

Ethnopolitics, Fear and Safety in a Johannesburg Neighbourhood

Obvious Katsaura

Fearfulness appears to have become a way of life in modern society. Many of us – or so we are told – are afraid to go out on the streets of our towns, at night certainly, but even during daylight hours as well. Yet staying at home carries its own threats: a whole industry manufacturing alarms, locks and surveillance mechanisms has been founded on our conviction that our homes are wide open to dangerous intruders. We view strangers with suspicion and the future with trepidation (Tudor 2003: 238-239).

This chapter, focusing on a cosmopolitan urban context of a Johannesburg neighbourhood, examines otherising and counter otherising dynamics in the field of community safety governance. The study examines the extent to which fear of crime and violence in Johannesburg is also cast as a fear of supposed strangers, especially in contexts of existence in super-diverse contexts. Fear of real or imagined violence and crime (and other urban disorders) has a huge impact on the spatial and social organisation of contemporary cities (Sandercock 2003; Tudor 2003). Spatial impacts include the creation of gated neighbourhoods, road closures and adoption of military technologies by residents seeking to protect their spaces (Davis 1998; Landman 2004a; Landman 2004b; Landman 2008; Murray 2011). Social impacts include the formation of safety governing community organisations, neighbourhood associations, mob justice and other preventive, adaptive or reactive individual or social group practices (strategies and tactics) (Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2005; Haeefele 2002; Olima 2006; Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis 2005a; Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis 2005b).

Fear is a ubiquitous perception of many cities' residents, visitors, planners, managers and politicians, among other stakeholders (Body-Gendrot 2012; Dirsuweit 2002; Dirsuweit 2007; Sandercock 2005; Tudor 2003). In Svendsen's (2008:48) words, "fear has become a way of looking at the

*Previous page:
Johannesburg city
centre. Source:
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world" - a "culture" (Svendsen 2008). Bauman (2006:2) formulates the concept of "liquid fear" to describe the fearsomeness of "diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating fear"; which has "no address" and supersedes rationality in influencing human action (Bauman 2006). "Fear has become an emotion that controls the public and a number of social scientists now claim that today's society can best be described as a culture of violence", writes Svendsen (2008:12). The view that we are increasingly experiencing what Febvre describes as "fear everywhere, fear always" captures the reality of life in many cities (Tudor 2003). Given this background, I argue that fear is a *liquid institution* (cf. Bauman 2004) - formless and permeative. Fear can therefore be conceptualised as a *social fact* (Liska, Lawrence and Sanchirico 1982) - a reality that imposes itself on individual conscience¹ (Charles 2006). Fear is therefore to be conceptualised as a phenomena as old as the city itself.

Johannesburg is, anyway, a city founded on violence and crime; and on continued attempts among strangers to seek fortune in this so-called "city of gold" in contexts of various performances of *ethnopolitics*² - starting as early as the late 19th century when the city was founded on the discovery of gold at the Witwatersrand; attracting populations from the width and breadth of the world (Kynoch 2011). It is the contention of this chapter, that fear of the unknown, unpredictable and the strange - of crime and violence - and of the unfamiliar social agent or "the foreigner" percolates community organisation for safety governance, shaping imaginations or representations of crime and violence; as well as associated ethnonational prejudices and stereotypes. *Ethnopolitics*, as explored in this chapter within a context of dynamics of community safety activism and governance, is an expression of "urbanisms of fear"³.

From an empirical grounding in Johannesburg's innercity neighbourhood of Yeoville, I examine the socio-political contradictions associated with community organisation for safety governance. Yeoville is of interest because of its pan-African outlook - being a host to an African immigrant and South African population (Palomares and Quiminal 2012). Given its social diversity, Yeoville presents a potentially interesting case for understanding the *ethnopolitics* of community safety governance in the city of Johannesburg. In a context of Yeoville's co-habitation by a largely fragmented African immigrant and South African population (Katsaura 2012; Palomares and Quiminal 2012), one can question the efficacy of an invocation of "community" in safety governance policy and practice. Yet the South African government has officially turned to community as a panacea to crime and violence confronting South African societies (Pillay 2008).

However, this chapter shows that "community" in cosmopolitan contexts does not refer to a unitary and coherent entity as assumed in these invocations, but is rather, a constellation of multiple and often competing or coalescing social fragments. It argues further that the field of community security governance generates a socio-political space in which various *ethno-national* groups mobilise, take positions and jostle for recognition or protection. I examine two elements: i) the representations

01. Reality *sui generis* in the Durkheimian sense.

02. *Ethnopolitics* refers the allocation of differences, based on ethnic and/or national origin of a person or social group; otherwise referred to as ethnonational politics in this context. See Nederveen, 1996, 2007. Fumagalli 2007. Jamal, Amal. 2007.

03. I use the concept of 'urbanisms of fear' to depict the culture of fear that pervades urban society.

and manifestations of the politics of *ethno-national* otherness and othering in the community security field; and ii) associated counter-otherisation discourses, practices and strategies. Before getting into a narration and discussion of the two elements above, I lay out the theoretical context of the study.

