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Xenophobia and Forced Eviction of African Migrants from paid Apartments during the Covid-19 Pandemic in China

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Abstract

The study intended to examine the basic issues of xenophobia against African migrants in the context of evictions from paid apartments during the Covid-19 pandemic in China. The research adopted the state repression theory as framework of analysis. Secondary data collected using the worldwide search engines like the Google, Google Scholar, CrossRef, Ref list and ScienceDirect, were analyzed using qualitative descriptive method. The study found that flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants was responsible for xenophobic attacks on African nationals in China during the Covid-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the study revealed that the rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China worsened the tensions between the African people and the Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 crisis. The study recommends, among others, the need for routine diplomatic discussions between the African Union (AU) member states and their Chinese counterparts, in order to devise modalities for enhanced cordial relationships aimed at protecting the fundamental rights of migrants from both regions.

Keywords: *African Union, African migrants, Covid-19 pandemic, forced eviction, xenophobia.*

I. Introduction

The deepening relations between China and Africa, and the mutual protection of the rights and fundamental freedom of respective migrant nationals have become paramount to both geopolitical locations. For instance, the wellbeing of Chinese nationals and their business interests have always been the priority of most African countries where China has established its business and diplomatic presence. Since China's development and regime stability anchors on international trade flows, over ten thousand Chinese businesses operate in Africa, procuring resources and selling industrial outputs (Bayes, 2020). The protection of these interests has become a top agenda for both China and Africa. That has been the rationale for the establishment of African peace and security as a priority area for Sino-African ties in 2018. In the same vein, thousands of African migrant workers, traders and students are resident in China.

Although the Chinese expats face security risks in some African countries (Adebajo, 2022), the Chinese nationals and their enterprises in Africa have continued to enjoy maximum security and protection from African governments in the past two decades (African Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). The Chinese nationals in Africa are treated as first class citizens and their businesses protected as national assets. On the contrary, the African migrant community in China are being subjected to perilous and devastating conditions which negate the international norms establishing the fundamental human rights of migrants. China presented a uniquely attractive prospect for budding businesses and industries which remarkably increased African migration to China. Conversely, the number of African immigrants in China has dwindled due to discrimination and racial profiling within a traditionally homogenous society over the past few years (Zeng, 2019).

The human rights breaches suffered by the African expats in China became intensified following the upsurge of Covid-19 disease. During this period, many African nationals in China were reported to suffer xenophobic attacks. In April 2020, many migrants of African descent were racially characterized and were being coerced to quarantine or dislodged from their residences by house owners simply because a few Africans reportedly tested positive for Covid-19 (Bodomo, 2020).

Without evidences, African people in China were held accountable for the country's second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. According to Feng (2020), what was more terrifying than the Covid-19 itself was the rising tide of discrimination driven by deep-rooted prejudice against black people in China. Some Chinese citizens particularly in Guangzhou province were reported to have streamed racist, bigoted, and hateful rhetoric in the social media about Africans in the city (Feng, 2020). At hotels, residential apartments, school lodges, bars, restaurants and streets, there were reports of a groundswell of bigotry and racial stereotyping targeting the African migrants in China (Feng, 2020; Nnabugwu, 2020).

In China, many reports from the official and media publications showed that African nationals faced myriads of xenophobia, which was escalated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Obianagwa, Ezeani, Ifem, Ugwuozor & Dein, 2023). These reports corroborated Human Rights Watch (2020), which observed that African nationals in China encountered range of discriminations from the state security agents, the media, the general public and other fabrics of the Chinese society including places of employment, healthcare and housing systems. Other reported forms of human rights violations faced by the African migrants in China include aggressive control methods, random arrest and detention, mass surveillance and arbitrary raids, police oppression and extortion, seizure of passports and repatriation (Branigan, 2010; United States Department of State, 2017; ABC News, April 20, 2020).

