triggered angry reactions elsewhere in Africa. The Nigerian and South African governments consequently agreed to create an early-warning mechanism for sharing information and preventing renewed conflict. Fearological ethics becomes necessary to correct all the rapid misinformation before it becomes a social crisis that can escalate to violence attack.

The Reciprocal Fear Cycle in Nigeria–South Africa Relations

The 2019 crisis

In September 2019, Nigeria expressed concern over attacks on Nigerian citizens and property in South Africa and dispatched a special envoy. Nigeria requested visible measures to protect law-abiding Nigerians and other African nationals. South Africa condemned the violence and affirmed its responsibility to protect foreign nationals. However, violence in South Africa also generated reprisals against South African businesses and diplomatic interests in Nigeria. The two presidents condemned both attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa and retaliatory actions against South African interests in Nigeria. This demonstrates the transnational character of fear. Xenophobic violence in one country can generate nationalist anger in another. Migrants are attacked because they are associated with their countries of origin, while foreign-owned businesses are attacked because they are associated with the host country of the original violence. Responsibility is repeatedly transferred from individuals to national categories.

The early-warning mechanism

The 2019 joint communiqué endorsed an early-warning mechanism through which both countries would share information and prevent outbreaks of conflict or violence. The initiative was philosophically important because it recognized that reaction after violence is insufficient. Fear must be identified and addressed before it becomes a collective action. Nevertheless, subsequent incidents indicate that a diplomatic mechanism cannot succeed if it is disconnected from township communities, migrant organizations, local police, businesses, media institutions and civil society. Early warning must operate below the level of presidential/governmental diplomacy.

People-to-people relation

In 2021, President Buhari called for stronger people-to-people relations so that Nigeria and South Africa could avoid unhealthy competition and build cooperation in education, science, trade, tourism and security. This proposal closely reflects the logic of the acquaintance method. Bilateral relations cannot be sustained exclusively through meetings between governments. Citizens must acquire direct knowledge of one another through education, professional networks, commerce, cultural programs and community partnerships.

The 2026 crisis

The 2026 developments demonstrate that xenophobic fear remains unresolved. Nigeria's evacuation of nationals, South African anti-foreigner protests, migration enforcement and official warnings against vigilantism reveal the coexistence of legitimate migration-governance concerns and dangerous collective hostility. A fearological interpretation avoids two extremes. The first denies the existence of irregular migration, border corruption or exploitative employment. The second treats all migrants as threats. Responsible leadership must confront both migration-system failures and xenophobic violence simultaneously.

Applying the Acquaintance Method

Evidence-based public acquaintance

The first level of acquaintance is to be factual and transparent. Governments should publish and make accessible information regarding foreign nationals in their countries on a regularly bases either yearly or quarterly updated information can help both the government and migrants to plan. The following information might be necessary: the number and legal categories of migrants, migrant employment and business activity, migrant contributions to taxation and job creation, crime data disaggregated by relevant variables, pressure on local services, immigration enforcement outcomes, and penalties imposed on employers and officials who violate migration or labour laws. The objective is not to portray all migration positively. It is to replace rumors with evidence, and to allay fears about immigrants. Acquaintance requires knowing both the benefits and the challenges of migration.

Structured community contact

Local authorities should establish migrant–host community forums in areas where tension is high. Such forums should involve traditional leaders, religious leaders, traders' associations, youth organizations, police, migrant representatives and municipal officials. Following Allport's conditions, contact should involve: equal opportunity to speak, clearly defined common problems, cooperative rather than competitive tasks, institutional protection, repeated engagement rather than one-off ceremonies, and measurable community outcomes. Possible common projects include neighborhood safety initiatives, sanitation programs, youth employment schemes, commercial mediation and community service.

Educational acquaintance

Universities and schools in Nigeria and South Africa should develop joint courses, exchange programs and public seminars on African migration, apartheid history, Nigerian support for liberation struggles, Pan-Africanism and

contemporary regional interdependence. Education should also challenge the language through which migrants are reduced to categories. Students should learn to distinguish a refugee from an undocumented migrant, a foreign national from a criminal. People should learn how to be more tolerant towards each other.

Media acquaintance

Journalists should include migrant voices rather than discussing migrants solely as objects of policy. News organizations should verify population and crime statistics, avoid using nationality where it is irrelevant and distinguish alleged conduct from proven criminal responsibility. Social-media platforms, government communication units and fact-checking organizations should establish rapid-response arrangements during periods of tension. Digital acquaintance is necessary because many citizens encounter migrants first through mediated narratives rather than direct contact.