Theoretical grounding

I start this discussion from the premise that social groups, based on their (foreign) ethnic and national origins, could be excluded from participating in community organisations and be accused of causing anomie and disorder (Barry 1998; Brubaker 1992; Elias and Scotson 1994; Kymlicka 2001; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Nyamnjoh 2010b). I argue that *ethno-nationality* (and stereotypes thereof) constitutes a rule for inclusion or exclusion of individuals and groups in spaces of participation in community safety governance activities and discourses. If not deliberately excluded, *ethno-national* minorities can choose to isolate themselves due to their (acceptance of the) perception that they are different and do not belong (Barry 1998; Brubaker 1992; Kymlicka 2001). *Ethno-national* minorities, if poor, easily occupy the status of *margizens* (Schulenburg 2008), *urban outcasts* (Wacquant 2008) or *pariahs* (Goffman 1963) - people with no or limited access to public goods or services (including safety). They are likely to suffer isolation, rejection and vilification by mainstream society. This typifies what Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:118) refer to as “the identity economy” - a socio-economy in which ethnic identity becomes a rule for access to economic, social and political resources. In referring to the status of African immigrants in South Africa, I deploy the concept of the other other⁴ to depict their multilayered social exclusion or isolation based on the stitched notions of ethnicity, nationality, race, class and gender, amongst others.

Processes of *other othering* - imaginary or real - and *group making* or *unmaking* as well as ethno-national “boundary maintenance” (Barth 1970) are akin to what Bourdieu conceptualises as regionalisation (Bourdieu 1991). *Regionalisation* is characterised by struggles over classification and definition of regional and ethnic identities and the properties (stigmata or emblems) linked to *ethno-national* origin (Bourdieu 1991). In the community security field, this is played out in discourses and practices - otherwise construed as “ethno-talks”, “ethno-practices” or “ethno-consciousness”⁵ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Such discourses and practices name, divide and rally social groups - creating divisions between “the established” (insiders) and the “outsiders”⁶ (Bourdieu 1991; Elias and Scotson 1994; Nyamnjoh 2006). The discourse of *Kwerekwere*⁷ is a typical example in the case of South Africa (Landau 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010). The *linguistic market* of the security governance field, where such discourses are fermented, serves to generate and perpetuate stereotypes about crime and violence - its perpetrators, victims, spatialities and everyday-ness. This is reflected in what Caldeira, based on her studies in São Paulo, refers to as “talk of crime”⁸ (Caldeira 2000).

Faced with ethno-nationalist othering, social groups are likely to engage collective and individual strategies of protecting themselves. I

04.

The concept of “other other” is used by Susan van Zyl to show the persistence of a differentiating and differentiated citizenship in postcolonial or post-apartheid South Africa despite attempts to wish away racism, classism sexism and other discriminatory classifications. I therefore develop this concept to analyse the exclusion or discrimination of non-South African blacks from South African public life, including participation in civic bodies. See van Zyl 1998. Siziba, Gugulethu. 2014.

05.

Ethno-discourses - ideas or debates informed by ethnicity or perceptions thereof/ ethno-talks - speeches informed by ethnicity or perceptions thereof/ ethno-practices - actions and rituals informed by ethnicity or perceptions thereof/ ethno-practices - actions and rituals informed by ethnicity or perceptions thereof.

06.

The “established” are those neighbourhood residents that have been there for a long time and in this case, being South African citizens, while “outsiders” are the non-citizens (the African immigrants).

refer to these as *counter-otherisation* tactics and strategies. This chapter therefore examines *ethnopolitics* in and of community safety governance; against a backdrop in which urban safety studies in South Africa overlook the importance of ethno-nationality in the configuration of local discourses, practices and strategies of community safety production. The South African body of available literature demonstrates connections between ethnicity and xenophobic discourses and practices in the public domain (Harris 2002; Kupe, Verryn and Worby 2008; Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Gavatri 2005; Neocosmos 2010; Nyamnjoh 2010a; Nyamnjoh 2010b); leaving a scholarly lacuna as far as understanding how these discourses and practices percolate community-based safety initiatives. I thus, here, explore dynamics of *ethno-nationalist* posturing, exclusion and isolation in the socio-political space of urban community safety governance. Below are highlights of the characteristics of the case study area, and their relevant socio-economic, crime and violence historical trajectories.

07.
The word *Kwerekwere* is a South African derogatory term referring to people considered to look foreign and strange and to speak languages that one cannot decipher.

08.
That is everyday talks and legends about crime.

Violence and crime discourses

Writing Johannesburg and the world from Yeoville

Johannesburg is conceptualised as a city of contradictions; one epitomising the bifurcated nature of South African society and its ills (Mbembe 2004; Metileni 2011; Murray 2011; Nuttall and Mbembe 2007). There is a common perception that Johannesburg is a violence, crime and fear ridden city (Dirsuweit 2002; Dirsuweit 2007; Hook and Vrdoljak 2001; Louw et al. 1998) - one where the imminence of “terror” or “catastrophe” hovers (Bremner 2004). The city therefore battles with labels such as “crime capital of the world” (Boisteau 2005; Schönreich 2000), “the most

