

# Spatial Contestation, Victimization and Resistance during Xenophobic Violence: The Experiences of Somali Migrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa

## AUTHOR

Ernest A. Pineteh  
Unit for Academic Literacy  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Pretoria  
South Africa  
Email: pineteh.angu@up.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses how violence between South Africans and Somali migrants plays out in different forms of spatial contestation, victimization and resistance during xenophobic attacks. It analyses Somalis' entrepreneurial strategies and the implications for access and appropriation of social and economic spaces around Cape Town. The article attempts to connect Somali perceptions of xenophobia and about South Africans' claims of spatial entitlement to issues of spatial control, belonging and social inclusion in South Africa. It argues that by establishing businesses in urban spaces and *townships*, Somali migrants have managed to establish stronger bonds and a collective identity, which give them better control over these spaces. Although their business tactics have propelled spatial contestations in which they have become easy targets during xenophobic incursions, the clustering of businesses has also created Somali-dominated localities around Cape Town, which facilitates rapid mobilisation to respond to or to resist different forms of crime and violence.

**Keywords:** Somali migrants, xenophobia, post-apartheid, South Africa, migrants

## INTRODUCTION

The xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa has been characterised by spatial contestations between citizens and non-citizens, whose presence in South Africa's fledgling democracy has been written as the usurpation of "an exclusive vision of citizenship and related entitlements" (Landau, 2011: 23). Pro-xenophobia narratives have been framed around myths and imaginations of "a subtle invasion of South African territory" by illegal aliens (Vigneswaran, 2007: 144). In this context, patterns of social mobilisation and violence characterised by maiming, looting, burning and murders portray unethical display of disillusionment, power, victimisation and resistance from both locals and African migrants. On the one hand Amit & Kriger (2014) and Landau (2011) have argued that xenophobia is symptomatic of local South Africans' erratic reactions to unfulfilled political promises, perhaps because in some instances the violence happens after service delivery protests. On the other hand, this form of violence is also an expression of locals' impassioned belief that access to the already limited resources of South Africa is the exclusive right of autochthons. The attacks on African migrants are therefore triggered by frustrations with the government, resource competition, a post-apartheid sense of entitlement, joblessness, poverty and destitution. These attacks provide opportunities for destitute locals to loot Somali shops and steal basic household products and groceries.

In xenophobia hotspots, we now see apartheid style "spatialised understandings of rights and belonging" used as salient tactics to eliminate "unwanted" Africans and take control of these localities (Landau & Misago, 2009:106; Thompson, 2016). This perpetuates an essentialist discourse of belonging amongst many South Africans, which establishes "a natural relationship between people and places" (Brun, 2001:17). Therefore, xenophobia and its violent undercurrents symbolise a new form of political agency in post-apartheid South Africa, which seeks to defend belonging and citizenship as "autochthonous cultural heritage" (Geschiere, 2009: 19).

The data used in this article was gleaned during a broader project on the experiences of Cape Town-based Somali victims of xenophobia. The article discusses Somalis' perceptions about xenophobia and about South African

nationals, constructed from experiences of spatial contestation, different forms of violence, victimisation and resistance during xenophobic attacks. It analyses Somalis' aggressive entrepreneurialism and the implications for access and appropriation of social and economic spaces around Cape Town. Here, the article attempts to connect Somali perspectives about xenophobic violence and South Africans' perceived claims of spatial entitlement to broader issues of spatial control, belonging and social inclusion in the new South Africa. It argues that despite the longstanding intra-business competition between the different social divisions that constitute the Somali migrant community, the establishment of *spaza* shops<sup>i</sup> and other forms of businesses in urban spaces and *townships* in Cape Town, has fostered stronger bonds, business networks and collective identity, which give them better control over these spaces (see Piper & Yu, 2016; Thompson & Grant, 2015). For instance, Somali business strategies often propelled spatial contestations in which they have become easy targets during xenophobic incursions and other forms of crime. However, the clustering of Somali businesses has also created Somali dominated spaces, which facilitates rapid mobilisation in response to or to resist any forms of violence against their community, while monopolising business opportunities (Gastrow & Amit, 2013; Piper & Yu, 2016).

In the following sections, the article uses excerpts from Somali narratives and evidence from existing studies, to analyse Somalis' perceptions about xenophobia and about local South Africans. It attempts to connect these perceptions to conceptions of power, spatial control, victimisation and resistance. Here, I conceptualise the article and I describe the participants of the project. I explain the research journey and data collection process. Finally, I analyse episodes of narrative accounts from Somali victims of xenophobia.

## CONCEPTUALISING THE RIGHTS TO BELONG AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Globalization has been characterised by the exponential increase in transnational migration and the "privatization of space and power in a period of rapid commercialization and commodification" (Zhang, 2001: 179). However, this narrative of "free flows and dissolving boundaries is countered by the intensifying reality of

