The smoke that calls

Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa.

Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence

Karl von Holdt, Malaxe Lange, Sepetla Molapo, Nontlwana Mogapi, Kindiza Ngubeni, Jacob Dlamini and Adele Kirsten
The smoke that calls: insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa. Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence.
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Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence

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July 2011
Acknowledgements

This innovative research project would not have been possible without the willing and engaged participation of community members across the eight sites. They provided the research team with invaluable information and rich insights into the current dilemmas and challenges facing poor communities across South Africa.

The researchers were a dedicated and energetic team who explored creative approaches to gathering information and were mutually supportive of each other’s work: Jacob Dlamini, Malose Langa, Molanunta Molaba, Sepetla Molapo, Kindiza Ngubeni, Hamadziripi Tamukamoyo, Malehoko Tshoedi, and Karl von Holdt.

Trudy Ajibogun of CSVR and Christine Bischoff of SWOP ably provided some much-needed administrative support.

Professor Jacklyn Cock needs special mention for being a catalyst and helping initiate the project. Her intellectual contribution throughout the duration of the project—from the first tentative idea mooted soon after the May 2008 xenophobic attacks to the publication of this report in July 2011—is highly appreciated.

Lara Jacob for her rigorous editing of the sprawling text presented by the researchers. Sally Dore of Design Aid for her ability to meet unrealistic deadlines with equanimity, and for the creativity of her design.

And finally a very big thank you to the donors—The Royal Norwegian Embassy and the C.S. Mott Foundation—for their enthusiastic support of this project and without whom this important work could not have been undertaken.
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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDF</td>
<td>Bokfontein Development Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDW</td>
<td>Community Development Workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSVR</td>
<td>Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>Concerned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPF</td>
<td>Community Policing Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPE</td>
<td>Congress of the People</td>
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<tr>
<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Collective Trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWP</td>
<td>Community Work Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG</td>
<td>Director-General</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRA</td>
<td>Displaced Residents Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSMIII</td>
<td>Diagnostic Statistical Manual III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUSA</td>
<td>Democratic Union of South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPWP</td>
<td>Extended Public Works Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAWU</td>
<td>Food and Allied Workers Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FET</td>
<td>Further Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Independent Electoral Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFP</td>
<td>Inkatha Freedom Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCR0</td>
<td>Gauteng City-Region Observatory</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Member of Executive Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIA</td>
<td>National Intelligence Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>OW</td>
<td>Organisational Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>OWC</td>
<td>Organisational Work Crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan African Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>PASO</td>
<td>Pan African Students Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAYCO</td>
<td>Pan African Youth Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEC</td>
<td>Provincial Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDP</td>
<td>Reconstruction and Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>REC</td>
<td>Regional Executive Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANCO</td>
<td>South African National Civics Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDU</td>
<td>Self-Defence Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Student Representative Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWDP</td>
<td>Society Work and Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDM</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP</td>
<td>Very Important Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVIP</td>
<td>Very Very Important Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU-PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAPU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African People’s Union</td>
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Introduction

Project Leaders:
Adèle Kirsten and Karl von Holdt

There are several innovations to the research projects captured in this report. Firstly, it consists of studies of both xenophobic violence and community protests, drawing the links both empirically as one of collective action spawns or mutates into another, and theoretically through the concept of insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008). Secondly, the research was conceived of, and conducted, through a collaboration between an NGO, The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and an academic research institute, the Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at University of the Witwatersrand. This brought together scholars and practitioners, psychologists and sociologists, in a challenging and productive partnership to try to understand collective violence and its underlying social dynamics. Thirdly, it combines an attempt to probe and understand the repertoires and meanings of collective violence with a wide-ranging analysis of local associational life, local politics and class formation.

The origins of this research lay in the appalling violence of the wave of xenophobic attacks which swept across the country in May 2008, and the response of both organisations to this. CSVR was rapidly drawn into coordinating the relief work of NGOs across Gauteng, while in SWOP there was a sense that this violence connected to current research on strike violence and social precariousness. For both of our organisations, it seemed increasingly important to look at this outbreak of violence with a fresh eye for ways in which it challenged our understanding of the depths of anger, fragmentation, exclusion and violence in our society and, more specifically, the intervention practices which still drew much of their inspiration from the negotiated transition to democracy in South Africa. Ready assumptions about violence as pathological or criminal, about ‘lost generations’, about ‘community organisations’ and ‘civil society’, conflict mediation and educational workshops, needed to be tested with empirical research and new theoretical perspectives.

While we were developing the research proposals and beginning discussions with potential funders, a new wave of conflict swept across the country, with the epicentre—as in the xenophobic violence—in Gauteng. The community protests against poor service delivery, corruption and the lack of consultation with communities by government often flared into violence between protesters and police, and not infrequently involved episodes of xenophobic violence as well. The research project was re-conceptualised to explore the differences and linkages between these different forms of collective action and violence and, with funding secured, researchers were in the field in late 2009.

Our research methodology was designed to achieve the benefits both of in-depth qualitative research to explore the meanings, relationships and contestations within a specific research site, and the insights of comparative perspectives across research sites. The small team of researchers researched a diverse selection of eight different sites in two provinces over the following year, with each researcher being involved in at least two research sites, so that all researchers were fully alive to the comparative dimension of the research. A combination of key informant and snowballing selection was used to identify interviewees, and researchers also employed participant observation, attending meetings, rallies and parties, as well as hanging out in taverns and homes. Jacob Dlamini’s influence on our research strategies requires particular mention, as he used his sharply honed newshound skills to conduct impromptu interviews and informal focus groups on street corners, in taxis and taverns, and at
community water points. Other researchers learned from this, and applied similar research tactics in their sites. Caroline Moser’s ‘community mapping’ research strategy helped us to think through the implications of this (Moser & McIlwain, 2004).