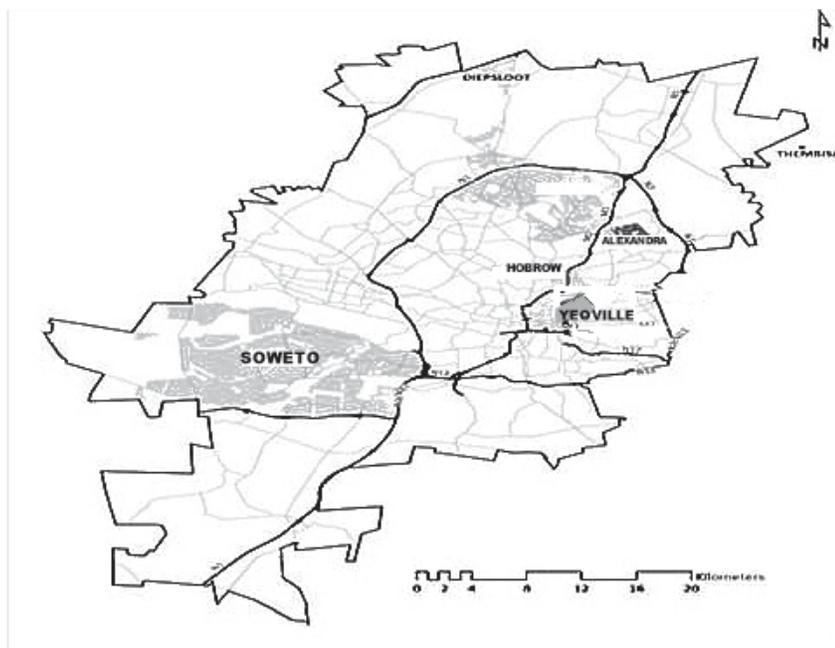


Figure 1: Map of Johannesburg showing location of study area Yeoville

09. Yeoville, Bellevue and Bellevue East geographically and politically constitute a single entity as they have a common economic hub in Rocky-Raleigh Street. Unless clearly indicated, this study shall refer to the area comprising Yeoville, Bellevue and Bellevue East as Yeoville as is the tradition.

10. "Problematic" in that the city tries to stop street trade in Yeoville, generating tension with the traders. Street trade is also considered in many circles as criminogenic and contradicting the designated use of public space.

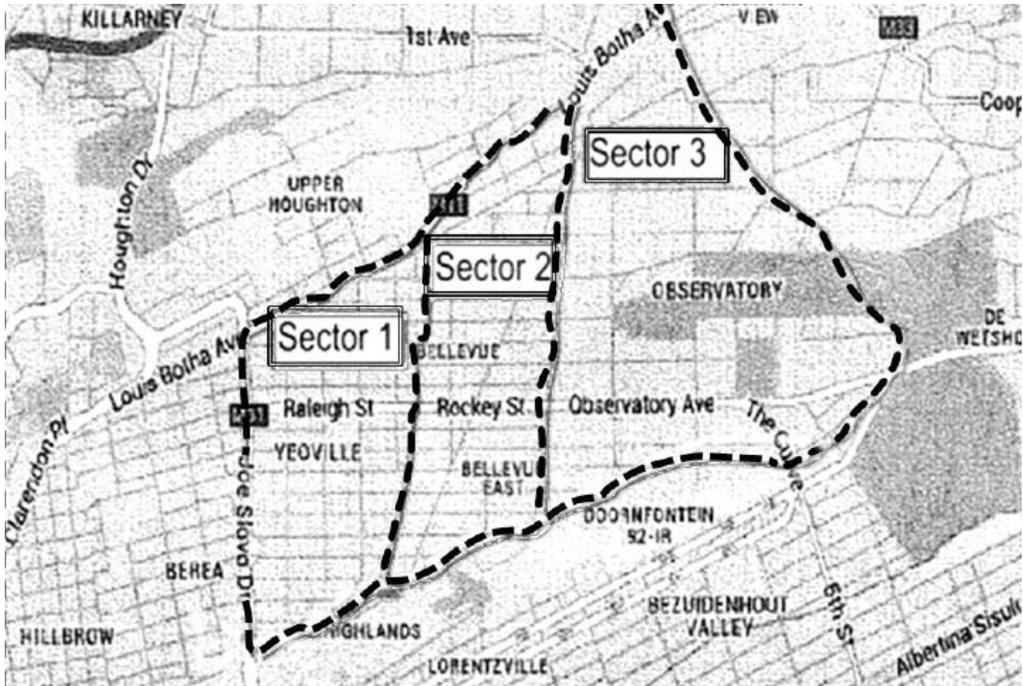
violent city in the world" (Louw et al. 1998) and "fearful city" (Dirsuweit 2002). It is not surprising, therefore, that Johannesburg is considered as South Africa's "test case for controlling and preventing urban crime"; one in which success would "boost the confidence of both the public and police in the attempt to reduce crime" (Louw et al. 1998:4).

To explore ethnopolitical dynamics of safely community production in Johannesburg, I delve dynamics of community safety activism in Yeoville, one of the most cosmopolitan neighbourhoods of Johannesburg. The area loosely referred to as Yeoville here incorporates the neighbourhoods of Yeoville (proper), Bellevue and Bellevue East⁹.

Yeoville is an innercity neighbourhood located peri-centrally to the eastern side of Johannesburg City Centre. It is a low-income neighbourhood characterised by a long history of community activism, local and international migrancy and a vibrant, and yet "problematic"¹⁰, micro-economy of street trade (Benit-Gbaffou 2006; Harrison 2002). Observatory, which is a middle income area adjacent to Yeoville, is part of this study given that it falls in the same policing zone as Yeoville; being served by the Yeoville Police Station and by the Yeoville Community Policing Forum.

