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Xenophobia in the GCC countries: migrants' desire and distress

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ABSTRACT

Xenophobia has not received sufficient attention although anti-migrant sentiments and practices have been on the rise in receiving countries. This study attempts to inset xenophobia in the migration debate by examining the growth of this phenomenon in host countries in the GCC. It provides short accounts of xenophobia experienced by migrants. We argue that the maltreatment the migrants are subjected to is largely due to xenophobic than merely professional factors. For this research, 61 (Qatar 8; Kuwait 9; UAE 11; Bahrain 7; Saudi Arabia 21, and Oman 5) migrants were selected on snow-ball basis for interviews. Xenophobic attacks/outbursts result in an increasing act of hostility and violence. Xenophobic maltreatment towards foreign workers could be marked as a gross human rights violation.

Background

Since ancient times, xenophobia has been an ethnic issue that has plagued our world and is widely prevalent today in most parts of the world (Valji, 2003). This is a highly emphasized and sustained issue to the mass including millennial with the help of social media and trumpism. Xenophobia, some say, was only used near the end of the nineteenth century when the slave system was introduced. Some other says, when Europeans moved around the world, the stigmatized "indigenous locals" were considered as inferior and described them as "the others" (Patrick, 2006). The processes of "othering" play roles in xenophobic practices. In this article, we study the magnitude of xenophobia that occurred in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Expression of xenophobia occurs against migrant populations on arrival, return and their transit, primarily because the citizens consider the migrant workers "outsiders". The notion of "outsiders" and "insider" cultivates a social and political climate wherein xenophobia develops. There are about 30 million migrant workers in the Gulf region including an estimated 2.4 million foreign domestic workers (FDW) (Gulf Research Centre, 2017) and most of who are from Asia and Africa. The FDWs are recruited under the abusive kafala (visa-sponsorship) system that does not allow leaving or changing employers without the consent of the first employer and any violation would entail a range of punishments (arrests, fines, detention

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and deportation) (Begum, 2017). Citizens who are at a disadvantage consider migrants as competitors for jobs and public services consumption/utilization (UNESCO, 2002). There are widespread complaints against local employers about "brutal" treatment toward the migrant workers (Ullah, Mohamad, & Chattoraj, 2020; Ullah, 2014; 2013; 2010b, 2017; Ullah, Hossain A, & Islam, 2015).

Migrants constitute almost half (49.7 per cent) of the total population of the GCC countries (Bahrain, 52 per cent; Kuwait, 70 per cent; Oman, 45 per cent; Qatar, 90 per cent; KSA, 33 per cent and UAE, 88 per cent) (Khoja et al., 2017) and the majority of the foreigners are unskilled workers (Raphael C., 2013). Foreign workers started to migrate into the GCC countries during the early seventies in the wake of the massive development plans following the oil boom and the deficit in domestic workforce in the Gulf (Birks, Seccombe, & Sinclair, 1998; Ullah, 2012; 2017; Ullah & Kumpoh Asiyah, 2018a). A few years later, most governments in the region shifted their labour force policy from decreasing dependence on foreign labour to creating job opportunities for nationals. This policy turned out to be an unsuccessful one (Chia Siow, 2011; Ullah, 2010b; 2015; 2018b). The ratio between foreigners and citizens in the mid-1970s was balanced, however, the foreigners doubled the size by 2009.

Migrant populations are vulnerable and subjected to xenophobic maltreatment. Some countries in the GCC became infamously known for their maltreatments towards migrant workers. In some instances, the level of the maltreatments has been heart-wrenching. Among a myriad of reasons for the breeding of xenophobia and racism among the locals, is the growing competition over resources they have with the migrants as states begin reducing the public spending in social welfare, education and healthcare.

Although xenophobic attacks occur everywhere in the world, South Africa has been a unique example of the phenomenon, which has been linked closely to the apartheid (Claassen, 2015), though this has not come to an end in the country. In 2017, the magnitude of xenophobic violence reached to a horrific level, for example, about 66 deaths, 116 assaults 571 loots and 11,140 displacements occurred (Hiropoulos, 2017). South Africans believe that 25 per cent of its population is foreign (a reflection of the xenophobic fear) who takes away their jobs (McConnell, 2009). This fear is widespread around the world reflecting the complicated relationship between migrants and nationals.

The violence against migrants seems to continue unless profound socio-economic and attitudinal changes happen (Everatt, 2011; Ullah, 2018b). Expression of xenophobia may even occur amongst people with identical physical characteristics, particularly when people arrive, return or migrate to areas where the occupants consider those people as outsiders.

In the USA, for instance, xenophobic assaults manifested in the form of anti-Hispanic hate crimes during the 1840s while in 1885; it was toward Chinese immigrants (David, 2016) where White Americans rioted against Chinese residents. In Rome, xenophobic tendencies were expressed towards the neighbouring Russians and Hungarians. Xenophobic attacks toward migrants were also evident in a multicultural society like Australia. In 2016 alone, the number of xenophobic attacks in Germany includes 3533 attacks on migrants and asylum hostels, 2545 attacks on individual migrants with 560 people injured including 43 children, 988 attacks on housing (slightly fewer than in 2015), and 217 attacks on refugee organizations and volunteers (Cullen & Cullinane, 2017).

During the Second World War, an internment of about 120,000 people of Japanese descendants that were living in the USA occurred due to the fear that these people would side with the Japanese forces. This act came out of racist and xenophobic tendencies among the whites of the west coast (Bond, 2014). The Jewish Holocaust was one of the most gruesome episodes of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945, over six million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime, and another five million non-Jewish people were murdered which consisted of the Poles, Communists, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the mentally or physically disabled (Bergen, 2003).

Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, Ainu, and people originating from other nationalities suffer from xenophobic sentiments from the Japanese (Webster, 2011; Young-Min, 2016). The Caste system in India is another example of xenophobia, where people of the higher castes fear and shun those of lower castes (Bouglé, 1971). The genocide in the mid-1990s in Rwanda by the Hutus on the minority Tutsis, is an attempt of ethnic cleansing, led to the deaths of about a million people, and the rape of thousands of Tutsi women and children, are all notorious examples of hate and xenophobic crime (Desforges, 1999). In Canada, about 2073 hate crimes took place in 2017 alone (Yang, 2018). Importantly, hate crimes increased by 17 per cent in Trump's first year of presidency compared to previous years (Webster Emma, 2018).

Xenophobia and racism spark off the increase of hate crimes in these different parts of the world. The spread of xenophobic and racist ideas brings nervousness and hatred to the people, and they start thinking that the predominant factors behind their fighting in their country are the other populations living in it. We argue that xenophobia and racism have a damaging effect on the victims. We further argue that the detrimental impact of xenophobia and racism on every modern society causes the climb of hate and assault in neighbourhoods.

While there are abundance of research conducted on vulnerabilities of migrant workers in many countries and societies, the paucity of research in the GCC countries dedicated to xenophobia is evident. This research is expected to fill in the knowledge gap. Xenophobia, racism and discrimination are the results of increasing competition in the job market and scarce welfare services between the citizens and the migrant workers. We argue that maltreatment experienced by the migrants is largely due to xenophobia than what their professions are.

Objectives and methodologies

Particular attention was accorded to the dimensions of xenophobic treatments rendered to Asian unskilled and semi-skilled workers (domestic and construction workers in the Gulf). Cheap labour has often become synonyms to the devaluation of humans. Asian domestic workers live under exploitative conditions. Some claim that the policies regarding foreign workers such as threat of violence, restriction of mobility and movement and exploitative employment conditions have led to significantly widespread abuse of these workers. This means that xenophobic practices are manifested in policies such as the preference of temporary contract labour that excludes possibilities of citizenship; particular kinds of menial work (dirty, dangerous, difficult and demeaning types) have been allocated to foreigners.

This study attempts to inset xenophobia in the migration debate by examining the growth of this phenomenon in host countries in the GCC. It provides short accounts of xenophobia experienced by migrants.

The paper is based on empirical research that employs a qualitative approach because we intended to have an analytic and interpretative depth of the xenophobic actions perpetrated upon the migrants in the GCC countries. The research strongly relies on fundamental field research techniques such as in-depth interviews and unstructured interviews. Qualitative research is usually applied when there is a need for a complex, detailed understanding of a difficult problem that has debarred comprehension (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). The sample was selected on snow-ball basis. We interviewed 61 (49 females and 12 males) (Qatar 8; Kuwait 9; UAE 11; Bahrain 7; Saudi Arabia 21, Oman 5) (Table 1). The respondents were chosen for the purpose of extracting insight about what they feel about the xenophobia. We do not claim this sample to be a representative one. A representative sample is notoriously difficult to draw due to the fact that there is no sample frame available. We conducted face-to-face interviews of the sample population (n) by using both closed and opened-ended questionnaire. The in-depth interviewing used in this study allowed us to develop, clarify, verify and refine the core issues of the interview protocol. Initially, the content of the interview was unstructured and flexible in order to allow the interviewees to communicate freely their experiences and considered views concerning the challenges they are facing.

We had 284 respondents but for this research, we excluded 223 respondents based on the criteria (i.e. those who work in domestic spheres and construction sectors, those are not in managerial position and those whose stint has been at least 5 years) we set for this particular research. We believe that five years time is good to understand their experiences. Since we had to go for snow-ball technique in order to select the sample, we, initially selected 284 respondents. Each of the samples was selected against the set criteria and hence most of them were omitted as they disassociate with the criteria. Data collection and analysis were simultaneous. Analysing data involved triangulating the evidence from multiple perspectives.

We adopted a data triangulation approach, which refers to the use of multiple sources of data. Multiple and independent sources of evidence, including observations and

Table 1. Profiles of the respondents.

Age	f	Major complaints
Female		
20–25	22	Verbal abuse, rape, molestation, physical torture on regular basis. Insufficient food and sleep.
26–30	10	Verbal abuse, rape, molestation, physical torture on regular basis. Clock round work, confinement.
31–35	9	Verbal abuse, rape, molestation, physical torture on regular basis. Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.
36–40	8	Verbal abuse, rape, molestation, physical torture on regular basis. Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.
	Male	
20–25	3	Verbal abuse, physical torture on regular basis. Non or delayed payment, name calling, Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.
26–30	6	Verbal abuse, physical torture on regular basis. Non or delayed payment, name calling, Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.
31–35	2	Verbal abuse, physical torture on regular basis. Non or delayed payment, name calling, Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.
36–40	1	Verbal abuse, physical torture on regular basis. Non or delayed payment, name calling, Insufficient food and sleep. Confinement.

Source: Field work, 2014–2015.

interviews, were used in this research. In order to corroborate interview data, we used secondary sources (such as published documents, books, media sources, etc.). We did, for some interviewees, repeat interviews as some provoking information triggered the necessity for another interview as the themes began to unfold.