These reported cases of human rights abuse against African nationals in China during the Covid-19 pandemic have continued to raise doubts on China's commitments to upholding the fundamental human rights of migrants. Amid global scramble to deal with Covid-19 crisis, Sun (April 17, 2020) stressed that relations between Africa and China ruptured at a most unexpected front as a result of racial attacks meted out on Africans in China which triggered streams of official diplomatic complaints and petitions from the African Union (AU) towards China. These reported incidents of prejudice and racism against African nationals in China during the Covid-19 pandemic sparked worldwide condemnation and diplomatic outrage (Obianagwa et al., 2023). This compelled the UN monitoring committee on the migrants' rights to advise China on the need to protect Africans from the reported abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Notwithstanding the growing reports especially on the pro-Western international and social media depicting racial discrimination of African nationals in China, the Chinese authorities and local media refuted the international outcry on the hostile treatment of Africans in China (Sui, 2020). Although many reports of eviction of Africans from paid apartments during the Covid-19 crisis in China were evidence-based, those outrageous treatments were not unconnected with the deplorable status of many Africans in China. These Africans were considered as illegal and undocumented migrants by the Chinese authorities. Many Africans in China were profiled by the Chinese authorities and deemed liable of illegal migration, drug and sexual wrongdoings, proliferation of diseases, and therefore were considered risks to the Chinese national interests (Cheng, 2011).

While the Covid-19-motivated racial discrimination against the Africans in China has drawn much attention in both conventional and unconventional media spaces, these incidents of human rights violation have also elicited academic debates. However, the existing studies have not addressed how the rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China have exacerbated their sufferings from the Chinese authorities and the general public. Against this backdrop, the study set out to examine the fundamental issues of xenophobia against the African migrants in China during the Covid-19 crisis.

The study examined the following questions:

- i. How did flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants account for the xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- ii. How did rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China worsen the tensions between the African people and the Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Investigate how flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants accounted for the xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ii. Explore how the rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China worsened the tensions between the African people and Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The study hypothesized that:
- i. Flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants accounts for the xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - ii. Rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China worsen the tensions between the African people and Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

In this section, we conceptualized the terms Covid-19, xenophobia and forced eviction which are so fundamental to the study. The term Covid-19 has become one of the most widely used concepts in the academia, health sector and media following the eruption of coronavirus disease on the 31st of December, 2019 in the Chinese city called Wuhan (European Center for Disease Prevention and Control - ECDC, 2020). Covid-19 is defined as a morbidic organism capable of racking humans with transmissible acute respiratory diseases often manifested with symptoms such as chills/rigor, coryza, diarrhea, difficulty of breath, dizziness, dry cough, dyspnea, excessive sputum production, fever, headache, malaise, myalgia, nausea, shortness, sore throat and vomiting, etcetera (Hui, Wong & Wang, 2003).

The term xenophobia is one of the widely used concepts of international migration often utilized in the study of intra-and-inter racial relations. Xenophobia has become a major plague between groups, caused by the increasing rate of migration especially in the face of rising scarcity of resources. The concept xenophobia is associated with a confluence of two Greek words- “xeno”, which means stranger or foreigner, and “phobos”, meaning fear (Bozdag, 2020). Deriving from the above, xenophobia is used by the United Nations International Organization for Migration (UN- IOM), International Labor Organization (ILO), and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN- OHCHR), to refer to extreme prejudice, rejection, antipathy and hatred against foreigners or outsiders (McKinley et al., 2001; Bozdag, 2020).

The concept of forced eviction is connected with a range of related terms such as ejection, forced removal, expulsion, premises recovery, etcetera. The urgency for every humanity to have access to adequate

shelter and safe home has become one of the cardinal goals of the UN-OHCHR. Essentially, access to shelter and adequate housing, as an integral part of people's wellbeing was documented in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN-OHCHR, 2023). This fundamental right contains, among others, protection against unlawful evictions and demolition of people's homes. Thus, national, regional and local governments are mandated by the UN-OHCHR to prevent the outrageous trend of evictions as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic and urgently eradicate the emerging patterns of social exclusion associated with access to adequate housing (UN-OHCHR, 2023).

