**Episode four - El Dorado**

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

xenophobia, migrants, people, South Africans, foreign nationals, afrophobia, manifests, el dorado, report, government, local, colonial, incidents, labour, Africans, disparity,

00:00

Welcome to episode four of El Dorado. The next 20 minutes contains strong material that you may find triggering. So be cautious. On that note, there will be colonial terms which I'll explain. So, we are on the same page. South Africa's colonial past is a melody of coveting eyes from both the Dutch and the British. As you've learned the discovery of diamonds and the unearthing of gold, had a devastating impact on Southern Africans humanity in the process of forming a nation state called South Africa in 1910. The demand for black labour positioned local ethnic groups in economic and social subordination the ideas of race that had entered the diamond fields of Kimberley, the big hole, and the gold mines of Witwatersrand created an insidious market that needed more than the promise of a democratic nation to be demolished.

01:10

Rain does not fall on one roof alone.

01:14

Um, I’m here to see Silindile from Xenowatch.

01:18

Do you have an appointment?

01:19

Yes, 16:00 sorry 14:00 o'clock, I believe they are based in the African centre for migration and society? Opposite the Senate Chambers.

01:29

Ah yes, you need to go to the other side.

01:30

Okay, thank you.

01:32

In the previous episode we learnt about the hysteria for precious metal that led to the discovery of the gold reef at Witwatersrand creating the metropolis we know as Johannesburg, The City of Gold. The economic wealth from the region would come at the price of subjugating Black ethnic groups across Southern Africa as low wage labourers.

We witnessed the horrendous working conditions miners faced and their gruelling journeys to the mines. By the end of the 19th century the men that had been sent to labour away in the name sake of protecting their kingdoms ceased to be warriors. Britain had annexed all the independent chiefdoms and disarmed their tribesmen. After losing their independence, local ethnic groups were still compelled to work for the purpose of raising money to pay taxes to finance a colonial system which had deprived them of their political freedom and economic independence.

We asked ourselves what would be the legacy of a migrant Labour system built to create disparity?

We found our answer in Maandagshoek, the home of one of South Africa’s most profitable mine, Modikwa Platinum. We heard oral histories from the community leaders, Chief Sonias Vilakazi and Emmanuel Mokgoga, spokesperson of the Maandagshoek Development Committee.

Today we’re visiting Silindile from Xenowatch to hear about the research project’s findings and possible solutions to tackle afrophobia.

Note: when I was speaking to Silindile I had not yet learnt about the word afrophobia.

03:19

So yeah, Xenowatch is a project that was developed by the African Centre for migration and society. We're obviously based at Wits university. And the aim of the project was to monitor xenophobic discrimination. And not only that, but to also monitor responses by officials, in terms of like, you know, are police actually responding when there's xenophobic incident reported, when they're cases of displacement or people in need of care, civil society organisations, international organisations, who are mandated to do so actually stepping in to provide, you know, assistance.

another reason or aiming for developing the project was to also for the project to act as an early warning system. So, the idea is that when people hear of threats of violence, they can report them to the Xenowatch, and then we can feed that information to law enforcement to be able to prevent violence from taking place. Unfortunately, it's a bit of a challenge, because reporting to authorities does not always necessarily translate to intervention. But we have seen cases where, you know, early reporting has prevented violence from taking place.

Our last objective is to analyse the data. So, we analyse the data, because we're a research centre, our main focus within this ecosystem of trying to address xenophobia is to also provide evidence, you know, evidence-based information through the information that we collect. So, we use all these incidents that we receive the reports, we verify them, and then we analyse to trying to understand, you know, the phenomenon of xenophobia holistically, what are the triggers of xenophobia? What causes it? How is it manifesting? Does it manifest differently in different provinces, because, you know, we also see that they are different, you know, particularities in the way that it manifests in each province, depending on the issues that are present there. So, for example, in Cape Town in Port Elizabeth, they face a lot of issues with extortion, where gangs actually gun down shop owners who don't pay protection fee. They loot their shops and etc. But then in other provinces, you might find that this they face certain issues. So, understanding those things are key to informing evidence based policy recommendations and also implementation on the ground, because it doesn't help to implement projects that don't really speak to the reality of the situation. So, it's about providing that information to civil society organisations, government policymakers to say, this is what we get from our findings, and these are the recommendations that we are suggesting to improve, intervene when it comes to xenophobia in the country. So that's the project in a nutshell.

06:20

how would you describe xenophobia?