The scarcity of research on the interface of empirical research and press coverage of xenophobic attacks in GCC is a serious problem worth investigating. Xenophobic tendencies and details of it are best captured by a qualitative approach. Through a critical analysis of narratives from victims of xenophobia, we provide a detailed account on the underlying conceptual framing of the discourse of xenophobia. The study employs an explanatory study approach that is an empirical inquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

Conceptualizing xenophobia

Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers. It is embodied in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, often culminates in violence, including all types of abuses. As globalization continues at its rapid pace, migration continues at dramatic levels together with its negative consequences (Ullah, 2011; 2018a; Ullah & Kumpoh Asiyah, 2018b), which means that xenophobia, racism and discrimination are global phenomena that negatively affect immigrants and migrants (Ullah & Huque Ahmed, 2014). The factors that cause xenophobia could be broadly categorized into two types: one is from destination perspective that includes uneven development, deprivations, cultural practices, history, politics and second type of xenophobia occurs when entire group is not considered part of the society i.e. a fear of the "Other" (Ashforth, 2005). The term denotes a dislike of foreigners (Hook & Eagle, 2002). Therefore, xenophobia is characterized by a negative attitude towards foreigners, a dislike, a fear, or hatred. By framing xenophobia as an attitude, however, there is no comment on the consequences or effects of such a mind-set. This may be misleading, because xenophobia is not restricted to a fear or dislike of foreigners, rather, it results in "intense tension and violence towards immigrants" (Tshitereke, 1999, p. 4). De Genova's (2010) view provides additional weight to the argument that neoliberalism privileges and promotes the process of accumulation, concentration, and consumption of capital by private individuals and entities, while appearing to place private actors at the forefront of this process. This implies that in the neoliberal economic policies, contradictions are generated as borders are open for money and goods for many but borders are closed for certain people. This, in fact, serves the interests of states for migrants to be scapegoated (Ullah et al., 2020).

Racism refers to a hostility based upon beliefs about inherited biological differences, while xenophobia refers to a hostility that is based upon beliefs around cultural differences or hostility towards foreigners. Xenophobia is fear, dislike, contempt or hate towards the "others", those different, and the "them" in opposition to "us". It's a value judgement made without any verification and empirical base in reality (Ullah et al., 2020). Racial prejudices, as the conscience of biological superiority of own races, developed in Modern Age to justify nationalistic and colonialist policy. Xenophobic is translated into hostility towards immigrants (Jureidini, 2003) as they have little to no legal protection.

It is widely believed that xenophobic violence is a bias-motivated crime (Desai, 2010; Human Rights First, 2007). Xenophobia, racism and discrimination, at different

degrees, imperil the own of oneself manifested in polces (for example, there are no possibilities for migrants to obtain citizenship) and that the menial dangerous and dirty types of work are allocated to them (Ullah, 2015a; Ullah, Yusnani, & Maria, 2016).

Racism and xenophobia are often misunderstood as the same concept though they are in practice sometimes overlapping (Figure 1). Xenophobia and its differentiation from racism are still evolving concepts. The racial discrimination and xenophobia are often played down and sometimes denied by authorities (United Nations, 1979). It is an ideological construct that assigns a certain race and/or ethnic group to a position of power over others on the basis of physical and cultural attributes, as well as economic wealth, involving hierarchical relations where the superior race exercises dominance over others. Racism is generally understood as different racial groups that are characterized by intrinsic abilities and that such groups are naturally superior to others. Biology as ideology is another specific form of racism involving insiders and outsiders (Becker, 1963). More precisely, racism is mostly based on religion, ethnicity or gender, while xenophobia is based on the place of birth (Solomon & Kosaka, 2014). However, xenophobia denotes prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are foreigners to the community (UN, 2001).

A range of theories tends to explain the causes of rising xenophobia across the world (Crush & Sujata, 2009). Scholars are divided into two blocs: one bloc views xenophobia as a natural reaction to outsiders. The other views from Allport's (1954) nature of contact approach that it can result in greater harmony if four broad conditions are met: groups in question should have or perceive equal status; the contact should be effective and have groups work together; the need for inter-group cooperation rather than competition must be emphasized; and authorities must support inter-group contact (Allport,

Figure 1. Dynamics of xenophobia. Source: Adopted from Aden, 2017; Angen, 2016
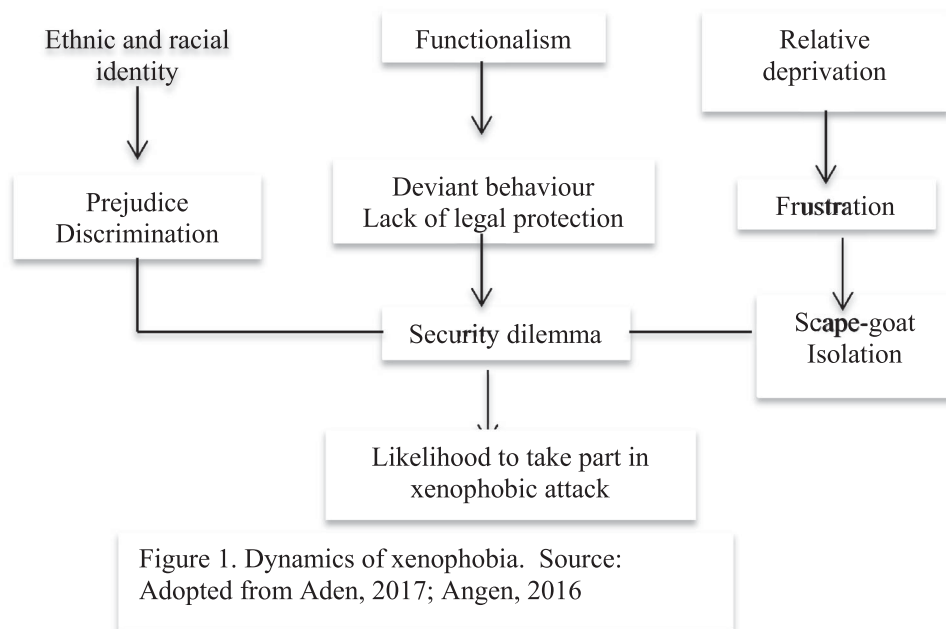
Figure 1. Dynamics of xenophobia. Source: Adopted from Aden, 2017; Angen, 2016.