borders, divisions and violent strategies of exclusion” (Nyamnjoh 2006:1). In fact, the ideology of globalisation is now defined through a set of contradictory idioms which express the fortification of national borders, protection of state resources, and citizens against those considered ‘outsiders’. Today, renewed debates about transnational migration and the right to belong especially in South Africa, now focus on tensions between social inclusion and exclusion and the limits of liberal democracy in protecting migrant and refugee rights (Amit & Kriger, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2006). For example “the shifting practices of [South Africa’s] Department of Home Affairs (DHA)” reflect global patterns of bureaucratic tactics to de-legitimise and reject migrants and refugees (Amit & Kriger 2014:269). In Europe and America, for example, the violent reactions to the influx of migrants have been perpetuated by “more exclusionary ideas of citizenship [which are] matched by the urge to detect difference and distinguish between ‘locals’, ‘national’, ‘citizen’, ‘autochthons’ or ‘insiders’ on the one hand, ‘foreigners’, ‘immigrants’, ‘strangers’ or ‘outsiders’...” on the other hand (Nyamnjoh, 2006: 3). Nevertheless, increasing transnational migration has led to new forms of citizenship and belonging that can no longer be ignored by states and their citizens. However, with the upsurge of African immigration into South Africa and the perceived competition over dwindling resources, the state and politicians seem to be echoing a return to citizenship based on indigeneity and autochthony. Recent political rhetoric and street level narratives are now very vociferous about locals’ exclusive entitlements to spaces, property and state resources, and these rights have been performed with impunity during the series of xenophobic attacks on African migrants (Landau 2011).

The indigenisation of citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa, which has given rise to several xenophobic attacks of African migrants, is indeed a postcolonial predicament. In the 1960s and 1980s, African migrants experienced several similar incidents of xenophobia in countries like Nigeria, Cote D’Ivoire; Cameroon; Ghana, Zambia, Sierra Leone and so on (Adepoju 1984: 430). This political framing of citizenship was propelled by the influx of migrants into these countries and the host governments’ commitment to protect and preserve limited state resources for indigenes only. An interesting paradox is that while local South Africans claim ownership of spaces and resources on the basis of indigeneity, as victims of a

mutilated Somalia, Somali migrants also “assert their rights to protection as stateless persons under South African government’s international commitments” (Thompson 2016: 90). Regardless of allegations that they are terrorists “bringing foreign disorder in South Africa” under the guise of refugees and that many of them are living illegally in South Africa, their “assertions of statelessness enable moral claims on South Africa as a relatively strong state, and seek to effect access to opportunities and resources within the country” (Thompson 2016:87/100).

The intricate spatial contestations and the display of rights to belong suggest that “whether emanating from official institutions or grassroots movements, xenophobic violence takes different forms in different spaces” (Thompson 2016:89). For example, in townships, it has been displayed through mob actions such as looting, maiming, stoning and burning of victims and property or through banditry and other forms of gangsterism. In urban areas, xenophobia is performed through unscrupulous and tactical police and military operations in migrant-concentrated areas (Gastrow & Amit, 2013; McMichael, 2015). Xenophobia in South Africa can therefore be linked to the notion that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978: 95) and conversely “where there is resistance, there is power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). We need to read the violence against Somalis in business spaces as a display of spatial control, power and resistance from both Somalis and South Africans. When migrants enter the country of destination, they immediately establish new and often imaginary homes, which they use to, “build up their power and authority by controlling housing and market spaces” (Zhang, 2001: 180). Through communal habitations and a sense of collective identity, they gradually implant themselves in residential and commercial spaces, and build “strong and resilient individuals and communities” (Weine, 2013: 81). With time, these spaces transform into migrant enclaves, contesting the “beliefs that [the rights to belong] are inextricably tied to someone’s territorial origin” (Landau & Misago, 2009: 100). Any xenophobic attack on African migrants in South Africa therefore reflects an “exclusive claim to territory and resources held within” (Ibid: 101). Scenes of these attacks explain how the South African territory has become a space for political and socioeconomic contestations between the state, its citizens and African migrants.

## DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Although this article is based strictly on evidence collected from Somalis who claimed they are originally from Somalia, studies on Somalis, their business operations and social existence in South Africa show that not all Somalis who flee to South Africa are originally from the politically mutilated Somalia. It is very likely that the Somali community in South Africa also includes some Kenyan-Somalis or Ethiopian-Somalis who might have fled political victimisation or other forms of discrimination in these countries. Therefore, whether the Somalis in South Africa are from Somali or elsewhere, many of them were forced to flee because of legitimate cases of victimisation and marginalisation. These studies also argue that not all Somalis are bona fide refugees or living in South Africa legally and that it is important to differentiate between glaring incidents of xenophobia and opportunistic acts of robberies (Amit & Kriger 2014; Gastrow, 2013; Grastrow & Amit 2013; Grant & Thompson, 2015). Although, I have argued previously that there is a link between xenophobia and perceived acts of banditry, it is necessary to provide a clearer description of participants of this study because South African politicians have tried to downplay xenophobic violence as random acts of criminality and/or robbery, or as the state and citizens' response to illegal aliens and migrant-orchestrated crimes (Hassim, Kupe & Worby, 2008).

The data used in this article was collected from 30 participants residing in the Bellville suburb and Khayelitsha Township in Cape Town. The participants were made up of 20 males and 10 females between the ages of 25 and 45 and they were selected using a snowballing approach. At the time of the interviews, 25 participants had been granted full refugee status and 5 were still on temporary asylum seeker permits. However, both permits legalize the participants' residency, with explicit rights to study and work in South Africa. The participants included 5 retail shop owners, 15 spaza shop owners in Khayelitsha, 3 shop attendants in Bellville and 7 roadside traders also in Bellville. During the interviews, shop owners and roadside traders claimed that they had been robbed, beaten and/or their businesses looted at least once between 2008 and 2015. For instance, shop owners in Bellville emphasised that they had been mainly victims of random robberies and sporadic lootings because of their location. However, spaza shop owners in the township

pointed out that they had experienced worst forms of xenophobic violence, ranging from vandalising and burning of shops to stoning and brutal murdering of Somalis. Of the 15 spaza owners, 5 claimed they had been shot at least once or had witnessed the brutal murder of another Somali business owner and 10 stated that they had been seriously beaten. Some of them showed scars of these incidents.