As the map shows, the policing precinct of this area that is loosely referred to as Yeoville is divided into three sectors (Sector 1 – Yeoville proper; Sector 2 – Bellevue and Bellevue East; Sector 3 – Observatory). Although not the primary thrust of my study, I find fruitful a reflective relational analysis of the politics of community safety initiatives in an inner-city area (Yeoville) and a middle income suburb (Observatory). Yeoville was selected because it typifies the *ethno-national* diversity, "socio-spatial deprivation" and socio-economic "fractality" characterising socio-spatial

Map of the study area



cityscapes of Johannesburg. Below, I briefly discuss the history of Yeoville, focusing on its socio-economic trajectory, crime, violence and fear histories.

Yeoville's socio-economic, crime, violence and fear histories

Yeoville's founding coincides with the early history of the founding of Johannesburg and is only 4 years younger than Johannesburg (YBCDT undated)¹¹. It became designated as a "White only" neighbourhood during the apartheid era (Ibid). In the 1970s, it became a mainly Jewish suburb and an epitome of Jewish culture (Ibid). In the 1980s Yeoville is shown to have shifted into a cosmopolitan suburb where Blacks and whites co-resided despite the context of apartheid. It largely retained this cosmopolitan urbanism as it hosted a largely migrant population from different parts of Africa and South Africa. Yeoville's population shifted from being 85% White in 1990 into being 90% Black by 1998 (Ibid).

Also, Yeoville is a suburb with a long history of activism against apartheid and the activist culture has been carried over to the post-apartheid era (Benit-Gbaffou 2006). Benit-Gbaffou (2006:303) observes that Yeoville is known to have quite a "vocal and energetic" Community Policing Forum because of the long history of political activism in the area (see a table 1 detailing organisations engaged in safety activism in Yeoville during the time of research).

The history of fear of violence and crime in Yeoville is sometimes correlated to white flight in the 1990s and the concomitant occupation of the neighbourhood by a largely Black population (Beavon 2004). White flight and associated fears of violence were justified on events that took place during the 1990-1994 period of political transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa (YBCDT undated). This period marked the changing perceptions of Yeoville from one of a safe haven to one of a troubled space. The Yeoville Bellevue Community Development Trust notes:

"The death knell for that period was, ironically, the death of a Black Jamaican. Ridley Wright had married a South African exile and returned with her after 1990. He was owner of Crackers Deli, a popular cafe, and head of the Yeoville Trader's Association. In an altercation in which he attempted to protect a street corner drug dealer's wife from being abused by the drug dealer, he was fatally stabbed. It was downhill from there and by 2000, all of the shops and restaurants that gained fame in the 1980s were gone or transformed unrecognisably" (YBCDT undated).

Perceptions of Yeoville as a violent and crime ridden area have resulted in neighbourhood disinvestment and urban decay (Ibid). Increasingly, Yeoville, alongside other Johannesburg inner city areas like Hillbrow, Berea, Joubert Park and Betrams, has come to resemble what Murray (2011) describes as an *outcast ghetto*. The image of post-apartheid Yeoville is connected to the general image of Johannesburg, Gauteng and more generally, South Africa as places suffused by crime, violence and fear¹².

Below, I describe and interpret dynamics and discourses of *ethno-national regionalist* scapegoating in the community safety field, starting off with

11. YBCDT – Yeoville Bellevue Community Development Trust

12. Crime statistics of Yeoville reflect the neighbourhood as inundated with violent crime. In 2011, 20 murders, 35 attempted murders, 555 assaults (GBH) and 479 cases of common assault were registered in Yeoville, a neighbourhood which only covers an area of 10 km² with an estimated population of less than 40 000 people as of 2011.

*Table 1:
Community
Organisations/
Forums engaged
in community
safety activism in
Yeoville*

Community organisation	Brief description of activities
YCPF – Yeoville Community Policing Forum / CPF – Community Policing Forum	It was a partnership between elected community members and South African Police Service. The main focus of YCPF was to help reduce crime in Yeoville. YCPF held monthly meetings with members of the police to discuss the local crime challenges in Yeoville. They also held occasional public meetings as and when necessary. They were the link between the police and the community, facilitating communication between the two. They also co-supervised and co-organised the street patrollers in conjunction with the police. I use abbreviations YCPF and CPF interchangeably in this thesis, the former being used where there is a need for specificity of the CPF being referred to and the latter is used in general terms.
SCFs – Sector Crime Forums	Sector Crime Forums were sub-forums of the CPF. There were 3 sectors in the Yeoville poling precinct – Sectors 1 (Yeoville), Sector 2 (Bellevue) and Sector 3 (Observatory). SCFs conducted monthly meetings to discuss safety and security challenges.
YSF - Yeoville Stakeholders Forum	It was an affiliation of 22 community organisations in Yeoville, operating as an umbrella body of these organisations. It was formed in 2004 at the behest of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) as a contact community organisation during the period when JDA was implementing an infrastructural development programme in Yeoville's Rocky – Raleigh Streets. YSF conducted monthly meetings bringing together representatives of community organisations and other stakeholders in Yeoville. It was a platform for information sharing and solution seeking about and on local challenges in Yeoville.
YCF – Yeoville Community Forum	It was an organisation created by a group of South Africans living in Yeoville to respond to the housing situation by lobbying the municipality and government to address the challenge of lack of housing, high rentals and the issue of hijacked buildings ¹³ . During the early days of its inception in 2010, the YCF threatened militancy and violence in responding to the issue of hijacked houses.
ADF – African Diaspora Forum	ADF was formed in 2008 to respond to respond to the xenophobic violence that rocked South African in May 2012. The ADF claimed to have about 23 migrant organisations affiliated to it. It initiated education programmes and awareness campaigns to improve tolerance and co-living between South Africans and non-South Africans.

mapping out the *ethnopolitics* of fear – of who fears, who is feared and what is feared.