We have committed ourselves to maintaining the confidentiality of informants, given the sensitive and controversial nature of the information they provided us, which could expose them to considerable danger from local elites and rivals. Hence, we have attempted to conceal not only individual identities, but also the identity of research sites. We trust that readers will bear with this sometimes cumbersome requirement.

The overall comparative analysis, as well as the insights of the more detailed site case studies, is explored in the body of this report. Here, we would like to draw attention only to four key observations that strike us when we consider the report as a whole.

The first is the critical role played by the police in collective violence—a peculiar combination of absence and unnecessary and provocative violence. Regarding their absence, the initial role of the police in our studies of xenophobic violence—as in studies by others—was the lack of a serious effort on their part to prevent attacks or protect foreign nationals in the early stages of violence. They seemed only to move into action after the first fury of mob attacks, and then only in tandem with local organisations such as ANC branches or CPFs. A similar absence is registered in, at least, one of the community protest episodes, when the local police told councillors whose houses were attacked and destroyed that it was not their job to protect them.

On the other hand, our studies of community protests show that police actions escalated confrontation and tension which rapidly took the form of running street battles between protesters and police officers. There was widespread condemnation in communities of provocative violence against crowds of protesters on the part of police. Even more troubling were the incidents of random assault and allegations of torture against suspected protest leaders and their families in some of the communities—reports and allegations that have been repeated in more recent protests, such as those at Ermelo and Ficksburg where protest leader Andries Tatane died at the hands of the police.

The police are, therefore, critically important protagonists in collective violence, both when they are absent from scenes of mass violence, and when they themselves engage in collective violence against protesting communities.

Second, the counterpart to the police as protagonists is the role of the youth, mostly young men but including young women, in collective violence, both in spearheading xenophobic attacks as well as engaging in battles with the police and destroying public property during community protests. This is not a new observation, but it is nonetheless an important one. Many of those who participate in the violence are unemployed, live in poverty, and see no prospect of a change in these circumstances. Theirs, they feel, is a half-life, as they are unable to participate as full citizens in the economy and society. Impoverished young men, in particular, experience this as the undermining of their masculinity as they are unable to establish families. Protest provides them with an opportunity to exert their masculinity through violence and to experience themselves as representing the community and fighting on its behalf. Unless widescale strategies for social and economic inclusion address this issue, social fragmentation and violence is likely to continue.

A third observation concerns the interface between sociology and psychology. In many ways these two disciplines are difficult to bring together because of the contrasting questions they ask and their divergent narratives. However, concepts of ‘collective trauma’ explored in the chapter by Nomfundo Mogapi seem to provide a way of addressing this disjunction and finding common ground. This is a new field—certainly to us—and holds out promise for future research and analysis that enables us to explore this interface at a deeper level.
Finally, we want to draw attention to the significance of the Bokfontein study. While most of the studies focus their attention on the ugliest dimensions of local politics and the competition for resources, Bokfontein provides a reminder of what is possible in South Africa. The Community Work Programme (CWP) enabled a very traumatised and marginalised community to address both the collective trauma and its supporting narratives, and imagine a different future for themselves and at the same time provided avenues for young people to focus their energies on participating in a collective effort to transform their communities. One of the results was the end of intra-community violence and the deliberate rejection of xenophobic violence—achieved, it must be said, without any police action at all. After the immersion in the perversity and desperation of much human endeavour in our society, it was profoundly inspiring for our research team to encounter this place of hope with its combination of visionary and practical agency. Truly, the nations will be amazed!
Overview

Insurgent citizenship and collective violence: analysis of case studies

Karl von Holdt

Local community protests have spread across South Africa since 2004, with a dramatic upsurge in 2009 and 2010, as the record of larger and more visible protests captured by Municipal IQ demonstrates (see Fig. 1). At the same time, protests have become increasingly violent, marked by the destruction of public and private property, and confrontations between armed police and stone-throwing crowds. While protest action showed a small reduction from 2007 levels in 2008, the latter year was indelibly marked by the eruption of concentrated xenophobic violence against foreign Africans, which started in Alexandra and spread across the country. Over a two-week period, foreign nationals were attacked in at least 135 locations, at least 61 people were killed, of whom 21 were South Africans, either mistaken for foreign nationals or associated with them on the basis of ethnicity, and over 100,000 people were displaced (Misago et al., 2010: 9, 164).

Figure 1: Community protests by year

Source: Municipal IQ
Xenophobic attacks differ from community protests against government in their levels of violence and their targets, claims, impact and some of their repertoires, yet there are significant common features as well: the same or similar organisations may be involved, there are common repertoires, both are instances of collective popular agency and violence, both involve grievances about state actions or inactions, and community protests frequently include an element of xenophobic attacks on foreign-owned businesses. These similarities, as well as differences, suggest that it may be fruitful to compare and contrast these two different forms of subaltern collective agency, not least because of the possibility that new combinations of anti-government and anti-foreigner violence may emerge in future.