1954, p. 41). Pettigrew (2016), McLaren (2003) and Allport (1954) offer the concept of sca-pegoating, in which people displace their frustration on convenient target such as migrants, and then negative and biased stereotypes are produced (Figure 1). Materialist analysis proposes that xenophobic sentiments derive from competition over limited resources.

Several reviews on ethnicity-xenophobia nexus (Ellingsen, 2011; Ullah & Chattoraj, 2018; Ullah & Kumpoh Asiyah, 2018a) could be explained in three perspectives: primor-dialist, instrumentalist and constructivist. The primordalist perspective argues that ethnic and religious differences can generate frustration in and of itself while instrumentalist per-spective argues that ethnic differences alone are not sufficient for causing conflict (Elling-sen, 2011, p. 87; Carment, 1993; Lake & Rotchild, 1998). This means ethnic conflicts could develop for reasons such as socio-economic or political differences. The constructivist view makes two claims: first, it teaches that individuals possess multiple ethnic identities whose salience depends on the context in which the individuals find themselves. Second, the constructivist literature shows that ethnic groups are products of political and histori-cal processes (Chandra & Boulet, 2003; Ellingsen, 2011; Gurr, 2000).

The scapegoat hypothesis leads to the isolation hypothesis whereby the foreigner is alie-nated as a result of foreignness. According to the isolation hypothesis, xenophobia is a consequence of the country's exclusion from the international community (Harris, 2002). The prejudice theory propounds that prejudice rests on the identification of groups and the influence of group membership on the identity of an individual. In theo-rizing xenophobia, we seek to make a case for xenophobia that it is a distinctive phenom-enon that is different from racism. In order to do that we have presented sufficient evidence from scholars who examined different ways that the causal dynamics of xeno-phobia are comprehended.

Migrants in the GCC and xenophobia

GCC is one of the three systems in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), the Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia), and the Mashreq (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and West Bank and Gaza) (Baldwin, 1996; World Bank, 2010; Ullah, 2014). The GCC shares historical and cultural ties and aspires to develop a more diversified economic bloc over time. In 2007, they had a population of about 36 million (10 per cent of MENA) and a GDP of about US$ 826 billion (half that of all MENA) (Ullah, 2010a; World Bank, 2010).

In light of the GCC's national demographic profile, focus has shifted to examining the idiosyncrasies of its labour markets: the emerging strains (Fasano & Goyal, 2004) and growing levels of structural employment resulting from an over-dependence on an expatriate workforce and the government job-provision mechanism (for citizens) that lies at the heart of the social contract. The aggregate population has increased more than tenfold in little over half a century from four million in 1950 to 40 million in 2005 (Khouri A., 2009) (Table 2). It doubled in Qatar in the space of one year (between 2006 and 2007) (EIU, 2009).

The phenomenal pace of development, which is contingent on foreign labour in the GCC countries helps explain the deep-rooted concerns on issues of xenophobia. In

Table 2. Demographic composition in the GCC.

| Countries	Total population	National %	Non-national %
Bahrain	13,14,085	48.0	52.0
Kuwait	41,61,404	30.8	69.2
Oman	41,49,917	56.0	44.0
Qatar	22,24,583	14.3	85.7
Saudi Arabia	3,07,70,375	67.3	32.7
United Arab Emirates	81,64,070	11.5	88.5

Sources: Khoja, 2017.

recent times, unemployment has been a key factor for popular protests in some countries in the GCC such as Oman, Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2011). Promises of raising public sector wages and creating more job opportunities in Saudi Arabia and Oman were the counter initiative from the governments' side (Ghafour P.K., 2011; Hamdan, 2011) for quelling public protests. This circumstance could be explained by the materialist analysis, which contends that xenophobic sentiments are derived from competition over limited resources implying that the presence of the foreigners matters in the growing discontent among the locals.

Migrants suffer a myriad of vulnerabilities due to the lack of legal or union protection. The magnitude of xenophobic and racialized treatment perpetrated upon by the employers and the citizens is evident from the number of migrant's death (Figure 2). The number of deaths or missing cases may not be directly linked to xenophobia or racial maltreatment but it transpires the fact that how vulnerable this population group is. The acceptance index is measured by a few parameters developed keeping in mind the government's policy; therefore, this might not reflect the individual's level of acceptance or tolerance for migrants.

Their usual position in the labour market makes them vulnerable to xenophobia too. The vulnerable position of the migrants (as they fill the 4D jobs dirty, demeaning, dangerous and difficult) is taken as an advantage because they have little to no opportunity to seek redress. Many are unskilled migrants relegated to marginal, low status, inadequately regulated or informal sectors of economic activity.