Constructing the criminogenic other

Perceptions of and about African immigrants in Yeoville, like in the broader South African context, reflect the stereotypical problematisation and criminalisation of their very identities and beings (Landau 2010; Nyamnjoh 2006). A community activist in Yeoville underscored: “*The easiest people to blame are foreigners. People who are illegal migrants get into criminal activities because they can’t work ...*” (Interview, Maurice: 22/09/2010). Commenting on relations between South Africans and African immigrants in Yeoville, an African immigrant stated:

“The relationships between foreigners and South Africans are not good. However, foreigners are still tolerant towards the behaviours of South Africans ... The problem is with South Africans seeing us as invaders. We as foreigners accept them, but for them to accept you it’s a problem. They accuse us of taking their jobs. This behaviour is probably like that because most South Africans have never travelled... The ones who went outside [who have travelled] are friendlier to foreigners” (Participant, group interview with migrants: 11/08/ 2011).

In many cases African immigrants were scapegoated as the causers of rising socio-economic problems in South Africa, including crime and violence (Landau 2006a). They were viewed as a category deserving containment if further decay in South Africa’s urban spaces, societies and economies is to be curbed (Hornberger 2011).

“The easiest people to blame...”

At the level of perception, the genesis of crime, violence and other urban disorders in innercity Johannesburg was, in many instances, associated with some regimes of city space occupancy by African immigrants (Legget 2002; Simone 2004; Vetten and Sadiyya 2005). Some public discourses classified criminal activities or potentials on the basis of stereotypes about *ethno-national* groups. A CPF leader expressed:

“The people who commit violent crimes are mostly Zimbabweans and Zulus. These ones use guns and knives. The Nigerians normally commit technical crime: electronic money transfers. Zimbabweans for crime are number one and Zulus as well. Mozambicans are good in muthi¹⁴. They make you sleep and come to collect everything in your house. Hey! Hey! We are in a shit... Everybody is coming here ...” (Interview, Mduduzi [YCPF member]: 08/08/2010).

Though controversial, there seemed to be a tendency amongst South Africans to criminalise “foreignness”. In everyday common sensical understanding, as confirmed in an opinion and attitude survey and interviews contacted as part of this study, the tendency to criminalise “foreign nationals” was common place. In this regard, imaginations of connections between nationality and criminality generally put Zimbabweans at the top, followed by Nigerians and then South Africans. Zimbabweans

13. Hijacked houses are those houses that have been squatted and are under the unlawful control of an individual or group without the consent or approval of the owner.

14. *Muthi* is an African name for charms or traditional medicines.

were generally associated with crimes such as muggings, robberies, petty theft, fraud and domestic violence. Nigerians were associated with drug dealing and fraud, while South Africans were associated with use of fire arms and robbery. Other nationalities mentioned included Mozambicans who were associated with car-jacking and use of firearms. Congolese nationals were associated with domestic violence. Generally, nationalities from West Africa were associated with fraud. Those who did not see any correlation between nationality and criminality indicated that they would not want to pinpoint any nationality, that crime was sometimes committed by syndicates composed of various nationalities including South Africans.

While the association of criminality with African immigrants was common in public discourses, there was also public scepticism about it. Asked if there was a connection between nationality and crime or violence types, a senior police officer responded:

“... I cannot just say a particular nationality [commits crime], because Yeoville is a multi-national community. So we cannot single out a particular nationality. Even South Africans are being arrested. For example, in January our team arrested 13 youths for carjacking and robbery. All of them were South African nationals. I cannot just make a correlation between crime and people’s nationality.” (Interview, Constable Mbuli: 18/08/2010).

In public and academic perceptions, innercity decay in Johannesburg was correlated to the immigration of a pan-African cohort from inside and outside South Africa¹⁵. Urban decay, in Yeoville, was thus considered as concomitant with “white flight” the incoming of a predominantly Black population in the late 1980s, early 1990s and 2000s (YBCDT undated). With the wave of international immigration of Africans into Yeoville, there were allegations that these immigrants had turned many spaces in Yeoville into hubs of crime and social malaise.

Problematic spatio-economic presence

During a key informant interview and transect walk, Thabang¹⁶ described how the various spaces in Yeoville’s main business street have been appropriated by various groups of migrants for various purposes. He indicated that corner Raymond and Rockey Street was a hub for Zimbabwean. At that corner, he indicated that there was a building called the green house where a crowd of Zimbabweans was found. Most of these Zimbabweans, according to him used cell phones to rob people and defraud banks and they also robbed shops and sold stolen goods. Thabang characterised Corner Hunter Street and Fortesque as a little Kinshasa. He stated that there were people who illegally produced passports, South African ID books and death certificates. At corner Grafton and Raleigh Street, according to him, there were Nigerian drug dealers who were always dressed in expensive clothes and drove expensive cars. According to him, Times Square, at corner Raleigh Street and Fortesque, there were many Zimbabweans. Behind Times Square, as he stated, there were lots of Ethiopians and Somalians. This place, according to him was a

15. See Simone. 2004. People as infrastructures ...

16. The chairperson of Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF).

Main road to
Yeoville (Rockey -
Raleigh Street)
Photo:
Obvious Katsaura



port of call for trafficked humans. He indicated that there was a big truck that came there at night to drop off trafficked Ethiopians and Somalians. He stated that Corner Hunter Street and Kenmerre Street was a place for Ghanaians. He alleged that these Ghanaians committed internet crimes together with Nigerians. He expressed that Nigerians were the masters of internet crime. In Raleigh Street, between Kenmerre Street and Bedford Street in front of Shoprite, according to Thabang, there were lots of young men hanging closer to ATMs¹⁷. At that spot pin numbers were memorised and money was being withdrawn fraudulently. At corner Raleigh Street and Bedford Street, as Thabang narrated, there was a cohort of Tanzanian dagga dealers doing business there.