This overview chapter draws on eight case studies by a research team, which conducted in-depth research into collective violence in communities. As the table below indicates, the research sites consisted of a mix of small rural towns, large urban settlements originating in informal settlements, partially upgraded with RDP housing, an urban formal township, and a rural informal settlement, all within a radius of 500km from Johannesburg. In all of the research sites both community protests (often violent), and xenophobic attacks took place, or were associated with each other; in some cases the community protests were primary, with xenophobic attacks taking a secondary form as an adjunct to the main activity; in others xenophobic attacks were primary, but were either sparked off by community protests, or took place in a context of frequent such protests. In two cases, local groups worked actively to prevent the xenophobic attacks, and in one of these protests were peaceful, while in the other the community leadership rejected protests as a strategy. This chapter explores the patterns of similarity and difference across the community protests, the xenophobic attacks, and between both.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Primary Violence</th>
<th>Secondary Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voortrekker</td>
<td>Rural town</td>
<td>Community protest</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kungcathsha</td>
<td>Rural town</td>
<td>Community protest</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azania</td>
<td>Rural town</td>
<td>Community protest</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovo view</td>
<td>Urban/RDP/Informal</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks</td>
<td>Community protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladysville</td>
<td>Urban/RDP/Informal</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks &amp; community protest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble</td>
<td>Urban/RDP/Informal</td>
<td>Xenophobic attacks &amp; community protest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndabeni¹</td>
<td>Urban formal</td>
<td>Xenophobic violence prevented</td>
<td>Peaceful protests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokfontein</td>
<td>Rural informal</td>
<td>Xenophobic violence prevented</td>
<td>Local development, no protest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paper concludes that rapid processes of class formation—through which on the one hand a new elite is emerging and, on the other, a large underclass of unemployed and precariously employed, together with the dislocations of the transition from apartheid to democracy—is generating fierce struggles over inclusion and exclusion both within the elite, between elites and subalterns, and within the subaltern classes themselves. These struggles are in part marked by contestation over the meaning and content of citizenship. While the processes of class formation are producing what Hanson (2008: 7–9) calls ‘differentiated citizenship’—which distributes treatment, rights and privileges differentially among formally equal citizens according to differences of education,

¹ The Ndabeni study could not be written up in time for this research report; however, some of the insights from it are incorporated into this overview chapter.
property, race, gender and occupation—subaltern groups respond by mobilising an ‘insurgent citizenship’ around claims that ‘destabilise the differentiated’. The insurgent civil society of the struggle against apartheid during the 1980s established violent practices as an integral element of civil society mobilisation and of struggles for citizenship, so it is not surprising that similar repertoires of violence are apparent in current insurgencies over citizenship and exclusion.

However, these insurgencies do not constitute an unproblematic notion of expanded citizenship. They have a darker side too, reproducing patriarchal prejudices, xenophobic exclusion, and the use of violence in political and social disputes and to buttress local power—practices which corrode, undermine and restrict the basis of citizenship. Community protests, collective violence and the associational practices that underlie them are ambiguous and contradictory in their implications for citizenship and democracy.

Struggles over the meaning of citizenship are at the same time struggles over rank, status and power. The instability, fluidity and contestation that characterises the struggles within and between elites and subalterns generates uncertainty and contestation over the markers of status, power, hierarchy and authority, giving rise to what Dlamini calls ‘the politics of excess’ (Dlamini, 2010 and the chapter on Kungcatsha and Voortrekker of this document) and conspicuous consumption. Our case studies reveal struggles over the symbolic order (Bourdieu, 2000), which structures the meaning and hierarchies of distinction in post-apartheid South Africa. The case studies indicate that the ANC itself, as the locus of many of these struggles and contestations, has become a profoundly unstable organisation. This has ramifications across state and society. These very dislocations, instabilities and contestations in social relations, and in the meanings of these relations, tend to give rise to the practices of violence in struggles over social order and hierarchy.

The processes and dislocations of rapid class formation, the fierce struggles within and between elites and subalterns, the tensions between differential and insurgent citizenship, the instabilities and contestations over hierarchy, status and social order, and the prevalence of violence in social and political conflict, together give rise to a precarious society. A precarious society is characterised by social fragmentation and competing local moral orders which not only generates precarious lives, but a social world in which society itself becomes precarious.

This overview chapter develops this analysis through three steps. The first section provides an outline and comparison of the dynamics of community protest and xenophobic violence in the case studies. The second develops an analysis of the structural forces and processes of class formation and differential citizenship at play in the communities we researched. The third focuses on the dynamics of subaltern collective violence. Finally, the conclusion returns to discussion of precarious society, citizenship and violence.

Trajectories of protest: repertoires, organisers, crowds, aftermath

In this section we examine first the trajectories of community protests in our case studies, and then the trajectory of the xenophobic attacks.

Community protest

A typical protest

A more or less typical story is that of Voortrekker. The protests started in response to a sports day organised in April 2009 by the town council, which had set aside R 150,000 to pay for prizes. When the promised prizes failed to materialise, a group of residents, including local ANC leaders, came together to form the Concerned Group (CG), which convened a mass meeting in the local stadium and recruited more members. The CG claimed...
to be addressing corruption and service delivery failures on the part of the town council, but there were allegations that it had been formed to strengthen one faction in recent divisions that had emerged within the council. After the mass meeting the CG, now numbering 30, organised a march to the local municipal offices to present a memorandum of grievances to the council, as well as faxing them to the provincial premier’s office and that of the president of the ANC. A week later, the premier visited the town and held discussions with the CG, promising to attend a mass meeting of the town’s residents a week later, and even providing some cash for pamphlets. On the day of the meeting, a Sunday at the end of June, thousands of residents, young and old, men and women, gathered in the stadium at the scheduled time of 8 a.m. The officials arrived only at 1:30 p.m. and, though they included members of the provincial cabinet as well as the mayor and local town councillors, the premier himself was absent. The cabinet members attempted to address the crowd, but were angrily shouted down. A representative of the CG then addressed the crowd, echoing their shouts that the delegation should voetsek. Bodyguards whisked the politicians and officials from the stadium in their 4x4s, which the crowd showered with stones. The meeting then decided that the CG would go to the ANC head office in Johannesburg and request the president to visit the town, and that in the meantime the community would launch a work stay-away and make the township ‘ungovernable’, actions that were immediately recognisable from the days of anti-apartheid resistance.