Figure 2. Death and missing of migrants *enroute*. Source: Hinnat & Janssen (2018).
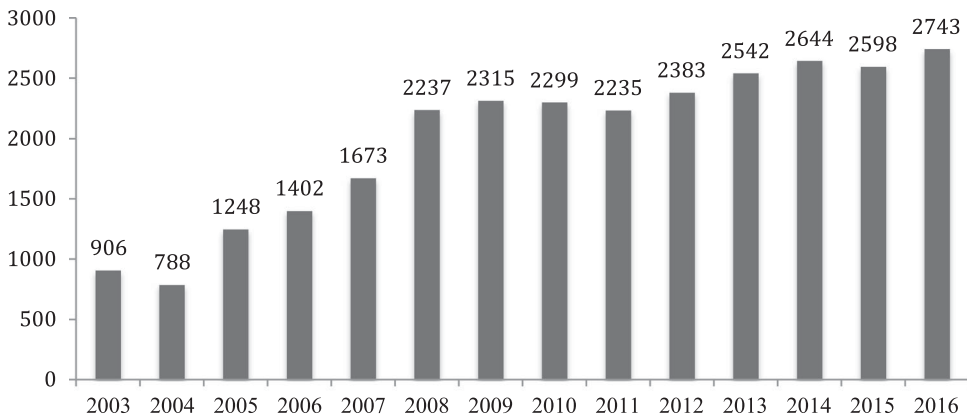
Figure 3. Number of dead bodies arrived in Bangladesh. Source: BMET, Dhaka (2010); The Prothom Alo, 10 February, 2014; Ullah, Hossain & Islam (2015).

Another horrific picture highlights the level of their vulnerability. According to BMET, 23,641 Bangladeshi migrants have died from 1976 to 2013 (Figure 3). Between 2003 and 2009, there are reports of 10,569 bodies being repatriated, which is more than three times the figure of the previous three decades combined. One can clearly see the alarming trend over the past decade; in 2005, the number of dead bodies repatriated ticked over a thousand for the first time, reaching a horrific 1248. Figures showing this growing trend reached its peak in 2008, with 2237 dead bodies received. Table 2 shows that the number of dead migrants surprisingly jumped to over 2000 from the year 2008, which continued to rise until 2013. It is believed that many more deaths remain unreported (Ullah et al., 2015). A total of 33,988 Indian migrant workers have died in the Gulf since 2014 (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2019). Apparently, the number of deaths may not seem to be linked to xenophobia. It is, however, very much a fact that most death cases are linked to the negligence of this population group.

Clearly, this research is limited to those who work in domestic spheres and construction sectors. This is not to generalize the entire migrant populations. Of course, not all foreigners face the same hostility. It is perhaps trite to observe that not all political manifestations of racism are of equal gravity. The incorporation of racist, xenophobic or intolerant rhetoric into a party's policies would justify a more determined reaction by the administrative authorities. Eventually, should a racist, xenophobic or intolerant party come into political power and pursue such policies, or a government permit such a party to indulge in extreme discourse without restraint or sanction, such circumstances would bring into question the tenability of that state's rights within.

Xenophobia also seems to have an ethnic element, but ethnic violence often takes place between groups in the same national context. Responses to xenophobia are intricately linked to the demarcation of borders and hence separate citizenships. The racist roots of the connection between nationality and territory are especially significant for understanding anti-foreigner violence. Ameliorating xenophobia, in turn, requires destabilizing this foundation, from the abstract world of social theory, through assumptions embedded within policymaking processes, down to public education. Irregularity is a crucial element of that bordering work. Xenophobia is connected to a state's sovereign power and the lack

of legal standing certain migrants experience. The rule of law has got a lot to do in mitigating xenophobia. In reference to the increasing number of migrants, who have died in GCC countries, however, most of them did not die due to explicit xenophobic violence. Vulnerability to xenophobia obviously contributed to their death.

Migration Acceptance Index (MAI) and xenophobia

Globalization in itself makes migratory pressures mount. Without comprehensive and rights-based responses to migration, xenophobic violence continues to escalate. The most common forms of xenophobic manifestations are sexual, physical and psychological abuse. The current fragmented process of international migration and resulting irregular statuses contribute to xenophobia. Irregular status means that migrants are reluctant to seek or be provided with police protection to address xenophobia or access to justice, which impedes possibilities to respond to xenophobia.

Interviews as well as literature confirm that manifestations of anti-migrant hostility with varying degrees are vivid in the GCC. These include incitement to and actions of overt exclusion, hostility and violence against persons explicitly based on their perceived status as foreigners. Anti-foreigner hostility can also be symptomatic of a denial of deeper racist prejudices within the host society (Van Dijk, 1996). Our hunch is that the anti-foreigner hostility, of course, takes place in the countries under study for reasons such as incitement to and actions of overt exclusion, violence against persons explicitly based on their perceived status as non-nationals.

There is a correlation between xenophobia and the level of acceptance of migrants in a given country. The level of tolerance and acceptance of migrants by receiving countries are measured by the Migrant Acceptance Index (MAI) (Figure 4). This index tells us the level of tolerance for migrants in certain countries (Esipova, Fleming, & Ray, 2017), which means that the index may explain how safe is that particular country for migrants. The MAI score for the world is 5.29 out of 9. The score for seventy-seven countries is higher than this average, while for 61 countries score lower. A global majority (54 per cent) think that immigrants living in their countries are good things. The Middle East, excluding the GCC countries (6.11), is the next-lowest region, with a score of 3.70. South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northern Africa and non-EU countries in Europe all score
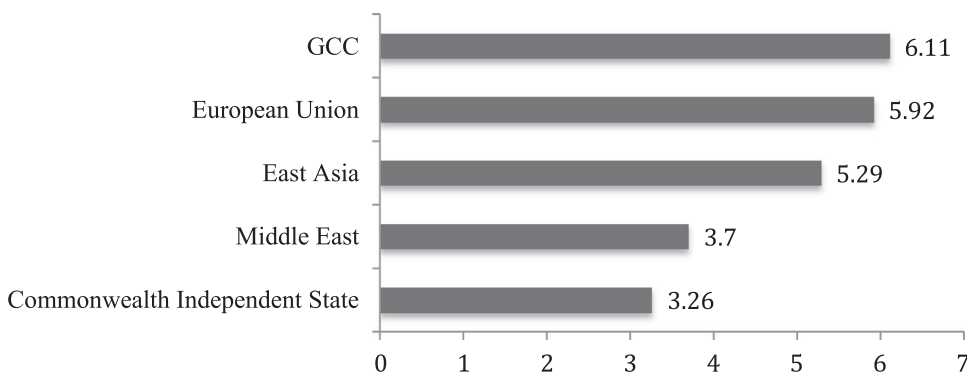