## RESEARCH JOURNEY AND DATA COLLECTION

Somali migrants are not very fluent in English, so conducting 30-60 minute interviews in English was a major challenge. To address this challenge, I recruited, as a research assistant, a postgraduate Somali student at the University of the Western Cape, with research experience and who was very familiar with the Somali community. His primary responsibilities included scheduling interview appointments, conducting interviews, interpreting and transcribing of data.

Through the research assistant's networks and association with the Somali community, I was able to gain access and conduct the interviews. We used a snowball approach to interview all 30 participants. The participants were generally willing to be interviewed because they construed this study as an opportunity to contribute to debates about xenophobia. Before each interview, we explained the purpose of the research and through a consent form, we requested permission to audio-record all the interviews. This form clearly explained ethical issues including confidentiality and anonymity. For this reason, the participants are cited in this article simply as 'participant' and suffix numbers between 1 and 30.

Personal interviews were conducted from July to September 2015 and later on transcribed and in some cases translated from Somali/Arabic into English. The data was then categorised into key themes, coded and analysed accordingly. The analysis revealed intricacies of belonging and the characteristics of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. They also revealed aspects of spatial contestation victimisation and resistance during xenophobic violence.

## SOMALI ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SPATIAL CONTESTATION AND DISPLAY OF POWER

In Cape Town, the Somali community's predominant livelihood strategies are characterised by risk-taking and entrepreneurship. They have devised a medley of business strategies which place them at a competitive advantage and provide an opportunity to appropriate business spaces. For example, in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, they have transformed sections of suburbs such as Bellville, Mayfair and Jeppetown into Somali enclaves. Studies on Somali businesses or spaza shops in South Africa such as those by Charman & Piper (2012), Gastrow & Amit (2013); Liedeman et al (2013), Piper & Yu (2016), Thompson & Grant (2015), Thompson (2016) and Gastrow (2013) attribute Somali business successes in South Africa to similar strategies. These strategies include ethnic clustering, competitive pricing, discounts, cheap labour, clan-based networks, shareholding, joint ownership, long operational hours, low rentals and a sense of solidarity.

Many of these strategies also featured in other studies conducted in other countries such as Jones, Ram & Theodorakopoulos (2010) on Somalis in Leicester, United Kingdom and Carrier & Lochery (2013) in Eastleigh, Kenya. In the South African context, these strategies facilitate the setting of businesses, enhance profitability and sustainability. These business successes have given Somalis the opportunity to control business spaces and to develop their own sense of spatial entitlement. This sense of spatial entitlement comes with an overt display of power in local communities, positioning their businesses and/or spaza shops as prime targets during xenophobic violence and/or robberies. One participant testifies:

South Africans think that they can force me out of my business place just because they are South Africans. But the place that I do my business is my own because I have an agreement with the landlord. When I went to pay for this place, they did not say no, they are not going to take my money because I am a Somali. If South Africans cannot afford the money the landlord is asking, it is not my problem. Yes, they can chase other Somalis but I am not leaving because I pay rent here and the local council gave me permission to do business here, so I have to protect my business. I have my own weapons and

I am ready for them anytime-they have tried several times and failed  
(Participant 6)

This participant is a 34 years old man who has lived and operated a spaza shop in Khayelitsha for more than five years. In his testimony, he claimed that during this period he has fought with thieves, looters and local shop owners to protect his livelihood. Here, we see claims of spatial ownership accorded by a tenancy agreement as well as a narrative of arrogance stemming from rental affordability. Such display of spatial ownership, infuriates locals who often perceive African migrants as 'illegal aliens' usurping their economic opportunities. This participant's narrative account provides a pretext for the eruption of xenophobic violence in the South African township.

In fact, since the post-1990 "deregulation of entrepreneurial spaces" (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000: 25), there has been a rapid expansion of Somali businesses and a unique culture of spaza shops in urban intersections and townships in Cape Town, positioning Somalis at the margins of xenophobic attacks. The decentring of local businesses in these spaces has given rise to a xenophobia tendency shaped by what Charman and Piper (2012:5) refer to as "violent entrepreneurship". Studies on Somali businesses as those cited previously, show that there is a relationship between Somalis aggressive entrepreneurship and many South Africans' justification of xenophobia, in that perennially disgruntled local business owners instigate violence "as part of a struggle to recapture lost market space or secure market advantage" (Charman & Piper, 2012: 5)

Today, local market spaces in Cape Town suburbs and townships exude images and symbols of ethnic heterogeneity, "transnational flow of labor and capital, an uneven spatial and social development" (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2008: 3). In Bellville, there is an uneasy spatial transformation of the inner city of this erstwhile white suburb into a Somali space. The queuing of formal and informal businesses on both sides of the streets and the emergence of Somali mini-malls have created strong Somali networks as they now seem to control these inner-city spaces. The following extract explains the reasons for Somali business dominance in Bellville.