III. Literature Review

The unfavorable human rights dynamics faced by African populace in China have continued to elicit a wide-range of systematic investigations. Historically, African migrants in China are familiar with several structural and legal barriers such as difficulties with visa renewal, restricted movement resulting from unlawful-staying, police persecution, and the impracticability of long-term residency (Rennie, 2009; Castillo, 2016; Castillo & Amoah, 2020). Pomfret (1989) and Lufrano (1992) noted that massive discontentment against the African community in China became visible in the public space in the 1960s when numerous students from Beijing-friendly African states went to study in China. Similarly, Bodomo (2020) argued that notwithstanding the resilience shown by African traders and students in China, the story of their marginalization by the Chinese society has not changed much. The racial discrimination against Africans in China is ideological as the central authority fails to trounce everyday racism against them (Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Lan, 2017; Kohnert, 2022).

Some studies focused on the historical trajectory of racism against African nationals in China. A study of campus and cyber racism against African students in China revealed that the Chinese students' anti-African protests were almost the only organized mass display of social discontentment comparable to pro-democracy demonstrations in the 1980s (Sautman, 2009; Cheng, 2011). The studies above noted that some of the anti-African protests took place at Shanghai in 1979, Tianjin in 1986, Nanjing in December 1988 and Beijing in 1989. The complicity of the Chinese authority on anti-African racism in China, which was not

suffered by other foreigners in the country is documented in the literature (Sautman, 1994; Huynh & Park, 2018; Amoah, 2021). Also, the perception of China regarding blacks is essentialized and racialized to prolong the obnoxious image of Africa as antiquated and inferior (Cheng, 2011). The manner the Chinese are treating Africans both in the Chinese mainland and through their investments in Africa, is a repeat of deeply rooted neo-colonial European racism, which depicted Africa as a wild, ahistorical and uncivilized continent (Kohnert, 2022).

The existing literature is also replete with human rights violations suffered by Africans in China during the coronavirus outbreak. On this note, Guangzhi (2020) argued that out of fear of a second wave of coronavirus mass infection from suspected imported cases, the Chinese authorities launched a crackdown targeting the black people in China. In an attempt to provide adequate explanation to what motivated this state-sponsored racism targeting large black communities in China, Guangzhi (2020) argued that the reason for excessive social control of black Africans in China lies in these communities' ties to rurality, which constitutes a roadblock in the city's urban upgrade and transformation. Deriving from the above, many African communities in China are linked with poverty and lacked capital, and seen as liabilities and forbidden to the Chinese public.

In addition, Castillo and Amoah (2020) reflected on what the future of African migration to China would be in the post Covid-19 world considering the magnitude of maltreatments many black Africans suffered as part of containment of the coronavirus in China. They pointed out that the dynamics of migration between Africa and China would likely change in the post-pandemic era. In their view, the safety of African migrants would come under extra scrutiny from the Chinese authorities. The study of how non-Asian ethnic minorities were treated in China during the peak of Covid-19 pandemic also indicated a major maltreatment of the groups (Wenger & Lantz, 2021). Adebayo (2020) argued that the maltreatment of Africans in China and failure to protect them by the Chinese state within its borders became a public concern. Xu et al. (2021) in a study of stigma, discrimination, and hate crimes in Chinese mainland during the coronavirus crisis, disclosed that Africans in China are a major foreign group that suffered xenophobic attacks and verbal violence during the pandemic. In a related study, Dionne and Turkmen (2020) observed that African migrants in China suffered broad-range of discrimination and stigmatization during the Covid-19

pandemic. Kohnert (2022) also investigated the plights of African migrants in China and concluded that Africans living in the country were widely accused of drug trafficking and criminal activities, and because of that, they suffered stigmatization during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Notably, many researchers have documented the historical trajectory of antagonism against African community in China during the Covid-19 scourge. However, most of the existing studies did not capture properly the clashes between the African migrants and Chinese security forces as well as the general public. The crux of this study was to fill the gap in literature by interrogating the basic issues of prejudices against the African nationals in China during the Covid-19 outbreak, focusing on how the rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China resulted in the crackdown on Africans by the Chinese security officers and the general public during the pandemic period.

