

Violence and the Enchantment of Everyday Life in Johannesburg: Preliminary Insights¹

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01. This paper outlines some ideas of the author's ongoing postdoc project, sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation

Johannesburg is a city well known for high levels of violence and crime (Boisteau 2005; Dirsuweit 2002; Schönteich and Louw 2001). Yet there has been a lack of examination of the role of traditions, beliefs, and spiritualities, however varied, in the mediation or prevention of urban violence and the fear it induces. While contemporary explanations of public violence invoke the idea of a “culture of violence” in South Africa (Von Holdt 2011; Von Holdt 2012d), they rarely, if at all, locate explanations and descriptions within the matrix of beliefs, traditions, and spiritualities. Also, current studies on xenophobic violence (Landau 2010; Landau and Haupt 2007; Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Gavatri 2005; Misago 2011; Misago, Landau and Monson 2009), local security initiatives (Benit-Gbaffou 2008a; Benit-Gbaffou 2008b; Bénit-Gbaffou, Fourchard and Wafer 2012), and violent protests or strikes (Alexander 2010; Atkinson 2007; Hough 2009; Von Holdt et al. 2011) do not attempt to adequately understand the potential role of religious practices and mysticism in explaining the genesis and governance of urban violence and crime.

Furthermore, religion is rarely conceptualised as an influence in urbanism², let alone as an institution that plays a key role in the (re)production of urban order or disorder. This is the case notwithstanding the existence of a corpus of literature that examines the role of religion (and ethnicity) in fuelling conflict and enhancing the restoration of order in (post) war situations in Africa and elsewhere (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000; Ellis and Ter Haar 1998; Marsden 2002; Ranger 1992). The trivialisation of the role of religion, beliefs, traditions, and spiritualities in the making of urban orders or disorders in South Africa is puzzling, especially in a context where even the government of South Africa recognised that a restoration of morality was necessary for crime and violence reduction – launching the moral regeneration campaign in the early 2000s (Rauch

Previous page: Figure 1; A group of people from the Shembe Church doing their ceremony. The Shembe church is a mixture of christianity with the Zulu traditions and has over 4 million followers.

Source: iStock/ THEGIFT777

2005; Rauch 2011). Religion and religious leaders also played a key role in post-apartheid attempts at reconciliation in South Africa (Chapman and Bernard 2003). This shows that despite its apparently “modernist” orientation, South Africa still remains a very much enchanted society in which symbols, myths, beliefs, traditions, and spiritualities play a “key role” in the ordering of (urban) social life; this is even officially appreciated at the level of government.

Given the persistence of fear of real or imagined violence in Johannesburg in a context of apparent inadequacy of state efforts to fully maintain law and order, one therefore wonders how people survive and adapt. It is in this context that I examine of the role of traditions (customs), beliefs and spiritualities as social and psychological resources invoked by urban populations in coping with or governing urban violence. Such resources, which are currently marginally appreciated in urban studies literature, enable resilience and flexibility of (African) urbanites in difficult and trying circumstances (Simone and Abouhani 2005). I pursue this line of thought, notwithstanding the fact that in many instances, religion and beliefs, especially fundamentalist versions thereof (Appadurai 2006), account for rebellion, violence, and disorder (Turner 1991).