That evening protesters erected barricades of burning tyres around the township, which police, armed with tear gas and rubber bullets, tried to dismantle. During the night municipal buildings, including the clinic, the public library, the community hall and municipal offices in the township, were torched. The following day all access roads were barricaded and most residents stayed away from work. In the course of the day the crowds torched the houses of three councillors, including the mayor. A 29-year-old man was shot dead by the guards at the mayor’s house, and later a 21-year-old man was killed by a bullet fired from a car full of police and traffic officers. In retaliation, a crowd attacked and burnt down the house of a fourth councillor they believed to be responsible. Video footage shows this particular crowd singing ‘Tambo, kamoshhekile. Bayasithengisa.’ (Tambo,4 things are bad. We are being sold out). During the course of the protests, foreign traders in the township were hounded out and their shops looted.

The following day the premier arrived and addressed the community at the local stadium, announcing that the town council would be suspended and placed under administration. A week later the premier was booed and jeered when he arrived at the stadium for the funeral of one of the young men who had been shot. Chaos ensued when the driver of a small van lost control and ploughed into the crowd, killing a 71-year-old woman. The driver fled the angry crowd which then set the van alight. The premier and mayor fled the stadium.

With the council under administration, some members of the CG resigned, feeling they had achieved their goals, while others developed a close relationship with the administrators. The CG was given the job of clearing the sites of the destroyed buildings ‘to pacify them’ in the words of an administrator, and members of the CG were given R100,000 to travel to Johannesburg to buy trophies, kit and other items for a new sporting tournament to be called the Peace Cup. A portion of this money was spent by CG members on tracksuits for themselves.

The case of Voortrekker illustrates many of the dynamics that are common across the case studies: the repertoires of protest; the prominence of ANC figures, together with ordinary residents, among the organisers of protest; the intersection of divisions among ANC councillors in the local town council with popular grievances against the council; grievances including allegations of corruption, indifference and lack of service delivery; trigger moments when indifference on the part of authorities towards the grievances and peaceful protests of the community become palpable and publicly visible; appeals to authority beyond the local level; a turn to violence provoked or exacerbated by police violence; and an aftermath in which the balance of power within the local

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3 Insulting Afrikaans term meaning ‘Bugger off’.

4 Oliver Tambo was ANC president during the anti-apartheid struggle.
ANC is reconfigured, the protest leadership are reabsorbed into the ANC, and what had appeared to be local social movements or ‘civil society’ organisations whither away. There are, of course, variations on these themes between the case studies as well. In what follows we explore each of these themes in turn.

Repertoires

The repertoires of protest in Kungcatsha included mass meetings in the stadium, marches in support of a petition, and when the premier failed to arrive, an escalation to a work stay-away, barricading of streets, street battles with the police, the burning down of councillors’ houses and council buildings, and the looting of foreign-owned shops in the township. In Kungcatsha there were peaceful protest marches over several years, mass meetings, including in the stadium, and then a work stay-away, barricaded streets, street battles between police and youths, and the burning down of council buildings and a councillor’s house. In this case, the violent protests continued for two weeks and included looting foreigners’ shops, stoning cars, barricading a nearby highway and exacting toll fees from traffic, and a march to deliver a petition in the town centre. One young man was killed, allegedly while looting a foreigner’s shop.

In Azania, participants referred to a long history of protests dating back to 1996. In 2009 the tempo increased, with marches and mass meetings held in the stadium, and a growing frustration about the indifference of the mayor and the town council. Violence was sparked when a large number of police confronted the crowds after a meeting in the stadium and running street fights erupted between youths and police, barricades went up and shops owned by Ethiopians were looted. This lasted a couple of days. About two weeks later President Zuma and a team of Cabinet ministers visited the town to investigate, but about six months later, in the absence of any progress, a new round of mass meetings and marchers began. Again the mayor failed to arrive, the police started firing with rubber bullets, and street fighting and barricading followed. The township library was burnt down, computers were stolen and foreign-owned shops were looted.

In Trouble, an RDP settlement where there are no municipal buildings, protest crowds barricaded streets and tried to destroy a nearby regional road after a meeting of community leadership in a school, that took place under the watchful eyes of the Metro police. This rapidly turned into running street battles between police and young protesters. The primary target of the protests was the local ANC councillor, who was alleged to be involved in corruption with the local SANCO branch and to be refusing to attend branch meetings or submit accounts to the local ANC leadership. But the protest only lasted a day, and then the ANC branch and Youth League reverted to using internal ANC channels to address their grievances.

The similarity, in the repertoires of protest across the case studies, is quite striking.