Diplomatic acquaintance

Nigeria–South Africa diplomacy should move beyond crisis meetings by establishing continuing professional, student circle, religious circle, artistic and municipal exchanges. Diplomatic missions should maintain community liaison systems through which local tensions can be reported and address before they become violent.

Applying the Love-Fear Method

Listening without endorsing prejudice

Love-fear leadership begins by listening to the fears of citizens without automatically endorsing or criticizing their interpretation. A person who fears unemployment should not be dismissed as xenophobic merely for expressing economic insecurity. However, the leader must prevent that fear for economic insecurity from degenerating to collective hatred. The appropriate response is: “Your fear of unemployment is real. Let us examine its causes and develop solutions. But no person should be attacked or blamed because of nationality.”

Accurate naming of the problem

Leaders should use precise terms like: undocumented migration rather than “foreign invasion”, labour-law violation rather than “foreign job theft”, identified criminal networks rather than “foreign criminals”, public-service capacity problems rather than “migrant takeover”, and lawful immigration enforcement rather than community expulsion. Language determines the moral boundaries of action. When political leaders use unrestricted categories such as “foreigners,” they risk transferring suspicion from lawbreakers to all persons perceived as foreign.

Combining warning with efficacy

Warnings about migration should be accompanied by specific measures:

1. Stronger and less corrupt border administration
2. Timely asylum and permit processing
3. Enforcement against exploitative employers
4. Support for local enterprises
5. Prosecution of trafficking and organized crime
6. Investment in public services
7. Protection of migrants who report criminal networks
8. Lawful removal procedures subject to human-rights standards.

This follows the love-fear principle because citizens are not abandoned with fear, and migrants are not offered as substitutes for effective governance.

Protecting everyone against fear-based violence

Love-fear leadership is reciprocal. Migrants must respect host-country laws, while governments and citizens must respect migrants’ dignity and legal rights. Nigerian authorities must also protect South African citizens and businesses from retaliation when Nigerians are attacked abroad. The principle is simple: a person’s nationality cannot transfer guilt or offense for the conduct of another person.

Proposed Acquaintance–Love Fearological Framework

This study proposes Eneyo’s Acquaintance–Love Fearological ethics as a Framework for addressing this problem (see Table 1).

Table 1: Proposed Acquaintance–Love Fearological Framework

Component	Fearological questions	Practical application
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Fear mapping	What are citizens and migrants afraid of?	Community surveys, listening forums and migrant-safety assessments
Evidence testing	Is the feared danger supported by reliable evidence?	Migration dashboards, labour data, crime analysis and fact-checking
Responsibility tracing	Who is actually responsible for the problem?	Distinguish migrants, employers, officials, criminal networks and policy failures
Acquaintance building	How can unfamiliar groups gain accurate knowledge of one another?	Structured contact, dialogue, exchanges and cooperative community projects
Love-fear communication	How can risks be communicated without hatred or collective blame?	Truthful, precise and proportionate public communication
Efficacy provision	What lawful action can reduce the fear?	Border reform, job creation, labour enforcement, policing and service planning
Dignity protection	Does the response protect citizens and migrants?	Prohibition of vigilantism, discrimination, retaliation and collective punishment
Continuous evaluation	Are fear and violence actually decreasing?	Bilateral monitoring, public reporting and independent evaluation

Ethical standards for leadership communication

A migration-related statement should be considered fearologically ethical only where it satisfies six tests:

1. Evidence test: The claim is supported by credible data
2. Specificity test: It identifies conduct rather than condemning a nationality
3. Proportionality test: The proposed response is no more coercive than necessary
4. Efficacy test: It provides a realistic way of addressing the problem
5. Dignity test: It recognizes the humanity and rights of affected persons
6. Reciprocity test: The principle would be acceptable if applied to one's own citizens abroad.

Discussion

Eneyo's acquaintance method and intergroup contact theory are mutually reinforcing but not identical. Contact theory provides empirical evidence that appropriately structured interaction can reduce prejudice. The acquaintance method provides a broader philosophical principle: people should replace fear based on abstraction and imagination with informed engagement with the feared reality. Acquaintance therefore includes contact but also evidence, conceptual clarification, historical understanding and institutional transparency. The love-fear method also extends beyond conventional fear-appeal theory. The extended parallel process model explains why threat communication requires efficacy. Love-fear adds a normative condition: even an effective message may be unethical if it manipulates, humiliates or sacrifices an innocent group. The method asks not only whether a warning changes behaviour but whether it is motivated and structured by concern for persons and the common good.