In this chapter I argue that urban violence and associated uncertainties generate enchanted urbanisms, especially in a context of lack of faith in the state’s capacity to resolve these uncertainties and crises. Enchanted urbanism is a concept that describes increased belief in the supernatural, myths, and symbols in the configuration of everyday practices in the city. In this case I argue that despite observed modern or secular inclinations of city life (Goldstein 2009), many urban residents in South Africa [as elsewhere in Africa (Cohen 1969)] remain grounded, fully or partially, in their traditions, spiritualities, and beliefs – invoking their ethnic identities and associated cultural, ritual, and ethno-spiritual practices (Bigger 2009; Judin 2008; Kumar 2007; Stark 1999). While most of such practices are associated with pre-modernity and rurality (Bigger 2009), in the context of South Africa (as elsewhere) it would be a mistake to unduly split the rural from the urban, as urban populations (always) re-invoke traditional practices, rituals, and beliefs in responding to crises (such as violence) and as a way of life (O’Connor 1995). In this case, enchanted urbanism becomes observable in everyday urban commerce and social exchange. Beliefs, traditions (customs), and spiritualities can configure how urban dwellers walk, transact (trade), neighbour, associate, and befriend in contexts marred by fear of violence and crime – of the unpredictable, strange and fearsome. In this case symbols, myths, and customs are invoked in everyday urbanisms, influencing people’s relationship with (and in) a city characterised by fear of violence.

For the purpose of this study, I define tradition as long standing practices which could be inherited or bequeathed.³ The concept of spirituality here denotes practices or thoughts that have to do with beliefs in deities⁴. Belief is conceptualized as an idea in which some confidence is placed.⁵ While analytical definitions of violence vary, I define it here as the “use of forceful acts motivated by the conscious or unconscious desire to obtain or maintain political, economic, or social power” (MacLliwaine and Moser

02. There are recent attempts to analyse the urban impact of religion, although these have mainly focused on “pre-modern” cities and Islam, ignoring other contemporary impacts. See Benson, Amira K, and Alison L. Gascoigne (Eds.). 2007. *Cities in the pre-modern Islamic world: Urban impact of religion, state and society*. New York: Routledge. Also see AlSayyad, Nezar. 2011. *The Fundamentalist City?: Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*. New York: Routledge.

03. pass (something) on or leave (something) to someone else by will
04. See Ibid

05. See Ibid

2004). I resort to a conceptual continuum that distinguishes between social, political, and economic violence (Moser and McIlwaine 2001). In this study, although I refer to domestic violence, I am interested in public violence. I focus on collective violence (including strikes and xenophobic violence) and violent crime, while noting that concepts of violence and crime should not be used interchangeably (Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Pillay 2008).

This chapter is premised in theoretical explorations around the concept of enchanted urbanisms, I have invented it, and on preliminary fieldwork thus far conducted under the auspices of a research project that explored the mediatory role of religion, magic, and rituals in contexts of violence and the fear of violence in Johannesburg.⁶ This study is a multi-sited ethnography of Johannesburg and this particular chapter relies on field research done in the Johannesburg inner city neighborhoods of Rosettenville, which is a peri-central neighbourhood, Chiawelo, which is a Township neighbourhood, as well as Sandton, a high income neighbourhood. Below is a discussion of the theoretical frame of reference for this study.

Theoretical positioning

As a reference point, I benefit from the work of classical social theorists such as Durkheim, Weber, and Marx in my endeavour to understand the role of religion, beliefs, and traditions in urbanised (or industrialised) contexts. Following Durkheimian thought, my analysis invokes the notion of “(re)production of order” or “disorder” (peace, violence, fear) (Bourdieu 1986; Von Holdt 2012a; Von Holdt 2012b; Von Holdt 2012c), analysing the role of traditions, beliefs, and spiritualities in building moral or social orders and acting as “social cement” in urban contexts predisposed to “anomie” and “normlessness” (Durkheim 1975; Turner 1991).

In tandem with the Weberian tradition, I analyse the political and social significance of religious authority and the legitimacy thereof in the making of social and political orders (Kokosalakis 1985; Riis 1998; Turner 1991; Weber 1997). I observe a scenario where there is a re-enchantment or enchantment, rather than simply disenchantment of the world more visible in situations where modernity and urbanity have been accompanied by unresolved social problems such as increasing levels of violence and crime (Bennett 2001; Curry 2012; Jenkins 2000; Lee 2008). In fact, urbanism and modernity, in this context, come with a dialectic of disenchantment and enchantment or re-enchantment, rather than mainly with the former (Jenkins 2000). Thus, social and political stresses emanating from increasing levels of urban violence and uncertainty promote re-invocations of belief systems, traditions, and spiritualities as adaptive and regulatory mechanisms. Thus, I seek here to analyse the re-enchantment of the world in a context of violent modernities and urbanisms.