We have a good relationship with Somalis in Johannesburg and they supply us with stuff for good prices better than here in Cape Town. Here, we have come together and started our own wholesales where we supply to spaza shop owners in townships. The problem in Bellville is that to find a place to open a business is very difficult and many Africans are looking for places. So when we see an empty building, we come together and raise the money quickly and pay the deposit and several months of rent. After that we open shops in the building. When South Africans see that we have businesses in a whole building, they don't like it but it is because we work together (Participant 8)

This participant has operated a successful grocery business in one of the many buildings occupied by Somali shops in the Bellville CBD for 10 years. This building is located at close proximity to the main Bellville train station and a taxi terminus. This particular business area now resembles Mogadishu. In fact, some of these buildings carry symbols of Somalia such as the national flag and unfamiliar extra-large satellite dishes that connect them to broader networks of information from the Horn of Africa and Arab countries. During xenophobic violence these buildings become sites to mobilize and respond to mob actions.

This control of business spaces symbolises a unique style of Somali economic patronage and cultural images which mirror themselves through easy access to capital and “complex transnational network entrepreneurship, which [assists] in the start-up and functioning of their business enterprise in South Africa” (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000: 35). As one walks through the streets of Bellville, the Somali identity is displayed powerfully through language, cultural rituals and idioms such as traditional cuisine and fashion. Here, there is a sense of spatial control, as goods and money exchange hands either from one Somali to another; from a wholesaler to a retailer or from other African migrants buying from Somalis.

In this commercial hub, there is a performance of economic successes and a new social lifestyle as Somali migrants drive and park cars and trucks recklessly, defying

all possible traffic laws. This spectacle of Somali business practices epitomises power and control with Somalis emboldened by a sense of spatial ownership, mediated through close knitted business networks and a sense of collective consciousness. Besides traditional South African popular franchises such as Shoprite, Pick'n Pay, KFC, Morkels and so on, business sections of Bellville are becoming more and more impenetrable for other local business owners. By aggressively appropriating these spaces, the Somali case exemplifies an uncommon pattern of tactical cosmopolitanism (Landau & Freemantle, 2010) which does not only implant Somalis at the centre of business activities but makes them prime crime and xenophobia targets.

I understand why South Africans are angry that we have shops everywhere and that we are taking business from them. But in South Africa, there is no law that stops foreigners from opening businesses anywhere. We can open our shops anywhere because we have the money to pay the landlords. If South Africans cannot open businesses like Somalis, they should ask their government to put a law against foreigners running businesses in South Africa, instead of attacking and killing us stealing our things. They cannot just attack people and try to burn their shops just because this is their country and that we are taking their businesses. I have the right to stay here and make my own living (Participant 12).

Participant 12's testimony exudes an arrogance of financial power resulting from Somali economic successes and this power often plays out during contestations over business spaces. As mentioned previously, Somalis' financial power has given them access and control over business spaces in Bellville. Here, this financial power is sometimes used to influence the process of leasing properties from the municipality and from landlords, and/or to force potential competitors out of the race for spaces. As an owner of a spaza shop in Khayelitsha and a clothing boutique in Bellville, this participant attributes his successes to the financial might of Somali networks in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Although Somalis are legal asylum seekers and refugees, and despite their financial power, there is still a display of autochthonous claims over spaces and an underlying rhetoric, which constructs Somalis as undesirable people

reaping where they did not sow. During xenophobic violence, the spatial contestation is also driven by the recurrent “convenient metaphor of illegal alien...gaining undeserved advantages”. (Murray, 2003: 447). The narrative points to South Africans’ attempts to de-legitimise Somalis’ right to belong accorded to them by the South African government (Landau, 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2006).

Moreover, aforementioned studies on xenophobia and Somali businesses allude to locals’ discontentment with Somalis’ spatial appropriation, which seemingly have deprived South Africans of business opportunities. However, Somali accounts of experiences of xenophobia perceive South Africans’ claim over business spaces as a fortuitous sense of entitlement because as bona-fide asylum seekers and refugees, they have the right to operate businesses in South Africa. One participant testifies:

Since the day that Mandela came out of prison, many Africans have been coming to this country because he welcomed us here. South Africans should know that this country does not belong to them only because there are refugees also living here. Their government signed agreements to take care of refugees. They should be happy that we are doing our business not waiting for the government to take care of us (Participant 10).

In this quotation, Somalis audacious right to space originates from a clause in South Africa’s Freedom Charter and constitution that “South Africa belongs to all those who live in it” and from international refugee protection agreements, which South Africa is a signatory (Mcknight 2008; Crush & Pendleton, 2004). For participant 10, South Africa’s refugee policy of integration in communities rather than secluded encampment, provides refugees with legitimate access to spaces. Therefore, Somalis see xenophobic violence as a violation of their legal right to integrate and find ways to survive in South African communities. Their response to xenophobic violence is therefore a moral agency to protect their spaces and livelihoods and to oppose locals’ violation of fundamental refugee rights.