The organisers

There were variations in the composition of the protest organisers across the case studies, but a similarity in the leading role played by ANC figures in all of them. In Voortrekker the CG grew from a handful of friends who were ANC members to 30 at the height of the protests, including civil servants such as teachers, a prison warden, government clerks and traffic cops, as well as spaza shop owners and some unemployed. The majority were ANC members, including figures such as branch treasurer, branch chairperson, and former associates of the mayor, as well as an IFP member and convicted murderer, a drug dealer and churchgoers. Several informants maintained that the group was formed by the mayor to support her in her fallout with the council speaker and the town manager. Some joined to fight corruption, and others because they hoped it would open doors to jobs, and it was known that others were aggrieved because their access to lucrative tenders had dried up.

In Kungcatsha, in contrast, no independent group was established to lead the protests. It was a group of ANC Youth League activists who got together and planned the mobilisation of the community in protest against the alleged disappearance of a sum of R30 million from the town council. Of the three leaders interviewed for our research, one was also an executive member of the SACP and a beneficiary of council tenders, a second was a...
trade unionist and Youth League activist, and the third was an engineer with an independent company. Here too the eruption of protest was linked to divisions within the town council, with allegations that the speaker was feeding confidential information to the protest organisers as part of his effort to undermine the mayor.

Trouble was a similar case, with protests led and organised by the ANC Youth League branch and supported by the ANC branch. The primary demand was for the recall of the local ANC councillor. Neither the CPF nor SANCO (which supported the councillor) were involved in the protests.

Azania was different again, as the SACP and the PAC, which is unusually strong in this town, provided a relatively independent, organisational base for the protests. Protests were led by youth leaders from both organisations, by the Pro-Gauteng Committee, in which activists from both organisations were prominent, as well as by a landless movement organised by the PAC. The ANC was divided in this town between those who were in the leadership of the council and those who were active in the SACP, and the council faction was excluded from the protests alliance. The local ANC leadership accused the SACP of trying to overthrow the ANC in the town and of making opportunistic alliances with the PAC, and alleged that the protests were driven by a former ANC councillor and tender-businessman who was aggrieved because the council had blacklisted his business for failing to deliver on contracts.

Grievances and triggers

The grievances articulated by the protest movements show a strong similarity with local inflections. In three of the cases the disappearance of large sums of money from the council were central grievances, amplified by a litany of grievances about intermittent and dirty water supply, the inadequacy of recreational facilities and failure to maintain them, lack of jobs, nepotistic employment practices, lack of houses, failure to complete council contracts to build houses and roads, and generally inadequate services.

In the fourth case, a similar set of grievances were aggregated in the demand for the town to be re-demarcated from Mpumalanga to Gauteng because of the proximity of Gauteng public services such as hospitals and licensing offices. In all the cases, the perceived arrogance and indifference of local or provincial authorities—the failure of a mayor to accept a petition, the lack of response to complaints, the failure of the provincial premier to arrive as promised, the refusal of the councillor to meet the local ANC branch—was a major source of frustration and anger.

In both Kungcatsha and Azania there had been several years of peaceful protest over various issues, whereas this was not the case in Voortrekker or Trouble. In all four towns in 2009 the protests intensified and became violent. What served to trigger these shifts? The trigger-factors are complex and have several interrelated elements, but show a remarkable similarity in the four studies. In all four there was a shift in power relations within the town council and the local ANC, marked by open conflict between key figures within these structures, such as the mayor and speaker, or rival political figures in the ANC, which created the opportunity for outsider figures in the ANC or Tripartite Alliance to engage in struggles to reconfigure power relations.

Other trigger elements served to convert ‘private troubles’ into more visible ‘public concerns’ at a more popular level—the disappearance of prize money at a sports event, the surfacing of a forensic audit into a missing sum of R30 million, the refusal of the mayor to accept a petition from marching protesters, the threatened water and electricity cut off for payment defaulters, the community gathered in a sports stadium waiting in vain for the premier to appear, the failure of a presidential intervention to have any effect, allegations of political involvement in the theft of electricity cable. Frustration with the indifference and unresponsiveness of authority to the plight of the community was in all cases a critical element, as a young man in Kungcatsha made clear: ‘People of this township are very patient, but this time they were very angry. They were sick and tired of waiting.’ And a member of the CG in Voortrekker said: ‘That the houses were burnt down was the mistake of the premier. He promised
to come but did not.’ Finally, the full-force appearance of police units from outside the local police service on the scene was often the signal for a shift to violent repertoires, usually in response to police violence.

The importance of local conflict within the ANC/town council may provide a clue for the upsurge of large-scale protest actions in 2009 and 2010: the bigger struggles within the national ANC, marked by the ousting of Thabo Mbeki as ANC leader at Polokwane in December 2007 and the ascendancy of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the country in the elections of mid-2009, symbolised the intensity of internal conflict across the ANC, simultaneously giving rise to the rhetoric—and hope—of change and legitimated internal struggle and factionalism. As one respondent in Voortrekker put it: ‘It’s become a style—if they could recall Mbeki, they can recall a councillor.’

Leaders and crowds

Relationships among protest leaders, and between leadership and crowds, were a complex and opaque terrain in the three case studies, made murkier by allegations, counter-allegations and rumours. Amongst the leaders there were diverse motivations, with some regarding protest as an opportunity to oust their opponents in the town council and reconfigure power relations in the ANC so as to gain, or regain, positions of power and access to lucrative council business, while others appeared to be genuinely concerned to struggle against corruption and incompetence. Protest leadership were mobilising popular anger, and there was a tension between the subaltern crowds who were protesting against corruption and for improved material conditions and services by attending mass meetings and marches, and engaging the police in street battles, and those in the leadership who were pursuing their own agendas. The subaltern crowds were well aware of these agendas. In the words of young male protesters from Kungcatsha:

“It is not service delivery, but people are just fighting for tenders, but using the community to do so.”