IV. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the theory of state repression, which provided the frameworks for explanation of the research problem. Many scholars are associated with the early development of repressive state theory. Some of these theorists include Althusser (1971), Lenin (1971), Kittrie (1995), Davenport (1995), Gartner and Regan (1996), Shellman (2006), Heywood (2007), Franklin (2009) and others. Our theoretical review showed that several studies have contributed in expanding the frontiers of repressive state theory by utilizing its fundamental assumptions to examine the status of human rights especially in authoritarian states. Notably, Hyslop-Margison and Leonard (2012), Rivera (2017), Van Kesteren (2019), Blinken (2021), Ryan (2022), Obianagwa et al. (2023) were among the scholars who contributed to further development of the repressive theory. The theorists postulate that:

- I. State repression is often characterized by a range of human rights violations such as police brutality, unlawful detention and imprisonment, social exclusion and deprivation, and other forms of unlawful treatments targeting dissident groups, the media and general public (Kittrie, 1995; Frantz, 2018).
- II. Arising from the government's indifference to law and order in a repressive political system, citizens and victims of the injustices of society can hardly secure fair hearing in the court of law.

- III. In repressive states, the statute is seemingly amended in order to shrink the human rights and democratic space. This empowers the coercive institutions of the state to oppress the general public, and make it virtually impossible for citizens to vent their collective concern in any public forum (Hyslop-Margison & Leonard, 2012).

There is a nexus between the propositions of theory of state repression and the reported cases of human rights abuses suffered by the people of Africa in China during the outbreak of Covid-19 disease. Obianagwa et al. (2023, pp. 190-191) stressed that “through repressive legislations and ‘strategic inaction’, the Communist State of China emboldened its law enforcement agencies as well as the media and general public to violate the human rights of foreigners particularly those from African descent”. Sun (2020) argued that Covid-19 pandemic merely brought to the fore new levels of hitherto resentments against the African community in China, and portrayed them as a direct threat to the security and well-being of the local Chinese people. Local animosity against African migrants in China is not a new phenomenon, but with the emergence of new coronavirus manifestations among the African community in the city of Guangzhou, the existing tensions were amplified (Nnabugwu, 2020). Although some African nationals were culpable for illegal migration to China and sundry unlawful activities, the brutal approach of dislodgement from paid homes and racial characterization employed by the Chinese authority in tackling the menace during the coronavirus outbreak portrayed the Communist State of China as a repressive state.

V. Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. The justification for this design is that the incidents being examined (for instance, xenophobia and evictions of Africans from paid apartments during the outbreak of Covid-19 in China) have already occurred. Consequently, “xenophobia” became the unit of analysis while “the ejection of African nationals” served as the unit of observation. The research adopted documentary method of data collection to gather qualitative data from secondary sources, comprising textbooks, journal articles, official reports and media publications. Most of these data were gathered with the aid of universal search engines, such as the Google, Google Scholar, Ref list,

CrossRef and ScienceDirect. The study also made use of publications from both local and global media, combined with reports from the specialized agencies that are relevant to the study. The documentary data collected from secondary sources were analyzed using qualitative descriptive method, which provided the basis for detailed presentation, explanation and discussion of results of the study.

VI. Results and Discussion

In this section, we discussed the themes drawn from the first and second hypotheses as follows:

- i. Flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants and xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ii. Rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China and tensions between the African people and Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Flagrant Attitude of China towards the Human Rights of African Migrants and Xenophobic Attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Available data showed that harassment and prejudice have always characterized everyday encounter of African migrants with the Chinese security forces. For instance, Branigan (2010) stressed that routine crackdown on African immigrants in China by the security forces has estranged many and left young men maimed and suffering under custody. In a conversation with Tania Branigan, Mr. Ojukwu (leader of the Nigerian Community in Guangzhou, China) discussed the plights of African nationals in the hands of Chinese police as follows:

At homes of the African nationals, the Chinese police are there banging on the door. On the street, the police will detain you. The same thing on the bus, at a restaurant and everywhere. Africans are cracked down in arbitrary raids, with blacks subjected to constant passport checks by the police (Branigan, 2010).