In a bid to verify Thabang's description of *ethno-national geo-strategies* and *spatial occupancy* of street corners in Yeoville, I noted that his characterisation was grounded in his "common-sensical" observations of everyday socio-economic spatial trajectories of ethno-national groups. His characterisation was by and large simplistic given the maze of population mixing and criss-crossing characterising Yeoville. This maze makes it difficult, if not impossible, to confidently pinpoint the occupancy of a particular street corner by a specific ethno-national group.

What was a bit obvious, however, was a conglomerated network of business groupings based on ethno-national similarity or proximity; operating as cultural-economic enclaves (Caldeira 1996; Kahera 2002; Marcuse 2005a; Marcuse 2005b). These cultural-economic enclaves were, however, not always readily clear-cut as they tended to be a hotchpotch people that was not easily readable. Such *cultural-economic enclaves*, apart from being *enclaves of commerce*, were also represented or labelled as criminal enclaves. A local activist stated: "*There are certainly more serious crimes being committed in Yeoville such as bank fraud. I can talk about the various spaces and clusters of criminal activities associated with particular nationalities*" (Interview, Thabang; 25/08/2010).

These ethno-national enclaves were perceived as criminogenic and the occupying African immigrants as potential or real criminals – as *crimmi-grant bodies* (Aas 2011).

17.
Automatic Teller
Machines

Writing in *Yeovue News*, a South African contributor described the economic and spatial implications of the presence of African immigrants as problematic:

“Every self-respecting migrant should abide by the laws, by-laws, rules and regulations in their host country, in this case, South Africa. Migrants must not expect to do in a host country what they were doing in their original countries or, indeed, things they were not allowed to do in their countries because of stricter law enforcement...The reality we must boldly face is that most migrants in Yeoville Bellevue come from unplanned, underdeveloped cities with little infrastructural development and no effective by-laws or enforcement. Migrants need to orient themselves to life in South Africa [...]. Education around such things needs to take place without ill feelings.” (Majombozi 2010).

The typical “African immigrant” was thus publicly represented as one who hailed from an anarchic African country and as ignorant and disrespectful of South African laws. Many African immigrants, by virtue of fleeing economic or political crises from their countries of origin and seeking better economic opportunities in South Africa, were viewed with contempt and as endangering others (Landau 2010).

It is therefore not surprising that “African immigrant” was already a targeted “object” of everyday policing in innercity neighbourhoods of Johannesburg (Hornberger 2004; Hornberger 2011). In light of this, a migrant human rights activist complained: “The law enforcement agencies are promoting crime. They are taking bribes. If you see someone getting arrested, they won’t be having a bribe to give to the police” (Interview, Yonga-Yonga: 08/04/2011). This ethno-nationalised policing was abusive of African immigrants as police officers, who were supposed to protect the public, were even alleged to be harassing African immigrants and extorting bribes from them (Hornberger 2011). The scapegoating and criminalisation of immigrants was also overtly and covertly performed in spaces of public dialogue of spaces – referred to here as spaces of participatory safety governance.

Discrimination in spaces of participatory safety governance

Mirroring the culture of xenophobic otherism and scapegoating pervading South African public culture (Nyamnjoh 2010b), conditions in spaces of community deliberation on matters of local safety and security (wittingly and unwittingly) isolated African immigrants. They faced exclusion from official positions in the Community Policing Forums and related bodies. In its specifications of persons who should not hold positions in the Community Policing Forums in the Gauteng Province in which Johannesburg falls, the Gauteng Province Community Policing Board’s¹⁸ constitution of 2010 clearly outlined that people who were not citizens of the republic of South Africa were not legible [section 22, subsection 22.2.5 (GPCPB 2010)].

Apart from this conscious institutionalisation of exclusion of non-South Africans from established spaces of public participation in community safety initiatives, there were other un-institutionalised means through

18. The Gauteng Province Community Policing Board (CPCPB) is the one that oversaw the establishment and running of all CPF in the Gauteng Province.

Yeovilla
Community
Policing Forum
(YCPF). Photo:
Obvious Katsaura



which this exclusion took place on the ground. For instance, the use of local languages in spaces of public participation was a constant cause of the isolation of “foreign nationals” in these meetings. Although some or most of the organisations officially used English as their main language of community engagement, many times South African speakers would switch to *Zulu*, *Sotho* or *Xhosa*; to the exclusion of some African immigrants and also some South Africans who did not understand these languages. In a ward public meeting, the chairperson of ADF had this to say:

“[...] I am busy learning the local languages. We want to participate and contribute as well, but we don't understand everything if you use the local languages. Somebody here said they are from Rwanda, another from Uganda and I am from Ivory Coast. Can you speak in a shared language please?” (Ward Public Meeting, Fagbibo: 14/08/2010).