“Some of the leaders were angry that they were no longer getting tenders and then they decided to mobilise the community against the municipality.”

This cynicism about the motivations of the leadership did not undermine popular mobilisation, however; as one participant said: ‘I have never seen such a big march in the history of the township—everyone was there’. Drawing from this evidence, Langa argues that the protest movements are constructed through the agency of both the political entrepreneurs who use community members to fight their political battles, and the community members, who strategically use political entrepreneurs to present their grievances to relevant offices because of their understanding of local politics (see chapter on Kungcatsha).

Crowds within crowds

Subaltern protest took the form of crowds that shifted shape as the forms of direct action shifted from public meeting to marches to street battles with police to the burning down of selected targets or the looting of foreign-owned shops. We use the term ‘crowds within crowds’ or ‘riots within riots’ to explore these shifting shapes of subaltern direct action. At public meetings in sports stadiums and community halls a cross-section of the community was generally present—young, middle-aged and elderly men and women. When the call came to set up barricades and marshal a work stay-away the crowd took the shape of young men and women, although the call was generally issued at a more representative public meeting; thus it could be said that this crowd had received the mandate for direct action in the streets from the community as a whole. When the police arrived and deployed violence the larger crowds broke up into smaller crowds composed of young men engaging in running battles with the police. We know less about the kind of crowd that burnt down council buildings or councillors’ homes, although video footage from Voortrekker shows young men and women chanting together as they toyi-toyi5 towards a house, where the men are later seen wielding vuvuzelas and throwing stones at the

5 A war-like protest march
burning house with the women looking on in the background. Many from the crowd are also involved in the looting of the shops of foreign nationals.

Different crowds have different leaders at different times. In Kungcatsha, for example, the man known as the leader of the protests, an ANC Youth League and SACP activist, and tender businessman, seemed all-powerful during the protests, but was not a candidate in the by-elections that succeeded them. Participants in the protests explained that this was a man to lead strikes, but not to lead the community and not someone they could vote for. He was a militant and persuasive speaker in public meetings, but lacked the credibility to be a leader in any other sense. Other figures emerged from the protest leadership as serious contenders for nomination in the by-elections. On the other hand, another group of leaders comes to the fore in the crowds that wage street battles with police, or burn buildings or loot computers from a burning library. One such leader in Azania was active in the youth congress in high school before he dropped out, and admits that he is a heavy dagga smoker and drinker.

More work does need to be done on the nature of the subaltern crowds in community protests and in xenophobic violence, and on the relationship between different crowds within crowds. In some circumstances it seems that the crowds that emerge in violent actions have some kind of broad mandate to undertake these actions on behalf of the larger and more heterogeneous crowd that represents the community in public gatherings, and that was certainly the understanding of the young protesters in Trouble; the more formal and visible leadership that leads public gatherings clearly has an implicit understanding at some points that their actions will lead to violence (see Dlamini 2010; chapter on Voortrekker), and that there are militant activists among the youth who will undertake that violence. The moral meanings of violence are complex and contested though, and the formal leadership is quick to condemn collective violence as the work of ‘criminals’, leaving themselves blameless. Community members also expressed ambivalence and contradictory views towards some forms of violence, as we will see below.

What all of these cases show is that the subaltern crowd is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon, with different leadership nuclei animated by a range of different motivations.

Aftermath

The aftermath of violent protest is as important for understanding the protests and the social forces that shape them, as the origins and dynamics of the protests themselves. The aftermath in each of the case studies was different, but revealed common underlying themes.

In three cases there were highly visible responses from senior ANC political figures, to no response to the short lived protest in Trouble. To take them in chronological sequence—because the interventions from high levels of the ANC brought these protests onto the national stage, bringing each intervention into relationship with previous and following interventions—in Voortrekker, the provincial premier arrived 24 hours after the outbreak of violent protest, and announced the suspension of the town council and that it was to be placed under administration. A probe was announced into the allegations of corruption, which led to the suspension four months later of two councillors and several senior managers. In Azania, a week after the first round of violent protest President Zuma arrived in town with a team of ministers to meet with the local councillors, and announced initiatives to improve service delivery, create job opportunities and establish a training college in the town. In Kungcatsha, after two weeks of violent protest during which the ANC resisted calls from the community to intervene, a high profile ANC national team arrived and announced the recall of the entire mayoral executive. In Azania, after the second round of violent protest had broken out six months after the first round, President Zuma again arrived with a team of ministers in order to announce progress with service delivery. In Azania, unlike the other two, there was no attempt to take action on the allegations against the ANC mayor and local councillors, possibly because the ANC feared that the PAC, which was unusually strong here and was prominent in the protest movement, might be able to take advantage of this.
In each case, protest leaders had responded to the indifference of the local town council by addressing their grievances to a higher power, the ANC leadership beyond the local level, in the hopes that their grievances would be heard and acted upon at that level. When the provincial or national ANC leadership did respond, and arrived in town to make their decisions known, they presented a performance of political power, announcing the suspension of councillors and an investigation of allegations in two cases, and, in the third, announcing high-level interventions to improve service delivery. In two of the cases, crowds responded by disrupting the performance of political power because of what they regarded as an inadequate response. In Voortrekker, crowds shouted down the provincial team when it arrived without the premier, and stoned their vehicles as they hastily left. A couple of weeks later, after announcing the suspension of the town council, the premier attended the funeral of the two protesters who had been killed, where he was again greeted with jeers and boos.