The explosion of violence and variations in its intensities, repertoires, and responses to it across various urban spaces is Marxianly analysed in terms of differences in material conditions of humans inhabiting those spaces – spaces of disadvantage which Wacquant designate as “territories of urban relegation” (Wacquant 2007) inhabited by “urban outcasts” (Wacquant 2008). Such spaces are more vulnerable to uncertainty as the

06.

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residents cannot purchase protection and a sense of security for themselves. In the same vein, increased religiosity of sections of the population in these troubled spaces can be conceptualised as tantamount to the pacification of the masses (Toshio and Grapard 1996): religion operating as the opium (Marx and Raines 2002; Turner 1991).

Given the institutional gap created by the inadequacies of the state, the governance of violence invites other social institutions and civic collectivities, which then fill this gap. In this case, religion is one of the social institutions that play an important role in the making of urban orders. Religion plays a significant role in shaping the habits (practices and strategies) of urban dwellers as they navigate fearful cities. Not only is religion a matter of concern here, but also non-religious rituals that come to epitomise attempts by urbanites to generate ontological security by enhancing the predictability of life (Dirsuweit 2007), for instance by taking certain temporal or spatial practices and strategies that reduce the risk of violent victimisation in the city (de Certeau 1984). This may range from anything including the creation of walking or driving paths, the generation of mental maps that enhance perceived safe navigation of the city, or the avoidance of certain places during the day or night (Lynch 1960). In this case, I argue that there is an “institutionalisation”⁷ and “habitualisation”⁸ (Berger and Luckmann 1966) of fear, if not of violence itself (Katsaura 2012). The religious practices, everyday rituals, and mind maps of the city thus come to constitute stocks of cultural and social “capital” (Bourdieu 1986), deployed by collectivities and individuals in the negotiation of the urban social world. These stocks of knowledge are not to be ignored in our quest to understand the repertoires, negotiation, and governance of (the fear of) urban violence at local levels – and the associated everyday or periodic interaction rituals (Goffman 1961): violence and counter-violence practices and discourses themselves are public and/or everyday rituals.

Now I turn to the imaginations of Johannesburg, highlighting anecdotes that position the city as a place of fear.

Imagining Johannesburg: Fear as a key signifier

Johannesburg is generally imagined as a luring and enchanting city in the positive and negative sense. It lures people from all over South Africa, Africa, and the world in search of fortune; yet this lure of fortune doubles as a lure to live in a constant state of anxiety, fear, violence, and crime. It is both the hope for fortune and the fear of violence that is enchanting in Johannesburg. People living in Johannesburg, thus, also generally imagine the city as a space of immense hope, yet of great fear. Consider this statement by one interviewee:

“This is indeed the city of gold. It’s a space of opportunity. If you want to make money, Johannesburg is the place to be. In my view, it’s a place full of business opportunities and so there is a stampede of people wanting to live in Johannesburg. People hope that if they come to Johannesburg, their lives will become better. Even long back our fathers used to come to Johannesburg to work in the mines [from Zimbabwe]. However, this

07. Institutionalisation is a concept that describes the habitualisation, patterning, and regularisation of human practices, customs, and behaviours - enhancing the predictability of social life (see Berger and Luckmann 1966).