Figure 4. Migration Acceptance Index (MAI) by region. Source: Esipova, Fleming & Ray (2017).

lower than the global average (Esipova et al., 2017). The GCC holds better MAI than the Middle East overall. The MAI may be misleading in the sense that half of the total population in the GCC countries constitutes non-nationals, therefore, are more accepting and tolerant of migrants. The index is measured against a few parameters that do not include individual hostility and hatred towards foreigners. If their MAI is not quite low compared to other regions, then why are they still notoriously known to be abusive and exploitative to their employees?

Has xenophobia got anything to do with the rule of law of the land? Effective rule of law reduces corruption, combats poverty and disease, and protects people from injustices (WJP, 2018) because of the fact that rule of law stands for the supremacy of law over the supremacy of the individual's will (Meyerson, 2004). The notion of protecting people from injustices does not differentiate people who is local and who is non-local. The United Nations' 2030 vision for peaceful, just and inclusive societies includes migrant populations. The data reveal that some countries are light-years away from realizing this vision, with low acceptance of migrants at all levels of society. The Middle East stands in the middle, which means that it is not so tolerant (Figure 5). But it may mean it is somewhat tolerant since it is in the middle – depends on how we want to read it. Therefore, this may send a misleading message, which means that the MAI does not consider individual tolerance.

Treatments and attitudes towards the migrants

The xenophobia and anti-[im]migrant sentiments are largely a product of (mis)information about foreigners from the media and elsewhere (McDonald & Jacobs, 2005; Ullah et al., 2020). Most respondents endorsed the fact that anti-foreigner attitudes are based in part due to poor levels of information about the need of migrants in their country, their contribution and government policies. Respondents resonated that the xenophobic attitudes are formed on the basis of individual experience and, in some cases; it is more likely to be shaped by concerns about the country or community as a whole (Hatton, 2016; Katwala & Somerville, 2016). Anti-foreigner attitudes sometimes are dependent on the countries' economic standing. People who rate their country's economic situation as "fair" or "poor" are almost twice as likely to say that migration should decrease than
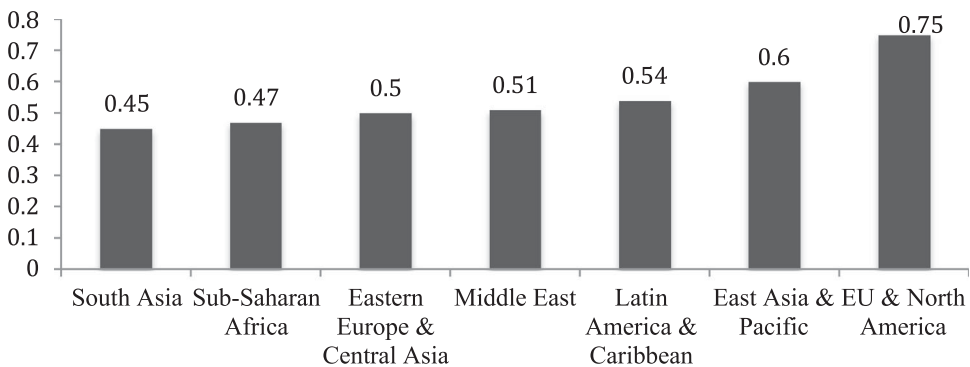
Figure 5. Rule of Law Index by region. Source: WJP (2018).

those who rate it "good" or "excellent" (IOM, 2015). This implies that GCC population is often unaware of the economic condition of their country and therefore, release their anger on the vulnerable or easy targets i.e. the migrants. Some people, however, are fed with fake news or misleading information from dedicated radio or TV shows that support hyper nationalists/supremist perspectives on migration.

Racial prejudice and other cultural factors are important in forming anti-foreigner sentiments (Dustmann & Preston, 2001). People who hold strong negative stereotypes of ethnic groups are more likely to favour restrictions on migration (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Pearson, 2010). Of late, concerns about security have appeared as a key factor driving negative attitudes towards migrants (Ullah et al., 2020). About half of the total respondents claimed that they saw a decline in tolerance towards them right after the security issues came to the fore in public discourse since the 9/11. A study on the similar issues in the USA concurs with the finding whereby 46 per cent of Americans opposed accepting refugees because they were concerned about perceived links to terrorism (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017; Telhami, 2016).