Language as a means of human association is therefore a political tool, one that is deployable to confirm and entrench of socio-political difference. It can be a tool for the exclusion of particular groups of people who do not share the same language, by those whose language and cultural group is dominant. African immigrants were therefore excluded in that if they attended participatory or deliberative spaces of safety governance they were excluded linguistically or constantly reminded of their outsider status and had to sit through discussions in which they were scapegoated and criminalised during the drama of public participation.

Encountering otherism: discourses and practices

In a context characterised by the logic of otherisation and otherism, vulnerable groups have a tendency of inventing survivalist strategies of navigating hostile social and physical terrains. Thus amongst other things, immigrants can generate counter-otherisation discourses and practices that range from lobbying and engaging the perceived otheriser to withdrawal from intensive interaction with the perceived otheriser.



A community unites in a public demonstration at the local court to protest the brutal bludgeoning to death of Dan Knight, 2013. The savagery of this expression of ethnic violence sent shockwaves throughout the community, uniting the population across lines of race and social affiliation. Photo: iStockphotoLic. 83488 6821 RT0001

Lobbying and engagement

The association of criminality with African immigrants was dismissed by some Yeoville residents (African immigrants and South Africans included) as not fact, but a matter of just scapegoating. A migrant activist questioned:

“These people behave as if there was no crime before 1994 in South Africa. When someone breaks the law they write foreigner and the magistrate will know that you are a foreigner. It’s not easy for migrants to get bail. Having the majority of people in prison as migrants doesn’t mean that migrants are committing too much crime. The fact is that South Africans can easily get bail” (Interview, Omokoko: 08/04/2011).

In this hostile environment characterised by discrimination, exclusion, scapegoating and criminalisation of immigrants, it is not surprising that immigrants form associational spaces to advance their interests and where necessary, defend themselves. This is the context in which African Diaspora, an immigrant organisation headquartered in Yeoville, was formed. The chairperson of African Diaspora Forum explained:

“When the xenophobic violence started in May 2008, the government didn’t do anything. We thought that the government would send the police of army to stop the violence, but it didn’t. That’s why we formed ADF to

respond to this violence and to lobby government and other stakeholders to act. I had to use my own network, being a leader of the Ivorian community, to make sure that this endeavour was a success. As ADF, we work with migrants and we want to work with the South African community to combat xenophobia. We had projects in Alexandra and we worked with the police and CPF to deal with the people, educating them about other African countries... We have a strong network. We have a relationship with high ranking police officers. This helps us. When members of the migrant community are arrested unfairly we can deal with the matter easily. We can make phone calls to these high ranking people so that we get assistance. We also work closely with councillors and other local politicians who are useful to us" (Interview: Fagbibo: 26/08/2011).

Thus, African immigrants were not passive bodies or groups upon which criminalising and othering labels simply stuck. They engaged in *counter-criminalisation* and *counter-otherisation* practices and tactics.

The African Diaspora Forum played an important role in lobbying and advocating change of perceptions of immigrants among the local population; with the hope of nurturing a spirit of peaceful co-existence. One migrant activist from African Diaspora Forum proposed:

"How do we get migrants to be accepted in South African communities and their contribution to the country and the communities they live in to be appreciated? I think it is important for us to publish profiles of migrants contributing towards the well-being of South Africa and we can do this through the proposed Diaspora News [...]" (ADF Meeting, Yonga-Yonga: 26/02/2011).

This was a proposal for use of the media to reconfigure the public representation and image of immigrants; profiling their progressive contributions to the economy and society. In this respect, ADF used to have a newspaper insert called *African Diaspora Forum News* in The Star newspaper in 2009. Lobbying activities thus played a role in attempts to improve the perception of African immigrants by the South African public. On 3 March 2012, ADF created a task team to deal with policing issues affecting migrants. The task team was expected:

"To work in cahoots with the SAPS and CPF structures to encourage inclusive policing in relation for foreign nationals living in South Africa... This involves in particular regular participation in CPFs (meetings, activities, executives) in areas where migrants are numerous, and/or where there are specific issues of xenophobic policing... This task team should formulate, jointly with policing bodies or on its own, projects that address the challenges of xenophobic policing..."

Such lobbying was meant to encourage and promote migrant inclusive and friendly policing by SAPS. Activism against police harassment of immigrants involved other civic organisations. In the face of identity-based adversity, African immigrants have at best also adopted blame-shedding strategies in public forums; campaigning against being scapegoated for local problems, including crime and at worst withdrawing from participating in public safety governing initiatives.

Withdrawal from spaces of perceived discrimination and danger

Given the embeddedness of othering behaviour at governmental and grassroots levels, it was not surprising that there was a low level of attendance of YCPF and other (South African dominated) public forums by immigrants in Yeoville. The lack of participation of immigrants in YCPF meetings became an issue for South Africans running these institutions. There were allegations, by participating South Africans, that African immigrants were disinterested in participating in community initiatives. A South African YCPF member complained: *“These people don’t come to the meetings. People from Congo and Nigeria don’t come to meetings...”* (Sector Crime Forum 1 meeting, Mduduzi: 02/06/2011)

The lack of participation of African immigrants in community safety initiatives was not just a result of forced exclusion but also a question of “self-isolation” (Barry 1998). Asked why he did not participate in YCPF meetings, a Zimbabwean immigrant staying in Yeoville responded:

“Because I don’t care about that. It doesn’t give me food on the table. I have better things to do. I am not permanent here, so I have got nothing to contribute to the community and my days are numbered. I am just a tenant here and I will be leaving the area” (Interview, Reggy: 12/02/2011).