Azania offers the clearest case of political performance and disruption. President Zuma’s visit after the first round of protest left the protest leadership angry, because he had confined his engagement to the leadership of the town council, failing to engage with the protesters or the rest of the community. For his second visit, Zuma and his team of ministers spent three hours meeting with the councillors and municipal officials, and then went to the stadium to address the community. The political performance was one that emphasised the authority and power of the President and his cabinet, displayed publicly in the choreography of the motorcade of powerful cars and bodyguards, and the rally in the stadium, and within the echelons of the state by the hierarchy of distinction between VIPs and VVIPs and their different lunches, and no doubt the displays of deference and authority in the three-hour meeting. They had come to announce the progress they had made in building houses and solving other problems, and there was no space for the participation of the protest leadership or township residents. Their role in the performance was to simply provide an audience.

The stadium was filled to capacity with an audience, but it was a rowdy crowd which repeatedly disrupted proceedings by chanting and singing, while waving flags of the PAC, the ANC and the SACP, despite the pleas of officials as well as the President. The subaltern crowds used the performance of ANC and state power to stage a counter performance of disruptive power which clearly discomforted Zuma. At the end of the meeting, in a highly ambiguous moment, the crowd started singing Zuma’s hallmark war song, *Mshini wami*, which Zuma immediately took up and ‘led’. Here Zuma was attempting to reclaim as a militant freedom fighter and man of the people—that is, from a position outside of the state—the authority that the crowd denied him in his role as the head of a state, which was indifferent, denied them a voice, and failed to provide for their needs.6 But who was dancing to whose tune here, and what did it signify about the crowd’s willingness to resort to violence against state authority, and about Zuma’s claim to be the leader of militancy?

In Kungcatha and Azania the removal and resignation of councillors led to by-elections. Elections provide another space for both the state and subalterns to perform the power and the limits of the state. In both towns there were intense struggles over who would be nominated as the ANC candidates, and the subaltern classes were able to profoundly shape the meaning of the elections, but in dramatically different directions. In Kungcatha the struggle over nomination took place between candidates nominated by the protest leadership who were themselves prominent ANC Youth League activists and candidates regarded as representatives of the old guard against whom they were pitted in struggle; in the end, the protesters won. A similar struggle in Azania ended with the regional ANC structure imposing a third candidate.

In Kungcatha there was a massive turnout, particularly in the ward where one of the protest leaders was standing, and the elections were seen as a triumph for the protest movement and for democracy. One of the protest organisers likened the elections to the founding democratic elections of 1994, and commented that ‘the people

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6 There is a striking similarity between Zuma’s attempt to perform his authority both from within and from outside the state, and the dual role played by the Shiv Sena leader, Bal Thackeray, in India, and I have drawn on Hansen’s analysis of this to understand Zuma’s performance (Hansen 2001: 227).
have come out in numbers to choose their leader... the masses have spoken through their mass action last year and now they will exercise their democratic right to vote’. In Azania, in contrast, there was effectively a boycott of the elections, with some ANC members campaigning for the PAC candidate, and others refusing to vote. Although the ANC candidate won by a slender margin, many activists felt that the PAC would have won, had they fielded their most popular leader. One ANC member commented that ‘people are losing their hope in the ANC’.

What accounts for the differences between the two towns? Three factors can be identified. Firstly, the protest movement was unable to shift power in the local ANC and have its own candidates elected. The reason for this is linked to the second factor—the strength of the PAC locally, which provides an alternative pole of organisation and identity for many who are frustrated with the ANC. It is very probably this presence of a rival political party that led the ANC national and provincial leadership to support its local councillors and attempt to deliver on their behalf, rather than present a political opportunity for the PAC. Thirdly, the nature of the demand—for re-demarcating Azania as part of Gauteng—lends itself to a boycott, as participating in elections can be seen as legitimating the political status quo.

Allied to the dynamics of elections is the question of what happens to the protest leadership and organisation after the ‘resolution’ of their campaigns? In Kungcatsha, the protest leadership consisted of an informal group of ANC activists, and no autonomous organisational structure was formed. The suspension of the mayoral committee and the by-elections constituted a reconfiguration of power relations in the local ANC, and the activists were reabsorbed into the political structure, leaving no residue of subaltern organisation. In Voortrekker, there was also a reconfiguration of power relations in the ANC with the temporary suspension of the council and senior officials, and their replacement by external administrators, and the CG found itself in a favoured position in relation to the new administrators. Indications were that some of its members were only too eager to grasp the opportunities for access to council funding, work and contracts. Several members resigned, saying that the group had achieved its aims, while others talked of registering it as an NGO, for unclear purposes. There was little sign that it would establish itself as a durable representative of the residents of the town in civil society. In Trouble the protests were insufficiently strong to immediately reconfigure power relations in the ANC.

In Azania the protest leadership was splintered. Those in the ANC, including its SACP alliance partner, were marginalised for allying themselves with the PAC, and the status quo was reinforced by the intervention from a national level. Many felt that the PAC presented a real alternative, except that it too was divided, and its most popular leader was marginalised by the nationally dominant faction. The diverse protest leaders were, in other words, primarily political activists, and even when neutralised within their political organisations took no initiative to establish an independent movement in civil society. The exception was a PAC activist, who mooted establishing a civic organisation but with the aim of contesting elections, rather than engaging with the political process from a base in civil society.