For this research, we did not mean to interview any locals in order to get to know their views about the migrants. A research on locals or employers' view on xenophobia could be undertaken, of course. Studies show that, globally, about 34 per cent wants the current level of migrants to decrease (as compared to 21 per cent who wanted to increase) (IOM, 2015). Grant (2005) attaches importance on the hierarchical spectrum of migration, from the skilled migrants to the irregular female migrants. The migratory process is often complex and dangerous. Thousands of women are signing up to move to the Gulf States as they are lured with the promise of jobs. However, they at some point of time end up with shattered dreams. The number of cases of abuse of migrant workers rose by 194 per cent between the years 2001 and 2002 (Asian Migration Centre, 2003). As for Domestic servants in particular, there were many cases of humiliation, severe beatings, long working hours, unpaid wages, or delayed salaries (Malecki & Ewers, 2007; Shah, 2004; Shah, Shah, Chozvdhury, & Menon, 2002). South Asian women who migrated to work as maids in the Gulf, following months of physical, sexual and mental abuse have started to flee their employers. In the first few months in 2018, at least 1,000 Bangladeshi maids returned to Bangladesh to escape gruesome physical and sexual abuse in the GCC. On average, 30 maids who were raped by employers, relatives or siblings of the employers are returning everyday from the GCC countries (Middle East, 2018).

Migrants are exposed to social labelling and are associated with criminality and using up of social services. These assumptions give way to xenophobic policies aimed to protect nationals from outsiders, and in turn, encourage hostility, violence and exploitation. Exploitation is central to the issue because migrant workers accept work offers for much lower wages than their national counterparts.

South-South migration encourages many developing countries to be instituting restrictive and anti-migrant oriented policies influenced by xenophobia (Crush & Sujata, 2009). The question is how does one balance out this argument between the need for security of a country i.e. well being of people versus rights of migrants? When a country has such policies that protect its locals would that be called xenophobia or racism? The counter arguments that policies meant for the wellbeing of the locals should not compromise the wellbeing of the non-locals.

The common grievances that stand out from the narratives from respondents are that the foreigners are the cause for the deprivations. Mobilization of the discontent works as the violence trigger because anger is translated into action. Individual's discontents towards foreigners develop into a collective discontent, which leads them to practice xenophobic violence. Darker-skinned person in the GCC has been exposed to racial epithets and called in derogatory names. The most common racial slur is *abd*, meaning slave or servant. This language of racism is an enduring legacy of the history of slavery in the GCC. In Malaysia, for example, the locals often call the South Asian migrant workers "orang Bangla". The legacy of apartheid (segregation, isolation policies, etc.), the impact of post-apartheid nation-building efforts and the failure to meet socio-economic expectations have a bearing on today's condition. The common xenophobic maltreatments are sexual abuse, harassment and 16–21-hour days in the GCC. This is a reality for thousands of migrant workers employed in the region. According to them, being a maid does not mean just mopping the floors. This includes body massage and sexual services too. One had bleached over her head as punishment by an employer for serving their food late. Few others said they were given a choice: sex with the boss, or death. Many of the interviewees said many came back pregnant or with babies. Many of them got raped. This resonates the findings of the research of Ullah and Alkaff (2018).

Most respondents interviewed have similar experiences such as being locked up in the bathroom by employers from hours to days. Some escaped from being killed as they spoke out against sexual abuse. These are no isolated incidents. The kafala[1] or sponsorship system ties the legal status of low-wage migrant workers directly to their employer, giving the latter power to take away workers' passports, withhold their salaries, and subject them to harrowing abuse rendering them extremely vulnerable.

According to a respondent, whereby the respondent endured oral abuse and being called Bangladeshi by an employer and his wife rather than the respondent's name " … they used to say that I came from a 'poor and dirty' country. The name calling has become so normal to them that they use it without any hesitation." Another respondent who worked in a construction farm said " … our skin colour is their tool for recognizing us who we are and where we are from."

Another Filipino respondent (a nurse) who worked in Oman said, she has darker skin unlike most Filipinos, and was called Coca Cola by her employer. The majority of respondents think 75 per cent of the Arabs are racist. The basis for their claim is the absence of any pleasant experience while working in the region. A respondent was even called a "beggar" by the employer. Arab racism is multi-layered; the degree to which people respect or hate a foreigner depends on where the foreigners come from. They feel that South and South East Asians deserve no respect but Americans do, and interestingly, there are some classists as well. Rich expats from anywhere are treated differently, unlike construction and domestic workers (Nabbout, 2018).

A common impression from respondents, irrespective of destinations, people in the Arab countries think they have the right to treat us badly just because we are Bangladeshis or from South Asia and they are Arabs. A patient in the hospital one respondent was working in was so angry because, according to the patient, the respondent was slow in registering him and retrieving his medical record. The delay was due to a computer glitch, however, the respondent was accused of being inefficient and labelled as "the slow people" working a lowly job because, he assumed, I came from South Asia.

Most of the respondents disagree with the stereotype by locals that the migrants are only after their (local) jobs. They think they are entitled to be the aggressors while we are passive mercilessly. I am still not sure what was my fault. One of his fingers still broken and lost sensitivity, and out of function – said a construction worker from Nepal in Saudi Arabia.

A Saudi employer supposedly lost some money from home. "They suspected me. Wife of the employer (madam) went out. The employer stripped me off totally under the pretext that he was searching for the money. As he found nothing, he was touching my private parts." Grimmer pictures are coming out from the voices of those are recently returning from GCC to Bangladesh. A few recently returnees (to Bangladesh) said their employers and their sons and often relatives raped them. Insufficient food, clock round work and sexual abuse forced them to return with shattered hopes.

Four of the female respondents from Bahrain said they were anally raped. Their entire body was painful for weeks. Two of them said they bled for a few days; they still had to work 18 hours a day without rest and sufficient food.

One of them who worked in Saudi Arabia said she was just like a sex slave.