Police brutality and prejudices from the citizens have always been the habitual experiences of African migrants in China. This occurrence,

according to an African migrant in China, named Obi is very precarious. Obi narrated thus:

Many Chinese citizens live in my home state doing their businesses and work. No one is harassing them. I am restless and cannot move freely everywhere- be it in a restaurant, on the street, or even at a friend's home, for fear the police come. I have to escape any time I sight the police. That is how I live here. Those arrested are bound to spend 21 days in detention if they are unable to pay fine; longer when they cannot provide a flight ticket for deportation. Sometimes, some Chinese police officers collect bribes from 2,000-10,000 yuan (£188-£940) to let go their African victim. Several Africans try to flee by jeopardizing themselves, jumping from buildings to escape crackdown and paying with shattered limbs. A 30-year-old Nigerian man had died in China while jumping from the sixth floor to evade police raids. This young man might be alive today if not for the police (Branigan, 2010).

In another development, Mary Ngum, a West African national living in China expressed her concern about the magnitude of racial profiling and discrimination suffered by Africans from the public officials and citizens at large. In a conversation with Tania Branigan, she noted as follows:

I am here with valid visa but would prefer to go back to Africa than tolerate police harassments and wider prejudice. I was denied a chance to work as a teacher by a Chinese headmaster because I am a black. When I sit next to the Chinese on the passenger vehicle, they hold their noses and try to avoid me. They make slighting remarks which I overhear. Many blame cluelessness, not hatred, but I think Guangzhou China is nastier than other locations I have resided in. They are always concerned about color (Branigan, 2010).

In the face of global struggle to overcome the affliction of Covid-19 pandemic, racism and xenophobia against migrant nationals were on the increase (Guadagno, 2020), affecting an estimated population of 164 million migrants among the total of 272 million migrant populations across the globe (UN- IOM, 2020). The intensification of hostilities against the African community in China began when the local authorities, particularly in Guangdong province announced that some Africans tested positive for Covid-19 (Su, 2020). Following the unexpected and sweep response to Covid-19 disease by China, Africans

were targeted and landlords directed by the local police authorities to evict their African tenants, making them homeless (see Figure 1 below). Other foreigners were generally not being subjected to this inhuman treatment (Kirton, 2020). According to Su (2020):

Some of the Africans evicted from their homes in China were longtime residents while others were itinerant businessmen who had finished their mandatory 14-day isolations, but could not be granted lodgments in hotels. They roamed the subways under the rainfall, slept under highway bridges, and huddled on the pavement wearing face masks. They made videos of Chinese police screaming at them, pressing young men to a wall, and of signals displayed in accommodation buildings and restaurants- including McDonald's- reading: 'No blacks'.

Figure 1: Evicted Africans loitering and sleeping on the streets in China



Source: Culled from France24 (April 13, 2020).

Similarly, a Nigerian businessman told the BBC that “the police dislodged him from his apartment and put him on the streets” (BBC, April 17, 2020). Like this Nigerian migrant in China, several other cases of cruelty and threats to livelihoods abound (see Figures 2 and 3 below), which were suffered by the African diasporic community.

Figure 2: Images of evicted African migrants loitering the streets in China during the Covid-19 Crisis



Source: Culled from the Globe and Mail (2020, April 12).

Figure 3: Homeless Africans in China during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic



Source: Culled from France24 (April 13, 2020).

Instances of other reports of police harassments faced by Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic include: A Ghanaian family living in Beijing who claimed to have no latest travel history or contact with

Covid-19 infected persons, disclosed that the police intruded into their home in the twilight of morning and commanded them to vacate (see Figure 4 below). This situation compelled them to seek refuge at the Ghanaian Embassy in Beijing (CNN, April 13, 2020). Africans in Chengdu and Fujian region also reported to CNN that they suffered police abuses.