08. Habitualisation here refers to the reproducibility of a human action or behaviour with an economy of effort as a result of it being repeated frequently (see Berger and Luckmann 1966).

is also a violent city. If you live in Johannesburg you have to constantly watch your back. The city is a place of opportunities also for criminals. We have a lot of hardcore criminals also in this city. You must be street-wise.”⁹

09.
Interview, Mandla,
Chiawelo, 20 May
2014.

Not only is Johannesburg imagined as a space of opportunity and fear by its residents, but also by people from elsewhere. In conversations with people from Harare, Zimbabwe, a city that has supplied many immigrants to Johannesburg, fear of the city of Johannesburg seems widespread:

“...That place is scary. We are seeing a lot of funerals from that side But again, many people from here want to come and live in that city because of the opportunities it offers. Once in that city, though, one needs to be very careful to avoid being killed”¹⁰

10.
Chiedza, Harare,
Personal Commu-
nication; 25 Sep-
tember 2013.

Given the facticity of fear of violence in Johannesburg, it is worthwhile to explore the ways in which people cope with this fear. Below I explore two ways in which people respond to fear of violence, which I understand as indicating a ritualisation of everyday life, emanating from people's attempts to generate a sense of safety. I analyse whether, indeed, there has been a theologisation of everyday life as a response to fear of violence and then I proceed to explain how routinisation of everyday practices in the city work as a safety generating mechanism.

Theologisation of everyday life

Religion plays a significant role in influencing people's responses to uncertainty and to crisis (Malinowski 1955). It emerged that in Johannesburg as well, religion is a strong reference point and a significant resource deployed by people to contend with living in a city considered to be violence and crime ridden. The city of Johannesburg is itself understood theologically as a space abounding with spirits – bad and good. For those who have come from far off places, there is fear of the bad spirits in the city. One interviewee from Zimbabwe had this to say in a group interview:

“There are spirits in this land. These spirits fight with us strangers. As strangers in this city, we therefore need to worship God so that God protects us in whatever we do. Johannesburg, as I can describe it has three spirits. The first spirit is one of wealth. Those spirits undermine your attempts to make money in this city especially because you will be a foreigner. The spirit doesn't want the wealth from this land to be taken away to other lands. The second spirit is the one of women. This land is full of women who operate as prostitutes – they have mermaid spirits. If you play with them you can lose your finances because they like money. You will risk becoming broke. The third spirit is of violence and criminality. Now this is a very dangerous spirit. You may migrate from your country a good person, but if you are not careful, once you are here, you are worn by this spirit. So, even as we walk in this city, we need to be very careful as the spirit of violence is connected to the spirit of death. To survive all these spirits, you really need God. You need to be prayerful.”¹¹

11.
Group Interview,
Ngoni, member
of the Johanne
Masowe Apostol-
ic Sect who was an
immigrant from
Zimbabwe, 9 May
2014.



Another participant in this group interview emphasised the importance of prayer in a context of fear of violence:

“Ya, living here is hard. It is God who protects you because anytime when people get into conflict or an argument, its common for them to shoot each other with guns. They do not hesitate to kill. Eh, they do not have respect for life. That is the biggest lesson I have learnt here. So the biggest favour you can do to yourself is to know God. If some one steps on you or offends you, you must quickly say sorry, even if you are not in the wrong. Even if the person scolds you, you must remain quiet. And here, getting mugged is common – here it’s worse than back home [Zimbabwe]. You really realise that living here needs divine protection. It’s not the same as being at home [Zimbabwe].”¹²

The group interview is revealing of the layered nature of fears that affect people living in Johannesburg, particularly those coming from outside South Africa. First, Johannesburg’s relatively wealthy economy in Africa is a major attraction for immigrants, who, once in the city, content with the fear of failing to make it in this economy – hence the above reference to the spirits that attempt to withhold wealth from “strangers”. Secondly, there is fear of losing money to prostitutes who are equally partaking of the city in search of fortune. Thirdly, violence and criminality is a key factor behind the fearsomeness of Johannesburg. This violence and criminality, because of its frequent lethality, befits the casting of Johannesburg as a necropolis – a city of death (Malaquais 2007). As emerging from this interview, prayer becomes an integral part of survival in this unpredictable city. In an interview, a Zimbabwean man from Chiawelo¹³, stressed the point that every morning he goes to a secluded hill to pray for divine protection and guidance during his daily socio-economic transactions and navigation of the city. This has become a long-standing ritual in his life.