## VICTIMISATION AND SOMALIS' RESISTANCE TO XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

For Somali migrants, the display of their entrepreneurial skills and the control of business spaces provide them with the power to resist and/or be more resilient to xenophobia. Also, because they have no home to return to, they are ready not to allow "claims to localized resources and competing definitions of belonging to a certain territory" to force them out of South Africa (Fourchard & Segatti, 2015: 8). In Cape Town townships and suburbs such as Khayelitsha and Bellville, local South Africans loot and burn shops and/or mutilate and brutally murder Somalis, as a way of reclaiming lost spaces and exorcising illegal migrants. But Somalis still operate businesses in these volatile spaces. One participant shares their experience of victimisation

One evening in 2008, I was sitting in the shop and I heard people shouting "these 'makwerekwere' must go back to their country". I went outside and saw a group of South Africans with knives; sticks, stones and metals. They were coming towards my shop, so I quickly locked the door and called the police. When they came, they started hitting the door with metals and stone and fortunately my shop is in a metal container. They broke the window with stones and they were shouting "come out and we will burn you and this shop". Luckily for me the police was coming and when they saw the police car they ran away. I was so afraid because I thought they were going to burn me like they did to another Somali shop owner. It is bad but we have nowhere to go because there is still war in Somalia (Participant 11).

In the interview, this participant mentioned that he escaped from Al-Shabaab insurgency in Somalia in 2004 and he has lived in South Africa for more than 10 years. During this period he has managed to build a new life with his family and although he has been a victim of violent attacks, he can't return to Somalia because of Al-Shabaab incursions. For him, xenophobia is essentially "discrimination against non-citizens [which] threatens further fragmentation and social marginalisation" (Landau, 2007: 61). Despite the legitimate right to belong, they are isolated and remain vulnerable to hostilities because as foreigners they "stand at a site where

identity, racism and violence practices are reproduced” (Harris, 2002: no page). Contrary to the statement that “South Africa belongs to all those who live in it” the attack of Somalis or any other African migrant is perceived here as an impassioned statement that South Africa is for autochthonous South Africans only. However, Somali migrants often find ways to resist victimisation from locals

During xenophobia, these people come out on the streets with everything, stones, knives, hatchets, petrol and even guns, ready to burn African shops and kill. So you can see they do not want us here... Because they do not want us, we have to make sure we fight for ourselves. We have to work together like Somalis and that is why we open our shops in the same place. You see here in Bellville our businesses are together, sometimes in the same building and when South Africans try to attack one person, we can easily join and fight back. One day, they attacked one Somali shop up the street and we saw them, we immediately took our weapons and rushed to the scene. We started fighting with them and as more Somalis were coming they managed to escape (Participant 8)

The idea of clustering shops is a common business strategy and defence mechanism for Somalis in suburbs and in some townships. For example, in Bellville a strong Somali bond is seen when they collude to take over business spaces, sometimes through bribery of local officials, and when they gang up to attack robbers and looters during xenophobic violence. By clustering and controlling business spaces, it is easy to spot danger and mobilise other Somalis. Although, this is not the case in the entire Cape Town, for this participant, business proximity and close networks have been very effective defence mechanisms for many Cape Town-based Somalis.

Somali experiences of victimisation symbolise generalised tribulations of the African diasporic community in South Africa. These experiences have been written in a grand narrative, which continues to mimic post-apartheid South Africa as a racialised society “where everything is judged in terms of having, taking, owning and

controlling” (Gibson, 2011:196). In the account below, the respondent locates xenophobia within this broader frame of “black on black” racism:

My understanding of xenophobia is that it is racism. When I was in Worcester in 2010; I remember that before the world cup started, our customers told us in one of the local languages that we would go back to our country because we are bringing all the bad things to their country like crime, drugs and corruption. They also are not criminals, so only foreigners bring crime. When they broke into our shops and houses, they stole our stuff: food, clothes, TVs. Is that not crime? When the police do nothing about it, we have to fight back because we Somalis don't commit crime; we work hard for our money (Participant 7)

This participant has operated a spaza shop for the past seven years in Khayelitsha and his business hours are 6am-10pm every day. This business strategy increases their daily profit margin and creates opportunities for local shop owners and community youths to attack and loot Somali shops especially at night. To incite violence, local shop owners return to common street level narratives which frame Somalis as illegal immigrants and pollutants, bringing crime into their communities. Interestingly, likening xenophobia to racism even though xenophobia is essentially “black on black violence” (Gibson, 2011: 195), is not uncommon in today's South Africa, especially given the ubiquity of racialised behaviours and attitudes from blacks, whites and sometimes from migrants.

In the above quotation, we see the interplay of competing forces, whereby the participant's construction of South Africans' fervour to get rid of Somalis is met with the victims' strong determination to stay in South Africa. The blaming of Africans as catalysts of the social problems in South Africa is driven by powerful and racist practices which continue to shape post-apartheid South Africa. Here, xenophobia is constructed as a new metaphor for racism as migrants are caught between increasing racial violence emanating from black discontentment and frustrations about widening white racial superiority and privilege after the demise of apartheid (Gibson, 2011; Harris, 2003). For this respondent, post-apartheid South Africa is still

a deeply racially divided society, which continues to oppress and impoverish black South Africans while inversely perpetuating a culture of *afro-pessimism*, which plays out in different forms of social violence against African migrants.

The victimisation and exclusion of Somalis symbolise the locals' attempts to exorcise the 'Other' because apartheid's policy of isolation ensured that South Africa was left with "no history of incorporating strangers" (Morris, 1998: 1125). After decades of constitutional democracy and the influx of African migrants, the recurrence of xenophobic violence is an affirmation of the rhetoric of the unwanted stranger or the illegal alien whose activities are constantly linked to criminality, banditry or thuggery. The attempts to exclude and eliminate Somali migrants reflect a broader local project to exorcise the perceived demons from other parts of Africa (See Landau 2011; Hassim, Kupe & Worby, 2008).