Figure 4: Chinese police intruded into the home of an African national in Beijing



Culled from CNN (April 13, 2020).

The BBC reported the case of Ade, a Nigerian migrant student in China who was forced out of his paid apartment alongside his roommates by the Chinese police in relation to coronavirus disease. BBC (April 17, 2020) noted that Ade was given until zero hours of the night to evacuate his apartment. As BBC observed:

Months prior the outbreak of Covid-19, the Nigerian student arrived Guangzhou, to enroll in computing at Guangdong University. He had just paid his school fees for the new semester when his landlord compelled him to pack out from his apartment. He struggled to pack his personal effects. The police were already outside waiting for him and his roommates. He was denied access to his friend's warehouse where he wanted to keep his belongings. He slept on the streets for several nights (BBC, April 17, 2020).

Speaking further, Ade reflected: “see how we are being treated, how we are evicted from our apartments and coerced to self-isolate; I was

told that I tested negative to Covid-19, yet I am constrained from going out”. In a related development, another migrant student in Wuhan, from Ethiopia spoke to Voice of America (VOA), as follows: “many of us are concerned that we could face imminent danger, more than they had done; and the Chinese authorities instructed all homeowners to eject all foreigners within one day and when we went go to the hotels, they rejected us too” (VOA, April 14, 2020). Many Africans living and working in China during the Covid-19 lockdown were reportedly living in fear. A Ghanaian merchant, who lived in Shanghai also expressed the same concerns of police brutality. According to him: “It does not make any sense; foreigners of other skin color are not treated this way; only Africans are mistreated. It is so annoying; it is strange; it is just like they are all ignorant” (VOA, April 14, 2020).

Moreover, African community leaders in Guangzhou and other Chinese cities confirmed that many Africans were being ordered to isolate or evicted on the streets, while some were hiding (Vincent, 2020). Several African migrants in China were ejected to the street- some by their landlords, and others by the hotel management and local authorities. Those dislodged, insisted that their rents were up-to-date, with their visas and paperwork still valid, and had no contact with anyone infected with coronavirus disease (Sui, 2020). CNN also reported thus:

Mr. Nonso, a Nigerian trader, narrated that he and his girlfriend were informed by their landlord at 7 p.m., through WeChat- a Chinese messaging app, to move out from their residence by 8 p.m. “I told him this is unfeasible within the period”. He said that his homeowner disconnected his apartment from electricity and water access at 10 p.m. “I inquired from them, what my offence was? My house rent was up-to-date until September with a deposit of two months. “No reason was given”, Nonso said. He called the police who allowed them to stay in the apartment for the night. Yet, it was difficult to find a new home to rent. “Many agents that we contacted were unwilling to lease apartments to black foreigners”, Nonso said (CNN, April 13, 2020).

In another show of hostility and police repression targeting the African community in China, a Ugandan exchange student in China named Tony Mathias, told Agence France-Presse (April 13, 2020): “For

four days now, I sleep under the bridge without access to food. ... I cannot even buy food anywhere. Shops or restaurants will not attend to me and we are on the street like destitute”.

Just as an evicted Nigerian migrant student, identified as Tobenna Victor told the BBC: “We are accused us of carrying the Covid-19” (Sui, 2020). Similarly, CNN reported another trend of eviction incident involving an African migrant, identified as Chuks. Reporting, CNN observed:

On the 21st of March, 2020, a Nigerian trader in China named Chuks, who maintained anonymity for fear of government’s repression, traveled back to Guangzhou, where he had lived since 2009. He returned seven days prior to cross-border movement restrictions imposed on most foreign nationals by the Chinese government. Upon arrival, Chuks says he was subjected to two-week government isolation in a hotel. He has a history of frequent travels as a trader and was accustomed to lodging at hotels while in China. Chuks confirms that when he was released on Tuesday along with 15 other African nationals, certified free from Covid-19, they automatically became homeless. (CNN, April 13, 2020).