The above statement shows that some “foreign nationals” were economically calculative and found no motivation to attend meetings leaving their economic activities. The other issue was the temporariness of their stay in neighbourhoods, and also in the country; which made them feel as though they did not belong and had no obligation to contribute to initiative aimed at improving the well-being of “community”. In light of this, I conceptualise most African immigrants as having a *habitus of survivalism*, as opposed to a *habitus of volunteerism*; a *habitus* abstracted from community and its dynamics and focused on acquiring economic gain.

Individual immigrants also withdrew from certain spaces or places as self-preservation. Withdrawal from spaces of public dialogue on safety and security was one way of avoiding being noticed and exposed to xenophobic discourses – a strategy of self-preservation. On the other hand, the navigation of the city itself demanded care from immigrants, to avoid being victimised for being “strangers”. People generally avoided places with a history of xenophobic violence. One participant explained:

“I will not go to places such as Alexandra or Diepsloot unless it is inevitable. In those places you can become exposed, especially if you cannot speak the local languages. If I happen to go to those areas, I avoid wearing traditional African dresses [African attire], lest they notice that I am from West Africa and attack me. I spent most of my time in the inner city of Johannesburg. Although there are huge challenges of crime in the inner city, the risk of suffering xenophobic violence is quite low. It is our place – our own little Lagos” (Interview, Chukwu: 12/02/2012).

Thus, counter-othering strategies also took place at individual levels as people live, traversed or “walked in the city” (de Certeau 1984); prioritising self-protection against potential violent and non-violent xenophobic

practices in the process. Through such collective and individual practices, African immigrants gained a special kind of street knowledge or “street science” (Corburn 2005) which they used to navigate the *fearopolis*¹⁹ that Johannesburg is. I refer to this kind of knowledge as part of the *capital of security*; accumulated through everyday practices and discursive exchanges, and usable in everyday navigation of the city.

Below, I conclude by crystallising the lessons that can be drawn from the analysis of the field of community safety governance as one characterised by ethno-politics; especially in ethno-nationally diverse contexts as of Yeoville, Johannesburg.

Conclusion

This chapter, through the notion of *ethnopolitics*, suggests community safety governance is a field of “ethno-discourses”, “ethno-talks” and “ethno-practices”²⁰ through which ethno-national groups pursue and defend their interests. Overall, the chapter confirms the argument that xenophobia has become part of public culture in South Africa (Nyamnjoh 2010b); with the state being complicit in the generation and sustenance of this public culture (Neocosmos 2008).

The imageries of African immigrants as major culprits in the genesis of local crime and disorder made Yeoville a neighbourhood that lived at the border of cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism (or counter-cosmopolitanism) – of peace and ethno-national conflicts. The criminalisation of (poor) African immigrants in Yeoville correspond to Caldeira’s (2000:53) observation, in her São Paulo studies, that criminals are publicly represented as people “from the fringes of society, humanity and polity”. While poor African immigrants were represented as the *scum of the city*²¹, within the ranks of the criminalised *scum of the city* also were the South African poor living in marginal spaces which, paradoxically, were abhorred and avoided by many African immigrants. It is in these marginal spaces of the city where xenophobic violence was common and acute (Misago 2011).

The *linguistic market* of the local security governance field in Yeoville was generally ethno-nationally exclusionary. The language used in spaces of participatory safety activism was unfriendly to African immigrants who could not fluently speak or adequately understand local South African native languages. When African immigrants attend community meetings on matters of security governance, they have to sit through discussions that stereotypically criminalised them and in which their contributions were not taken seriously. Therefore, in these meetings, when African immigrants participated, they tended to occupy a position of what I call the *absent present* - as their presence was rarely appreciated or respected. When they did not attend, they still remain the subject of *criminalising talk* - occupying a position of what I refer to as the *present absent*. Spaces of deliberative community security governance can therefore be conceptualised as sites of *performative symbolic violence* against African immigrants. It is important also to note that some African immigrants isolated themselves from participation in community safety activism because they saw more value in pursuing their economic interests

19.

A concept I coin to capture the city as a space of fear – see Katsaura Obvious. 2013. Socio-spatial politics of community safety in Johannesburg. Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

20.

See Comaroff, John L, and Jean Comaroff. 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

21.

I develop and modify this notion as adapted from Koestler, Arthur. 1968. *Scum of the Earth.* New York: Macmillan.

From the foregoing it emerges that community safety governance requires an appreciation and understanding of the role of social diversity in shaping or influencing public participation and social group and individual placing in the field of community safety governance. One has to be cognisant of the dynamics or potentialities of conflict and contradictions in such a context. An understanding of the anatomy of the social infrastructure of the neighbourhood – sometimes casted in the dichotomy between the “established” (insiders) and “outsiders” (Elias and Scotson 1994; Nyamnjoh 2006) - is an important first step for any intervention in or review of the security governance at a local level in situations characterised by migrancy and poor levels of collective efficacy and responsibility (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997). Above all I stress, as an epilogue to this chapter, that a theorisation or understanding of social diversity is central to profitable scholarship on urban dynamics; especially in cases of urban community mobilisation and organisation in response to urban challenges.

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