I don't think they target us or that we are different to other Africans because they also attack Mozambicans, Nigerians, Zimbabweans, etc. Yes we have shops in the townships but for me it is because South Africans don't like all foreigners in their country. They think we are bad people who do crime and drugs. But every day they come and rob our shops, who are the criminals here? They just want us out of their country. This is bad because we cannot live here in peace and we can't go back to our country... (Participant 6)

You saw how they burnt the Mozambican guy in 2008, they threw petrol on him and light a match [sic], and he was burning and shouting and no one came to help him. This is what they are doing to Somalis in the townships, they will hit you with anything, they will shoot you with a gun or burn you if they break into your shop and you are helpless. They are doing this to all foreigners because they are saying we are taking their jobs (Participant 13)

This study revealed that in South African townships, competition over business spaces, pricing and customers have resulted in the burning and looting of many Somali businesses. Although participant 13 has been victimised and robbed several times during the 6 years that he has operated a spaza shop, he feels these incidents

are attempts to exorcise not only Somalis but foreigners in general. His recollection of victimisation is narrated against the background of a collective identity used to represent African migrants. Here, the metaphor of the stranger or “immigrant as pollutant” (Cisneros, 2008: 569) is used as a tactic for victimisation and rejection. Also the myth of criminality employed to legitimise xenophobic violence is an unfounded “suspicion that foreigners are derailing the country’s progress towards national self-realisation and the promises of freedom-prosperity, equality, security and global prominence” (Landau & Freemantle, 2010: 378). The narrative explains the way South Africans continue to image the country as an erstwhile flawless society which has transformed into a gangster’s paradise because of the influx of African migrants.

Given the number of Somali murders or the amount of financial losses incurred since the irruption of xenophobic violence in 2008, one would expect Somalis to find alternative ways of survival or return to Somali. But they continue to do business in volatile places where they are expected to deal with local intolerances. For them, there are no plans of returning home because of political instability and al-Shabaab incursions. They stressed that they would rather stay in South Africa and find ways to resist victimisation rather than return to an al-Shabaab-controlled Somalia.

We are not going anywhere. We come from Somali and we know how to fight war, so they should not think that we are just going to sit and allow them to kill us and take our businesses. We have learnt that the police are also very xenophobic, so they will not always come to save our lives; we have to do it ourselves, that’s why we have a Somali Association in Cape Town. This association is to bring us together, so that we can support each other. I am sure you saw the way we got into our bakkies and went after the people who came to attack Somalis in one of the townships (Participant 18).

During gruesome attacks of Somali migrants, the South African Police has often failed to respond swiftly because of their own perceptions about foreigners. In some cases, the police have played the role of curious observers, watching with keen interest, how locals violently attack and murder foreign nationals (Hassim, Kupe &

Worby 2008). Their indifference and reluctance to respond decisively to xenophobic violence have prompted reactionary responses from migrant communities. In Cape Town and Johannesburg, Somalis and Nigerians have equally retaliated violently in isolated areas in these cities. The above quotation suggests that the Somali Association in Cape Town has played a key role not only in enforcing a sense of collective identity and solidarity but also in mobilising Somalis to resist xenophobic violence.

Furthermore, one level of understanding the exclusion and victimisation of Cape-based Somali migrants is by plotting their experiences against the backlash of broader South African obsession with Africans as pollutants, “strangers [who] potentially bring with them monumental and threatening changes” (Cisneros, 2008: 569). Generalised metaphors of criminality or social deviance captured in the excerpts reinforce the dominant narrative in South Africa about the perceived dangers of immigration.

I went to Home Affairs where I filled in forms and was given a permit for 6 months. When it expires, I would normally go back and renew it. The last time I went back, I filled in all the forms. The officer then told me I do not qualify for a 2 year permit. When I asked him the reason for that, he started to insult me. I told him I don't deserve these insults but he just carried on, telling me I am a fucking foreigner and I don't have any right in this country (participant 20)

This participant's experience at Home Affairs is similar to several other experiences whereby legal migrants and asylum seekers have suddenly become illegal because state officials unlawfully refuse to renew their permits. By so doing, asylum seekers suddenly change from legal to illegal migrants, exposing them to more victimisation from the police and citizens. By framing his experiences around this broader construction of foreigners, their account helps us to understand why the South African government has tended to focus on “nativist, racist and xenophobic justifications for immigration restrictions” (Cisneros, 2008: 571).

## CONCLUSION

During xenophobic violence, there is always a seamless display of power and resistance from state institutions, community groups and migrant communities who are seen “as a threat to the citizenry’s economic and physical well-being” (Landau & Misago, 2009: 102). In this study, empirical evidence gleaned from participants has exposed us to myriad entrepreneurial strategies used by Somali migrants to access and take control of business spaces in Bellville and Khayelitsha. Although these strategies have positioned them at the margins of xenophobic violence, they have also helped them to build a resilient Somali community capable of resisting different forms of victimisation. In this context, they see themselves as people with “a present life, where they need to survive, to make a livelihood and thus through their actions construct the place where they are physically present” (Brun, 2001: 19). For them, home is not Somalia but South Africa and they need to confront victimisation, resist and protect themselves from xenophobic violence in urban spaces and townships. In the guise of xenophobia, South Africans have expressed their sense of entitlement and rejection of any form of co-habitation with Africans. It is no secret that many local South Africans do not want ‘foreigners’ in the country for reasons that are subversive to South Africa’s claims of a liberal democracy and a ‘rainbow’ nation whose constitution provides judicial citizenship to non-citizens. The article has therefore analysed Somalis experiences of spatial contestation and victimisation as well as their perceptions of the ways local citizens use violent tactics to lay autochthonous claims to business spaces.