Chuks further remarked:

We went to the hotels and were denied accommodations even when we presented our Covid-19 test results which read negative. We contacted the police and reported our plights at securing lodgments at hotels, but they refused to take any action. For two nights, I had no option than to sleep rough, before I was assisted with a couch to sleep on by a friend. For those two nights, rain fell and drenched us and our personal effects were soaked (CNN, April 13, 2020).

Similarly, Chris Leslie, also from Nigeria, disclosed to CNN that he was forced out from his home at Guangzhou, even when his rent was up-to-date and having an authentic contract. In his words:

That night, I had no place to sleep, and I would have to hang outside. It is so outrageous living in a country where you are unaccepted and often criticized. This is terribly humiliating, and the most important thing is securing a place sleep (Marsh, Deng & Gan, 2020; CNN, April 13, 2020).

Meanwhile, 12 hotels in Guangzhou were called by the CNN reporters, in order to book accommodation for an African visitor, and was informed by 10 that they had no provisions for African lodgers any longer (CNN, April 13, 2020). On the other hand, China justified its actions against Africans, stressing that every effort was made to curb the spread of coronavirus (Olawejaju, 2020).

From the data presentation therefore, we validated the first hypothesis which states that “flagrant attitude of China towards the human rights of African migrants accounts for the xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the Covid-19 pandemic”. However, the above finding, largely supported by the Western-dominated media reports, only provided one aspect of the explanation, which placed culpability on the Chinese authorities and exonerated the Africans in China during the Covid-19 crisis.

Rising Cases of undocumented African Migrants in China and Tensions between the African People and Chinese Security Forces as well as the general Public during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The pro-Western human rights organizations and media were gorged with series of reports about racial discriminations on Africans in China during the outbreak of Covid-19. These reports were countered by the Chinese authorities both in the mainland China and overseas, emphasizing that China has a ‘strict policy’ against racial prejudice (Marsh, 2021). Although the Western media was inundated with several reports of xenophobia and culpability of Chinese authorities for human rights violations against Africans in China during the Covid-19 period, reports from the local Chinese media were in contrary. Specifically, Chen Xiaodong (former China’s Assistant Foreign Minister) denied mistreatment of African people during the Covid-19 pandemic and reassured diplomats representing more than 20 African countries in Beijing that China treats all foreign nationals including African migrants equally, fairly and friendly under the Beijing’s coronavirus prevention rules (China Global Television Network- CGTN, 2020). While the Western media were pivotal and provided validations and channels for other newspapers, the maltreatments experienced by African migrants in China during the Covid-19 pandemic were mainly structured within victimhood (Oshodi, 2023). As a result, the Chinese authority and local

media rebutted these negative reports and rebuked the United States and Western media for polluting Africa-China relations (Oshodi, 2023).

What seemed to be Chinese authorities' clampdown on African community during the outbreak of coronavirus could be framed within the immigration status of many African people living in China. Some Africans in China are associated with illegality on the basis of entry visa into the country. On this note, Asiedu (2020) and Jordan et al. (2021) noted that the challenges of most African small-scale traders in China may have become worse in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak, owing to their illegal status as they were reliant on dubious and informal networks to arrive in China. This illegal entry, residence, and employment of African migrants in China (Cisse, 2021), resulted in racial profiling of Africans by the Chinese authority, which made Africans generally vulnerable and police targets (Kohnert, 2022). Earlier studies such as Lan (2015), Zhou, Shenasi and Zu (2016) and Huang (2019) argued that the questionable status of many African migrants in China especially in the Guangzhou province compelled the Public Security Bureau to categorize African migrants in the area as "triple illegal". This classification meant that some Africans entered, stayed and worked in China unlawfully. Although it is unacceptable for any migrant to live or work in the host community or country by illegal means, profiling the entire African community in Guangzhou because of some illegal migrants among them, amounts to racial discrimination and breaches of fundamental human rights of the entire migrant community.