06:24

I think xenophobia is the fear or hatred towards, you know, another person, but you can hate someone, or you can fear someone because they look different from you. Now with xenophobia, you take it a step further, because then you act on that kind of discrimination or fear or this indifference towards the other person. So that's how I'll describe xenophobia. It's like, you know, the fear of other or the prejudice towards somebody else, either because of their nationality, because of where they come from, or maybe because of, cause of difference. What we see in South Africa is that even some South African nationals who are mistaken for being foreign nationals are attacked. So, it's xenophobia is not only doesn't only affect for that, foreign nationals, it can also affect South Africans, who are mistaken for being foreign. South African migrants which are in Johannesburg we get a lot of internal migration, people coming from other provinces to seek job opportunities. So, you find that people from Limpopo because they are dark skinned and have a different accent can be mistaken Zimbabweans. You know, stuff like that. So yeah.

07:40

Interesting. Are the different forms of xenophobia? Because when I was reading, you mentioned that there's different ways that this can take places, can you detail on some.

07:52

Yeah. like, they're no different forms of xenophobia, but the way it manifests is different. So, for example, there are certain things xenophobia is just broadly, a negative attitude towards someone else, right. But then the way it manifests is that it can be in violent forms. So, where people are killed, you know, assaulted and stuff like that, then we have issues of extortion, like I was saying, gangs force foreign shop owners within the township location to pay a protection fee. Otherwise, you know, the consequences that they face are either their shops are looted, or they can be gunned down.

We also have denied services where foreign nationals can try and access a service, and then because someone is in xenophobic can be denied in that service, for example, someone can try and access health care services, but because the healthcare professional feels like, oh, you're from Botswana, so you are burdening the healthcare system. So, it manifests in different ways or verbal abuse, someone can just say kwerekwere and swear at you.

Then you know, these, forced repatriation, selective enforcement of bylaws. By that I mean that, for example, in the municipality, they might say, and everyone who's operating spaza shop, or anyone who works within the market should have a permit to operate a business permit that they get from the municipality that enables them to operate. Now, there might have been some cases that municipality officials or police officials will then come to those markets, and then only specifically target foreigners who don't have permits, even though like, of course, lawfully, everyone should operate with the permit. But then it becomes in xenophobic when even South Africans don't have permits, but you're only targeting foreign nationals without permits. So, the law should apply to everyone. That's why we say the selection enforcement of by laws. So, it manifests in different ways.

09:54

Interesting. You said that it manifests differently in different provinces, what about Joburg?

10:01

Yo Joburg is a mixed bag because I mean, Joburg is like the economic capital of the country. So, we find that it has the most migrants both internally and border and cross border migrants. So, it's really a mixed bag. We see that, for example of late operation to dudula has been going into clinics like local clinics and stopping preventing undocumented migrants from accessing healthcare. So, they'll go on a a check for documentation, if you don't have documentation within, you know, chase you away. We've also had cases of nurses as well exhorting or denying them access to healthcare, because they will then say, okay, you're undocumented. So, if you want me to register your child, you need to pay me like 5000. So, they charge them back exorbitant fees, to register the children. And then when the mother of the child comes back, like maybe a week or a few weeks later, to follow up services, they then discover that the child is not documented or you know, is not registered. So those are different ways. And then recently in Diepsloot, as well, I was just speaking to a research assistant who just left right now. And she had gone to verify the incident, because the reports that we're getting were that the local community members are fed up with the crime in the area, and they want the President to come and, you know, intervene. But when she was on the ground, she was hearing that you know, the local members were concerned about crime, and we're blaming foreign nationals. So what shopkeepers are doing now is, like I said, what’s happening in Cape Town is that they're hiring security companies and stuff. Whereas in Cape Town, it's gangs, apparently, here, they are hiring security companies to protect them. So, each shop pays about 300 rand. And that person was killed in the process because he came alone, and that, obviously, things exploded. And it resulted in, you know, some shopkeepers being arrested. So, it really depends. It really depends.

12:00

Interesting. Like, from your research that you've done, what would you is the way forward?

12:18

I mean, xenophobia has been a feature of post-apartheid in South Africa, you know we have records of cases from as back as 1994. So that is already telling that, like, it's very difficult to tackle something like that, because one is multifaceted. There are so many key players that have been involved. And at the government level, we have seen that a lot of government officials are scapegoating on migrants, right and not taking responsibility for the poor service delivery. And you know, and that also has a trickle effect, because it legitimises the concerns of South Africans who are living in dire poverty, and for them, they see people who are coming from outside as the ones to blame for taking the opportunities. So, when a leader who's supposed to be the voice of reason, then says, Yeah, our hospitals are overburdened because of foreign nationals, then it makes the people say, oh, you see, we are right, and they attack foreign nationals. So, it's, it's layered in the sense that it's gone on for a long time, because there's this culture of impunity, perpetrators are not brought to book. That's why we keep seeing it, because it's also difficult to identify perpetrators, those who are arrested, arrested, and then within two days are released on bail.