The framework rejects two inadequate responses to xenophobia. The first is fear denial, which tells citizens that their concerns are irrelevant. Such denial creates resentment and allows extremist groups to present themselves as the only actors willing to listen. The second is fear exploitation, which confirms exaggerated narratives and offers migrants as objects of punishment. A fearological leader neither dismisses fear nor surrenders to it. The leader interprets fear, separates evidence from stereotype, identifies responsible institutions and directs concern towards constructive action. The framework also challenges simple accounts of Ubuntu and Pan-Africanism. Invoking African brotherhood is morally important but insufficient where communities experience severe inequality, competition and weak governance. Solidarity must be Institutionalize through fair employment systems, effective public services, lawful migration administration and shared economic opportunities. Otherwise, appeals to unity may appear detached from everyday insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishment of a bilateral fear-reduction and social-cohesion mechanism

Nigeria and South Africa should expand the 2019 early-warning arrangement into a permanent mechanism involving diplomats, local authorities, police, migrant associations, universities, religious institutions and civil-society organizations.

Create community-level migration dialogue councils

Councils should operate in identified hotspots and meet regularly rather than only after violence. They should map fears, verify claims, mediate to forestall avoidable disputes and report threats.

Develop an official migration-information platform/d

Data Base

The South African Government should provide periodically updated information on migrant numbers, legal categories, employment, crime, deportation, taxation and public-service use, like experts in some specific areas. Information should be communicated in accessible local languages.

Regulate political fear speech

Political parties and public officials should be held accountable when they deliberately present entire migrant communities as criminals, invaders or enemies. Legitimate criticism of migration policy must remain protected, but incitement and collective demonization should attract legal and institutional sanctions.

Enforce labor laws against exploitative employers

Employers who use undocumented migrants to evade taxes, minimum-wage, should face the full wrath of the law. These would protect citizens from unfair competition and migrants from exploitation. It would also help government to generate revenue through taxes and improve the economy of the country.

Institutionalize people-to-people diplomacy

The Bi-National Commission should include universities, student organizations, professional associations, artists, faith base organizations, local governments and business groups. Relations between two countries cannot be secured by governments alone.

Create joint media and misinformation protocols

Nigeria and South Africa should establish rapid verification channels for reports of attacks, fatalities, arrests and reprisals. Official silence allows rumors to dominate the information environment.

Protect migrants while enforcing lawful migration

South Africa has the right to enforce immigration laws, but enforcement should be conducted only by authorized officials and should respect constitutional and international obligations. Community base organizations must not conduct identity checks, block services or expel residents.

Address the structural sources of fear

Long-term xenophobia prevention requires job creation, improved policing, reduced inequality, functioning border institutions, support for local enterprise and adequate public services. Without structural reform, migrant communities will remain convenient targets for recurring frustration by some migrants.

CONCLUSION

Xenophobia in Nigeria–South Africa relations is not adequately explained as simple hatred of foreigners. It is sustained by a complex system of economic fear, insecurity, political rhetoric, misinformation, cultural anxiety, institutional failure and reciprocal national reaction. The study discovered that, these fears may begin with genuine social difficulties, but they become morally destructive when transferred onto migrants as collective blame. Michael Eneyo's philosophy of fear offers a valuable Afroxiological approach to the problem. The acquaintance method requires citizens, migrants and leaders to move from imagined danger towards accurate knowledge, constructive contact and reciprocal understanding. The love-fear method requires leaders to acknowledge genuine concerns while communicating them truthfully, proportionately and with practical solutions that protect human dignity.

None of these methods requires open borders, the abandonment of immigration law or the denial of criminal conduct. Rather, they require accurate distinctions and individual responsibility. Migration systems must be enforced by lawful institutions, not by mobs, vigilantes or politically motivated groups. The central fearological insight is that fear should neither be denied nor allowed to govern blindly. It should be studied, ethically and evaluated critically, so that it can lead to transformation rather than destruction. Nigeria and South Africa can reduce xenophobic violence when they ask not only how to control migrants but also how to understand and repair the relationships of fear that make migrants convenient targets. Such an approach would strengthen bilateral relations, African solidarity and the moral legitimacy of migration governance.

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