Furthermore, some scholars of international migration have examined the range of social barriers African nationals face on immigration affairs and in securing of visa renewal in China. Cheng (2011) explained that the derogatory status of most African migrants in China is the reason for their excessive social control and why state actions like visa raids and stop-and-frisk style inspections is widely supported by the general public, which often described Africans as "di sushi" (which means low quality people). Hall et al. (2014) observed that many itinerant African traders who were granted 30-day visa were subsequently denied renewal leading to unlawful-stay, legal susceptibility and persistent menacing of police passport scrutiny. According to them, some of the consequences of this Chinese visa policy towards African migrants include fine and detention without recourse to deporting them back to their homeland. The implication is that several Africans become

illegal residents in Guangzhou, unable or unwilling to return; and the costs of getting apprehended by the security official high (Rennie, 2009).

Since 2008, the challenges of overstays and sundry crimes have grown into major threats in China; as a result, the local police and immigration officers have increased the crackdown on illegal migrants (Li et al., 2009). Thus, the national lockdown declared by the Communist State of China following the outbreak of Covid-19 provided an opportunity for the Chinese authorities to launch a coordinated crackdown on illegal migrants in the country. Africans in China faced hostility including being targeted by the security forces and evicted from apartments, often due to the illegal status of some members of the community and dependence on mischievous and informal networks. This situation was even more prominent and increased the fragility of African community in China during the outbreak of coronavirus (Asiedu, 2020; Jordan et al., 2021). Olander (2020) tried to link the offensive against some Africans in China during the Covid-19 crisis to the existing Chinese policy of social control and restriction of African community especially in Guangzhou where there is large population of black people.

The Covid-19 crisis faced by Africans in China also exposed the status and conditions of illegal Africans who have overstayed their visas in the country, an issue of deserved attention and scrutiny (Sun, 2020). The fear of being caught, apprehension, and even repatriation compelled many illegal African migrants to boycott compulsory Covid-19 testing and inspections, perplexing the government's commitments to truncate the spread of coronavirus disease (Sun, 2020). In extreme circumstances, the Chinese authorities were compelled to raid apartments occupied by Africans in order to apprehend illegal migrants, arrest or evict them from their homes. This scenario was at its peak during the enforcement of Covid-19 lockdown and other containment measures in China. Thus, the data presented validated the second hypothesis which states that "rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China worsen the tensions between the African people and Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic".

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the data presented, the study proved on the one hand that China's low commitment for the safeguarding of basic human rights of African

nationals accounted for the xenophobic attacks on Africans in China during the outbreak of coronavirus. This manifested through forced eviction of Africans from paid apartments, among other human rights abuses, which attracted a global outrage from the African Union, world leaders and human rights bodies. On the other hand, the study established that the rising cases of undocumented African migrants in China exacerbated the clashes between the African residents and Chinese security forces as well as the general public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Majority of the illegal African migrants in China absconded from the mandatory Covid-19 testing and inspection for fear of identification, arrest and deportation by the Chinese authorities. Thus, the national lockdown declared by the Chinese government in response to Covid-19 upsurge provided an opportunity for the Chinese authorities to launch a coordinated crackdown on illegal migrants in the country. Instead of sharing the culpability between the Chinese government and the African community in China on the hostilities that arose between them during the Covid-19 pandemic, an atmosphere of the African migrants' "victimhood" was created by the dominant pro-Western human rights and media bodies. This one-sided narrative received rebuttal and rejection from the Chinese authorities and provincial media bodies.

In all these, the study recommended that there is the need for China to implement the universal human rights standards aimed at securing the fundamental human rights of all migrants and their families on equal and fair basis. Also, there is need for the Communist State of China to develop a mechanism that ensures prompt detection, arrest and deportation of African migrants with illegal status in the country. This will help to prevent the profiling of an entire African people in China, just because of a few illegal migrants from the community. There is urgency for the respective Missions of AU member states in China to develop mechanisms for interfacing with diverse groups of African nationals in the country. This will avail the Missions the opportunity to provide prompt responses to the needs and challenges of Africans in China. This effort should be complemented with routine diplomatic discussions between the AU member states and their Chinese counterparts, in order to devise modalities for enhanced friendly relations in view of protecting the fundamental human rights of migrants from both regions.

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