Xenophobia and its plethora of violent displays in post-apartheid South Africa seem to suggest that the country is yet to humanise itself. Although it is enshrined in the Freedom Charter and the Constitution that “South Africa belongs to all those who live it” the violence on other Africans including Cape Town-based Somali migrants, suggests that the utopia of a better South Africa for all is over and the new South Africa is yet to embrace African migrants with legal documents not as criminals and illegal aliens but as human beings with legitimate rights to live in South Africa. In making meanings from the experiences of Somali victims of xenophobia, this article claims that “spatialised understanding of rights and belonging” is bound to trigger “considerable infighting and competition for power and legitimacy among different

groups present in affected areas” (Landau & Misago, 2009:106). Xenophobic violence illustrates that as local South Africans continue to display an autochthonous sense of belonging through mob violence, they should expect similar reactions from legitimate migrants who have made South Africa their new home. These reactions and counter-reactions to the different conceptions of belonging will see more and more conflicting displays of power, spatial contestation and resistance.

## REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, L.

1990 “The Romance of Resistance. Tracing Transformation of Power through Beduin Women”, *American Ethnologist*, 17(1): 41-55

Adepoju, A.

1984 “Illegals and Expulsion in Africa: The Nigerian Experience”, *The International Migration Review*, 18(3): 426-436

Amit, R. and N. Kriger

2014 “Making Migrants ‘Il-legible’: The Policies and Practices of Documentation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Kronos*, 40 (1): 269-290

Andrew, M; C. Squire, and M. Tamboukou, M, eds.

2013 *Doing narrative research*. London: Sage.

Brun, C.

2001 “Reterritorializing the Relationship between People and Place in Refugee Studies”, *Human Geography*, 83(1): 15-25

Carrier, N. and E. Lochery

2013 “Missing States? Somali Trade Networks and the Eastleigh Transformation,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7 (2): 334-352

Charman, A., and L. Piper

2012 “Xenophobia, criminality and violent entrepreneurship: violence against Somali shopkeepers in Delft South, Cape Town, South Africa”, *South African Review of Sociology*, 43(3), 81-105

Cisneros, J.D.

2008 "Contaminated Communities: 'the Metaphor of Immigrant as Pollutant' in Media Representations of Immigration", *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 11(4): 569-602.

Comaroff, J., and J. Comaroff

2001 "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (1): 627-651.

Comaroff, J., and J. Comaroff

2002 "Alien-nation: Zombies, Immigrants and Millennial Capitalism", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(4): 779-805.

Crush, J. ed.

2008 *The perfect storm: Xenophobia in contemporary South Africa*. South African Migration Project. Cape Town: Institute for Democracy in South Africa.

Crush, J., and W. Pendleton

2004 *Regionalizing Xenophobia? Citizen Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Southern Africa*. Canada: Southern African Migration Project.

Desai, A.

2010 "After the Rainbow: Following the Footprints of the May 2008 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa", *Review of African Political Economy* 37(1): 99-105.

Dludla, S.

2014 "5 Reasons why Foreign-run Spaza Shops do better than local counterparts", *SME South Africa*, 20 October 2014

Dodson, B.

2010 "Locating Xenophobia; Debate, Discourse, and Everyday Experience in Cape Town, South Africa", *Africa Today* 56 (3): 2-22.

Foucault, M.

1978 *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Random House

Fourchard, L., and A. Segatti

2015 "Xenophobic Violence and the Manufacture of Difference in Africa: Introduction to the Focus Section", *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 9 (1): 4-11

Gastrow, V. and R. Amit

2013 "Somalinomics: A Case Study on the Economics of Somali Informal Trade in the Western Cape," *ACMS Research Report*.

Gastrow, V.

2013 "Business Robbery, The Foreign Trader and the Small Shop: How Business Robberies Affect Somali Traders in the Western Cape. *SA Crime Quarterly*, 43:5-15

Geschiere, P.

2009 *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa & Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gibson, N.C.

2011 *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*. Durban: University of KwaZulu- Natal Press

Gordon, J.A., and L.R. Gordon

2009 *Of Divine Warning: Reading Disaster in the Modern Age*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Gqola, P.

2001 "Defining People: Analysing Power, Language and Representation in Metaphors of the New South Africa", *Transformation* 47: 94-106.

Grant, R. and D. Thompson

2015 "City on Edge: Immigrant Business and the Right to Urban Space in Inner-city Johannesburg," *Urban Geography*, 36 (2): 181-200

Haffajee, F.

2015 *What if there were no Whites in South Africa?* Johannesburg: Picador Africa.

Harris, B.

2001 "A Foreign Experience: Violence, Crime and Xenophobia during South Africa's Transition", *Violence and Transition Series*, 5.

Harris, B.