There's the issue that xenophobia itself is not seen as a crime. If someone is tried or convicted, it's because of maybe they were seen killing someone. So, they're not going to be tried for the act of xenophobia itself, but the fact that we saw you killing someone, so and that's why you find that we've had very few convictions because it's very difficult to bring people to book especially when it happens in a space where a mob just starts attacking foreign nationals. No one wants to talk as who's the leader who's to blame, it just becomes a dead end. Right.

So, we're also seeing that civil society organisations have been coming up with campaigns over the years to you know, try, and educate people on the rights of migrants, and you know, the responsibilities of individuals, but South Africans don't care. These are people as I said are living in squalor, are desperate for socio economic opportunities, and all they see is foreign nationals coming in and taking away. So, when now you as an organisation come and say, but migrants have rights. It's feels like these people come in and take away our opportunities. At the same time, they have people defending them.

So, you know, we're now trying to push people to shift the narrative to say, how do we talk about inclusive societies that benefit everybody because once you start seeing migrant migrant rights in a migrant in an anti-migrant space. That's counterproductive, right. If we say, everybody in Johannesburg deserves a place where they are safe, where they have access to hospitals where they have access to, you know, services, whether they are LGBTQ plus whether they are a woman, whether they are foreign, whether they are whatever, then it shifts the narrative from an us versus them scenario. Because once the healthcare system is fixed, it just doesn't benefit foreign nationals it benefits even South Africans.

Yeah. So, there's a lot and you know, government will we see that there's not a lot of political will, when it comes to tackling xenophobia. In 2019, when there were attacks, the South African President and the Nigerian president had a meeting to address the issue, because then what the ripple effect of that was Nigerian and other Africans were now like looting and destroying shops and businesses that belong to South Africans within their countries. We were like, we can't tolerate it. So, they decided to come up with an early warning response mechanism, that it didn't go anywhere, right. And for the longest time, a lot of governments have been denial that what's happening is xenophobia, and basically defining it as it's just pure criminality.

Then the question is, if it's just pure criminality, why is it specifically targeted at nom-nationals. So, there's been a lack of political will in terms of addressing it. That's why it goes unabated. Also, for example, with the police, are people who live within communities where attacks take place. So, they also don't feel comfortable look like they're on the side of migrants, even if they're doing their job. So sometimes, even when you call the police, it escalates the situation. So, there is no one size fits all solution.

I think we need to see a lot of hands-on deck. But I think the first place to start is to, you know, have political will well, the government really take this into consideration and to account and one comes up with mechanisms of ensuring that perpetrators approach to book ensuring that, you know, law enforcement intervenes. You know, when we report because for example, with us, Xenowatch, there's only so much I can do, by tell the police that there is a threat in Diepsloot and they don't do anything about it, and the attack happens, you know, so then early warning doesn't work.

If law enforcement is equipped with the right tools to intervene appropriately, then that helps and changing the attitudes of law enforcement officers because some of them are xenophobic. We hear of migrants going like some migrants don't want to report incidents, they've lost faith in the system, because it's like we can go and report sometimes they turn us away. Sometimes we blame us for the incidents, or sometimes they say they'll do something, and they don't do anything. So

18:10

Like any social issue the government plays a significant role in legitimising Afrophobia as a human rights violation that needs to be resolved. It is only then that law enforcement can take violent attacks towards Black migrants seriously and citizens can be held accountable for their actions.

If we think about any other form of discrimination the battle for justice is validated by law, by this written word that also holds politicians to account for any harmful rhetoric. It is easy to scapegoat communities who are alienated by the law.

In turn in a society where bread is so precious how can you truly love your neighbour? Ubuntu cannot co-exist with individualism. The migrant labour system from the 1800s introduced a new set of values that thrives on stepping on one another to make ends meet.

South Africa’s colonial past and its equally violent present are parallel.

If you reflect on the past episodes, the way of thinking introduced to the region is centuries of being dehumanised. I guess it is easier to other others when you’ve been othered, whilst we can call for the South African government to action against disparity and hate.

I do feel there needs to be a decolonialisation of the mind, ‘us and them’, ‘self and other’, the possessiveness over land, of El Dorado has birthed a double consciousness that has distorted Africans views of their own humanity. We can dream of a dystopia where revolutionary leaders took heed of Frantz Fanon’s warnings, or we can start by challenge how we see other and that begins with language.

Like Silindile said everyone is impacted by the disparity in the country, being afrophobic won’t result in employment or provide a living wage. It’s an us issue not an us versus them.

In the words of the late Desmond Tutu, I am because we are. There is strength in togetherness.

Thank you for listening.

El Dorado is a family and communal production. This podcast series would not have been possible without the help of my uncles and cousin. Thank you to all the locals that shared their stories with us. Until next time.