In my own observations of a Pentecostal church in Johannesburg’s inner city, various forms of charms are given to congregants to give a

Left:
African pastor standing in the ocean raises a staff his hands while praying and rejoicing over water baptisms performed in the Atlantic Ocean
Source: iStock/wanderluster

Right:
Interior of a traditional round hut in a township near Johannesburg displaying ritual instruments
Photo: Kosta Mathéy

12.
Group Interview, Nyembesi, member of the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Sect who was an immigrant from Zimbabwe, 9 May 2014.

13.
Interview, Marko, Chiawelo, 20 May 2014.

sense of divine protection. These charms range from anointing oil which they apply on their bodies everyday, white handkerchiefs which they can carry everyday, to stickers bearing pictures of their religious leader (pastor – prophet) which they are encouraged to stick on their cars or doors or any place they deem necessary.

Interviewing sangomas (traditional healers) in Faraday, in inner city Johannesburg, it emerged that traditional healers also play a key role in guaranteeing spiritual protection from physical attacks by criminals. For example, one traditional healer explained:

"I have muthi [medicine] that I give my clients to protect their houses and cars. For the house, this muthi works like security. When a criminal wants to get in, they suddenly get gripped by fear. I do the same for cars to make criminals fear to even attempt to open the doors of a car to steal the car or to steal things inside the car. They will always feel like the owner will come back before they could even touch the car. If a car is stolen, I can also perform a ritual on the crime spot to make sure that the car is recovered. Many who have come to me have received phone calls indicating the recovery of their cars. I can also use muthi to punish the criminals by inflicting pain on them after they commit crimes – sometimes they then confess their crimes."

The effects of the use of prayers or charms to avert violence and crime or to enhance vengeance, compensation, or recovery for the victims, is worthy of theorisation. The question is not so much on the effectiveness of these charms in dealing with the problems at the level of materiality, but on their psycho-social effects. The significance of charms could simply be in their enhancement of the confidence of the victims of fear and violence, enhancing their ontological security, which is important for their daily life in a city gripped by fear of the unknown.

In spaces of spiritual gatherings within the city of Johannesburg, the fear of violence and crime is also expressed and addressed and there is a constant attempt to invoke divine protection for members of religious congregations. In one of the churches attended, a preacher stated:

*"My message today is that we are in a season of injury and we must be prayerful and careful. September, October, November are months of injury. We must pray for protection during this season. People are desperate for money. They want to go home where they come from in December in a big way. People are desperate to buy cars. Let us be vigilant and not be trapped or tricked. We must be watchful, we must be prayerful. There are too many dangers in this season. Criminals are very active. They want to make a financial killing..... The devil wants to take his last chance of the year – a chance to devour people... You must pray for the Lord's guidance..."*¹⁴

14.

Church Sermon,
Pastor, Pentecostal
Church, Johannes-
burg CBD, 21 Sep-
tember 2013.

Commentaries of people in public realm such as pastors, priests, and prophets on the scourge of violence and crime in Johannesburg lend credence to fear among the populace. If not creating moral panics (Cohen 2002), such comments simply endorse and sensationalise the fears. The content of public prayers also reflects the fear of public violence. Below

is an excerpt of a prayer by a pastor in a Pentecostal church in the inner city of Johannesburg, in which he blessed his congregants at the end of a church service saying:

*“Armed robbers have no power in your life. Hired killers have no power in your life. Witches and wizards have no power in your life. Premature death shall never be your portion..... In Jesus’ name, Amen!”*¹⁵

This goes on to show that the violence that is feared, while it is mostly of a physical nature, is also understood as spiritual; hence the mention of armed robbers, witches, and wizards in the same prayer. This is unsurprising in the context of born again Christians who ardently believe in the fundamental connection of the physical to the spiritual and, by extension, the connection between physical and spiritual violence (Chidester 2012; Marshall 2009).