> I felt that the master was tired of raping me and at some point of time he began to rape me anally. Oral sex was a common thing I had to perform almost everyday. He used to ask for tea by holding my hand, arms, neck and sometimes my private parts.

Another respondent said, as I used to cook in the kitchen, he came and wrapped me from behind and asked me to go to his bed. One day, he dragged me to his bed from the kitchen leaving the burner on. When the fire alarm turned on and the whole house became smoky and smelly he let me go. When madam came from outside and came to know that the pane was burned and I was beaten mercilessly. Of course, episodes of these events are not related to the fear of job lose but it is about taking advantage of their disadvantaged and vulnerable position.

There is a "threshold of tolerance" i.e. the greater the numbers of migrants in a context of deep dislike, the more violent is the reaction (Misago Jean, 2015). Some argue that xenophobia is a biological and natural response to strangers. Migrants are often made to be scapegoats for social problems, for example, crime, unemployment, decreases in the quality of health care and education. "When migrants are made scapegoats for social ills, negative and biased stereotypes are produced, re-produced and accepted as "common sense." This rhetoric excuses the poor treatment of migrants" (Crush & Sujata, 2009, p. 44). Last but not the least; the recent episode of brutality on a domestic worker in Kuwait says it all how unsafe the lives of the migrants in GCC without protection are. In Kuwait, in the mid-2018, a Filipina maid was murdered and her body was hidden in a freezer. This has triggered outrage and prompted Manila to impose a departure ban for its citizens to work in the Gulf States.

Conclusions

We argue that increasing intolerance, ethnic exclusionism and opposition to [im]migration policies have got a lot to do with xenophobia. We argue that poor service delivery; latent poverty, unemployment and rising commodity prices as a result of corruption are responsible for increasing the level of xenophobia. We do not rule out the fact that

xenophobic practices are rooted within social formations; the cultural, gender, racial and ethnic make-up, and class composition.

The GCC countries have experienced rising anti-foreigner hostility and racism, which have been reflected in increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Foreign victims find from less to no protection or support from state institutions, which are meant to protect the rights of all residents in the GCC. This is primarily because the migrants in Gulf States are excluded from labour laws, which leads to the restriction of their mobility and mistreatment at home. The resulting isolation is one of the main contributing factors to the vulnerability of the migrants. Therefore, greater understanding of the attitudes of the citizens to the migrants, the refugees and the migration policy; ratification and implementation of normative global standards on the protection of migrants (such as the UN Migrant Workers Convention and the relevant ILO conventions; global, regional and national monitoring of the treatment of migrants; legislative solutions including the criminalization of xenophobia as hate speech and appropriate sanctions against the perpetrators of xenophobic violence; public education campaigns by the state to foster tolerance, build social cohesion and encourage diversity) (Crush & Sujata, 2009, pp. 71–72) is crucial.

The apparent brutality by GCC employers against domestic workers highlights the severe shortcomings in labour laws and practices that foster abuse and exploitation. Xenophobia increases social inequality and creates an underclass of discrimination against individuals by taking away dignity, opportunities, and the ability to live a peaceful humane life. It has grave negative effects on migrant's community as it weakens the international human rights framework and threatens social order and social justice, thus decreasing protection for migrants (Crush & Sujata, 2009).

GCC members, however, met in Cairo to begin working towards a common policy on the employment of foreign domestic workers. The representatives from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, meeting on the sidelines of the 45th session of the Arab Labour Conference (ALC), agreed to establish standard regulations on transfer of employment, contracts and minimum wage. This was expected to reduce the incidents of xenophobic attacks on migrant population.

Xenophobic behaviour in the GCC may be different from other parts of the world. We tend to point our fingers to the fact that the issues of xenophobia are not geographically confined only in the GCC, rather it exists everywhere in different forms and shapes. Hence, migration governance has to be subjected to all receiving nations.

Xenophobia presents deeply rooted challenges to the migrant population, their rights, and entitlements (Chalcraft, 2010). In order to overcome xenophobia, the best way is to shake off the legacy of unpalatable past and end the culture of silence. Motive to hate – is the heart of a hate crime, but it is not always easy to determine. Therefore, it is important that parameters are developed to ensure a better measure of xenophobia is possible.

Xenophobia is often played down and sometimes denied by authorities. This gives the perpetrators a leeway to repeat their actions. Community leaders, public servants, political officials, and law enforcement agents often make xenophobic pronouncements that shape public opinion and behaviour leading to xenophobic practice. Law enforcement agents are involved in extortion, harassment, arbitrary detention and selective enforcement of the laws against migrant workers. Migrants have become visible in the public sphere, which opened new spaces for direct and substantive confrontations. Unskilled migrants who

live in poor and often violent urban areas are targeted by xenophobic attitudes and behaviour.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are fundamental to international human rights law. Everyone living within a state's territory, irrespective of the [im]migration status, is entitled to general human rights guarantees. A State must ensure that all migrants on its territory can exercise their economic, social and cultural rights. It seems policy facilitates, if not creates, xenophobia. If policy enforces existing laws on the perpetrators, the incidences of xenophobic practices would decline.

The existing scholarly debate focuses more on older patterns of xenophobia emerging as forms of non-violent discrimination but pays less attention to xenophobia as sexual abuse and physical violence. There are obviously gender differences in xenophobic maltreatment. The fundamental difference between genders is that females are more vulnerable to sexual abuse due to the xenophobia than the male counteracts. Our research has got no evidence of whether there is any implication of religion in xenophobic maltreatment.

Note

1. This system ties migrant workers to their employer and requires them to have their company's permission to leave the country.

Disclosure statement

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