2002 "Xenophobia: A new pathology for a new South Africa?" In Hook, Derek, and Eagle, Gillian, eds. *Pyschopathology and social prejudice*, pp 169-18, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Harris, B.

2003 "Spaces of violence, places of fear: Urban conflict in post-apartheid South Africa", Paper presented on the Conflict and urban Violence Panel, Foro Social Mundial Tematico, Cartagena, Colombia, 16-20 June 2003.

Hassim, S.; T. Kupe and E. Worby, eds.

2008 *Go Home or Die here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg. Wits University Press.

Hayem, J.

2013 "From May 2008 to 2011: Xenophobic Violence and National Subjectivity in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39(1): 77- 97

Henning, E., W. Van Rensburg, and B. Smit

2004 *Finding your Way in Qualitative Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Hickel, J.

2014 "Xenophobia" in South Africa: Order, Chaos, and the Moral Economy of Witchcraft", *Cultural Anthropology*, 29(1), 103-127

Jones, T.; M. Ram and N. Theodorakopoulos

2010 "Transnationalism as a Force for Ethnic Minority Enterprise? The Case of Somalis in Leicester," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34 (3), 565-585

Landau, L.B., and I. Freemantle

2010 "Tactical Cosmopolitanism and Idioms of Belonging: Insertion and Self-Exclusion in Johannesburg", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(3), 375-390.

Landau, L. B.

2007 "Discrimination and Development? Immigration, Urbanization and Sustainable Livelihoods in Johannesburg", *Development Southern Africa*, 24(1): 61-76.

Landau, L B., and J.P. Misago

2009 "Who to Blame and What's to Gain? Reflections on Space, State, and Violence in Kenya and South Africa", *Africa Spectrum*, 44(1), 99-110.

Landau, L.B. ed.

2011 *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press

Liedeman, R.; A. Charman; L. Piper and L. Petersen

2013 "Why are Foreign-run Spaza Shops more Successful? The Rapidly Changing Spaza Sector in South Africa," [www.econ3x3.org](http://www.econ3x3.org).

Mbembe, A., and S. Nutall, eds.

2008 *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

McKnight, J.

2008 "Through the Fear: A Study of Xenophobia in South Africa's Refugee System", *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 2 (2): 18-42

McMichael, C.

2015 "Urban Pacification and 'Blitzes' in Contemporary Johannesburg", *Antipode*, 47 (5): 1261-78.

Morris, A.

1998 "Our fellow Africans Make our Lives Hell': The Lives of Congolese and Nigerians Living in Johannesburg", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21(6): 1111-1136.

Murray, M.J.

2013 "Alien Strangers in our Midst: The Dreaded Foreign Invasion and Fortress South Africa", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37(2/3): 440-466

Neocosmos, M.

2010 *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in post-Apartheid South Africa. Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics*. Dakar: Codesria.

Nyamnjoh, F.B.

2006 *Insiders & Outsiders: citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*. Dakar: Codesria books

Peberdy, S., and C. Rogerson

2000 "Transnationalism and Non-South African Entrepreneurs in South Africa's Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMME) Economy", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34: 20-40.

Piper, L. and D. Yu

2016 "Deconstructing 'the foreign': The Limits of Citizenship for Explaining Price Competition in the Spaza Sector in South Africa," *Development Southern Africa*, 33 (5): 658-676

Ram, M.; N. Theodorakopoulous and T. Jones

2008 "Forms of Capital, Mixed Embeddedness and Somali Enterprise," *Work, Employment and Society*, 22 (3): 427-446

Thompson, D.K.

2017 "Scaling Statelessness: Absent, Present, Former, and Liminal States of Somali Experiences in South Africa", *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 40 (1): 86-103.

Thompson, D.K

2016 "Risky Business and Geographies of Refugee Capitalism in the Somali Migrant Economy of Gauteng, South Africa," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42 (1): 120-135

Thompson, D.K

2016 "Reinscription of "stateless" Socialites in South Africa: Some Thoughts on "Metropolitan Nomads: A Journey through Jo'burg's 'Little Mogadishu'," *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 39 (3): 241-244

Thompson, D.K. and R. Grant.

2015 “Enclaves on Edge: Strategy and Tactics in Immigrant Business Spaces in Johannesburg”, *Urban Forum*, 26: 243-262

Vigneswaran, D.

2007 “Undocumented Migration: Risk and Myths (1998-2005)”.In A. Wa-Kabwe Segatti & L. Landau, eds. *Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Challenges and Questions to Policy-Makers*. Paris: Agence Française de Development

Weine, S.

2013 “Building Community Resilience to Counter Violent Extremism”, *Journal of International Affairs*, 14 (2): 81-89

Zack, T

2015 “ ‘Jeppe’-Where Low-End Globalisation, Ethnic, Entrepreneurialism and the Arrival City Meet,” *Urban Forum* 26: 131-150

Zack, T. and Y.S. Estifanos

2016 “Somewhere else: Social Connection and Dislocation of Ethiopian Migrants in Johannesburg,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 9 (2): 149-165

Zhang, L.

2001 “Migration and Privatization of Space and Power in Late Socialist China”, *American Ethnologist*, 28 (1): 179-205

---

<sup>i</sup> Spaza shops are micro-convenience stores which operate in township residential areas, selling groceries, bread, cool drinks, prepaid airtime, sweets and cigarettes (Dludla, 2014)