Religion is therefore a key factor of everyday life. The Johannesburg landscape is awash with churches, shrines, mosques, and market places for sangomas. These spaces and the associated institutions play a very significant role in the (re)production of social order in the city. They must be understood as playing a key role in mediating the exigencies of life in Johannesburg, a city in which residents contend with rampant physical violence as well as structural violence meted by an unequal economic and spatial setup that condemns many ordinary men and women to misery and hopelessness. In this case, it is not surprising that religion –various Apostolic and Pentecostal movements– are popular among people occupying social ranks that are considered to be of the poor. This is the category that Wacquant and Bauman have elsewhere respectively referred to as “urban outcasts” and “wasted lives” (Bauman 2004; Wacquant 1993). In the face of helplessness and victimization, these religious entities and associated practices provide a temporary and useful exit from the pains of the world – Marxianly operating somewhat as the opiate of the afflicted.

15.
Church Prayer,
Pastor, Pentecostal
Church, Johannes-
burg CBD, 12 April
2014.

Left:
Ritual face
painting of the
Xhosa tribe in the
Western Cape.
Photo:
Kosta Mathéy

Right:
Xhosa religious
practice is
distinguished by
elaborate and
lengthy rituals,
initiations, and
feasts. Modern
rituals typically
pertain to matters
of illness and
psychological well-
being.
Photo:
Kosta Mathéy



Routinisation of everyday life

Contexts of fear and uncertainty, as noted by theorists such as Malinowski, Giddens, Bourdieu, and others invoke attempts at routinisation and habitualisation of life to generate a sense of security and predictability (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Malinowski 1955). Some refer to this as a kind of ritualisation of life, that is a reduction of sets of repeated behaviours or customs that enhance its predictability (see Burger and Luckmann 1966). It is therefore the case that some individuals in Johannesburg create certain social routines and certain walking paths as a response to the fear of real or imagined violence or crime. Talking of how he manages his life in a context of fear in Johannesburg, an interviewee stated:

*"I work in the city centre. It is a very dangerous place. If I make money, I quickly go to a safe place with my money. It's a problem to walk around with money in the city centre. If you take even 100 Rand out off your pocket, if it's seen by criminals, violence will erupt. They will attack you to take your money. Even if I have no money, I make it a point that I leave the city centre before 6 pm. By 6 pm I will be at my home because I know that after 6pm, particularly when it gets dark, I will be at greater risk of attack."*¹⁶

16.
Interview, Pindai,
Rosettenville, 9
May 2014.

Although the above tale focuses on the city centre even in residential places individuals generate their mental maps with the aim of enhancing personal safety. Below, a resident of Chiawelo narrated his understanding of the area he lives in:

*"You see, when we are in Chiawelo and surrounding areas we have places that we are afraid of, especially a place called White City. We know which areas we do not dare to go into. Although Chiawelo is relatively safe, the moment you cross Chris Hani Road, after those traffic lights from where you came and cross into White City, you must be careful. There are boys who take Nyaope [an addictive drug]. Those Nyaope boys patrol that area to rob people. Two of my friend lost their mobile phones in that area. Its better not to go to those areas after 6pm and if you do go there, it's better to avoid carrying valuables."*¹⁷

17.
Interview, Marko,
Chiawelo, 20 May
2014.

This story shows that there are both spatial and temporal strategies employed by people to avoid becoming victims of violence and crime. Individuals have got mental maps of the city, as informed by their fears of certain places, which directs their movement and location in the city at specific times. These spatial practices are the everyday strategies and tactics employed by people as they transect and transit through space (de Certeau 1984). They are reflective of residents' structuring of the perceptions (or images) of the city into "recurring elements such as paths (along which movements flow) and edges (which differentiate one part of the urban fabric from another)" (Lynch 1960:98). It is the fear of violence and other urban disorders that configure such images – images about dangerous or safe paths, spaces or neighbourhoods - which culminate in mental maps influencing individuals or social groups' navigation and classification of city spaces. Some spaces of the city are therefore feared, avoided,

or disowned, while others are claimed and owned by individuals and social groups (as reflected in territorialist discourses and practices).

In richer neighbourhoods, such as Sandton, people adopt other methods of securing their spaces that can also be described as routine and ritualistic. There is a booming private security sector in such neighbourhoods, and some of the mechanics of its operations demand that individuals adopt certain behaviours at all times, in order to enhance their safety. A security guard interviewed in one of Sandton's gated communities explained:

*"Here we people rely on private security. You see, there is always a private security vehicle on patrol in the area. We have the tactical response unit, which is heavily armed, always on patrol and on standby to tackle any security challenges. The people here always have a panic button on them. If they press that button, the tactical response unit arrives in just a very few minutes to deal with whatever security threat is there. Most of people here go to bed with the panic button in their possession, in case of any scares. It's normally put by the bedside for quick reaction in the face of any threats."*¹⁸

Thus, the use of state of the art security technologies is integral to the securing of everyday life in high-income suburbs of Johannesburg and it has essentially been routinised, if not ritualised. This speaks of obsession with fear, its entrenchment into everyday cosmology, and thus, its enchanting effects. While the obsession with security may seem irrational, one merely needs to observe that cases of violence – namely house robbery – are generally isolated and episodic. This brings to question the objectivity of fears that people have, yet one is tempted to understand the gravity of the subjective fear that grips people's consciousness and sub-consciousness.

Below, I conclude by laying some notes that crystallise the further meanings of narratives and analysis above.

Conclusion

Johannesburg, thus, can be understood as a city so intriguing because of its wealth, architecture, and not least because of its violence, floating fear, and also its religiosity. Simone (2004) rightly conceptualises Johannesburg as a city of intersecting fragments, of ruins underneath and beyond which a complex network of relations and a sophisticated as well as resilient social infrastructure is discernible. Religion, and various overt and covert ritualistic practices that enable residents to confront violence and fear thereof is a significant component of this social infrastructure. Given its complexity, and the complexities of its ordinary residents, Johannesburg can best be described as an enchanted and enchanting web.

From this study emerge two key conclusions. First is the observation that the context of fear of violence and crime and a cohort of other urban disorders such as unemployment and poverty spur a retreat into the ambit of the divine and spiritual for protection and/or psychological comfort. This scenario that I describe constitutes a theologisation of everyday life – a condition in which people increasingly depend on

18. Interview, Security Officer, Sandton 23 May 2014.

an imagined theocratic order in confronting their everyday life and its challenges or opportunities. This theologisation is here conceptualised as a function of uncertainty and lack of faith in the state, especially in contexts of constant threats to humanity, as in the case of high levels of violence and crime. In the context of the narratives provided above, the majority of participants were in fact immigrants whose connection to the government in South Africa was characterised by distrust and fear; government agents such as police officers are themselves considered as some of the main culprits in the meting of violence and injustices on the bodies of immigrants. It is therefore not surprising that most of them turn to this imagined theocratic order, as opposed to the conventional government as they seek safety, or simply a sense thereof.

While religious rituals and religious institutions play an important role in configuring responses to violence in Johannesburg as discussed above, non-religious rituals are also significant. It is well known, from Malinowski, to Bourdieu to Giddens, that uncertainty and anxiety invoke a search for stability, not only by calling upon higher authority, theocratic or otherwise, in an attempt to institutionalise a sense of predictability and security. Non-religious rituals, in the form of habituated practices and strategies play a significant role in generating a sense of safety and security. These range from patterned ways of walking (and driving) in the city, following pathways of perceived safety, and temporal strategies such as avoiding spaces of the city considered dangerous at night. This chapter opens a minefield of research into the significance of religion, magic, and rituals in the mediation of violence and fear thereof in Johannesburg – a minefield whose exploration is still just at its infancy with possibilities for further debate, if not repudiation of some of the views here presented.

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