The general pattern in the case studies of protest movements is that these did not lead to the formation of autonomous organisations in civil society. The local organisational elite, from which the protest leadership is inevitably drawn, is clearly focused on the nexus of power, status and resources, which is constituted by the local town councils, and dominated by the ANC. The ANC itself has sufficiently far-reaching legitimacy to simultaneously present itself as the governing authority within the town councils and as a popular movement outside the state, able at times to represent popular pressure on the state. In this capacity it presents itself as the incarnation of the noble legacy of the liberation struggle, and this, it seems, is a greater source of popular legitimacy than its control of the state, with many protesters drawing a distinction between their support for the ANC and their hostility to the current incumbents of the local state.

This leaves little space for the emergence of a genuinely autonomous movement in civil society, as the ANC absorbs the protest leadership, leaving the subaltern classes without a durable organisation. Despite this, though,
the repertoires of protest remained an active resource among subalterns and, as one of the protesters in Kungcatsha commented, ‘He [the new councillor] knows the process. He was part of the march. If he does not deliver we will also remove him like [the former mayor]’.

There are, however, three exceptions to this general pattern. In Gladysville and Slovoview, protests were organised by civic associations which have a durable existence for reasons specific to informal settlements, which are explored below and in Section 2. In the formal township of Ndabeni, an independent residents organisation has existed since the early 1990s, and continues to organise protest around housing issues. However, it has a quasi-political dimension, as it also contests local government elections and has three councillors in the Metro Council.

**Trajectories of xenophobic violence**

Xenophobic attacks follow a not entirely dissimilar trajectory to community protests. However, there are important distinctions to be made. Firstly, it is more difficult to ascertain who were the key organisers of xenophobic attacks, probably because of the opprobrium and illegality of their actions. Informal groups and networks appear to play a larger role, although formal organisations are also actors. Secondly, while xenophobic attacks exist as adjuncts to many community protests, cases where xenophobic violence is the primary form of collective action are primarily in informal settlements, often with newly built RDP housing sections alongside older shack sections.

In these communities, the local state has a remote and ineffectual presence, and state functions with respect to the control of land, policing and the prevention of crime, and the regulation of trading have not infrequently been appropriated by local elites and their organisations. The authority of the law is attenuated, and both elites and community members are accustomed to taking the law into their own hands. Where the state is seen to have failed in its responsibility to regulate immigration and have lost or abandoned its monopoly of coercion, elites and residents adopt coercive practices of their own in an attempt to define citizenship and its limits.⁷

In both Gladysville and Slovoview xenophobic violence started with mass meetings. In Slovoview the meeting was explicitly called to discuss the influx of foreign nationals fleeing violence in other areas, whereas in Gladysville the meeting was called to organise a protest march about housing and other services to the local government offices. In both cases the meetings were called by local civic organisations (the SANCO branch in the case of Slovoview), but informants differ over whether the civic leadership explicitly mobilised, or permitted mobilisation, against foreigners, or whether they lost control of the meeting. In Slovoview the crowd left the meeting and barricaded the entrances to the informal section of the settlement to prevent police entry, and moved systematically to identify foreign nationals and expel them. A separate section of the crowd moved deliberately to concentrations of foreign-owned spaza shops, and looted them. In Gladysville, crowds gathered the following day for the protest march, but when this was abandoned they returned to the settlement and began systematically to loot and burn shops owned by foreigners, after which they moved to loot and burn the shacks of foreigners more generally.

In both cases the perhaps ambiguous role of formal organisations was supplemented by the role of networks of South African business owners and unemployed young men organised through meetings in taverns. However, once the gangs of young men had broken into shops or shacks, members of the community more broadly, men and women, joined into the looting, not unlike the broad community participation in looting foreign-owned shops during community protests in Azania. As in the community protests, we see crowds within crowds, with leadership passing from formal to informal, as the violence proceeds.

The attacks in Trouble started quite differently. It seems that isolated groups of young men started attacking foreign shops, only to be repelled by the military-style weaponry the foreigners had access to. It was only after

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⁷ Misago et al., 2010 reach the same conclusions. See also Monson (forthcoming).
this that mass meetings were called, but here the formal organisations—the ANC branch, the CPF—strongly opposed those who argued that the community should arm itself and drive the foreigners out. In this case, formal organisation prevented informal crowds from taking the law into their own hands—although the ability of the foreigners to deploy superior force no doubt influenced this outcome. In Slovoview it was also the ANC branch and the CPF that actively mobilised against the xenophobic violence and quelled it together with the police, although significantly it was the branches of these organisations from the more formal RDP sections that did so; their counterparts from the shacks section where the violence was concentrated were conspicuous by their absence.

While the political life of the communities where protest actions took place was characterised by internal division and conflict within the town council and the ANC, Slovoview and Gladysville were characterised by struggles between and within various community organisations, and between them and local councillors and ANC branches, which in turn had their own internal conflicts. Thus, Slovoview is characterised by an ongoing struggle between the ANC and SANCO for control and leadership in the community. The SANCO leadership was divided, and came under pressure from subaltern residents to lead the xenophobic attacks, while the ANC leadership that worked to contain and stop the violence was least partly motivated by the need ‘to show SANCO who is boss in the alliance’. In Gladysville, the mass protests that led to xenophobic violence were mobilised by the civic organisation as part of its struggle against ANC councillors. In Trouble, though there were divisions both within the ANC and between the ANC and the local SANCO branch, none of these organisations supported the xenophobic violence. However, in Trouble as in the other two sites, the conflict between SANCO and the ANC is related to struggles over the control of land and local developmental projects.

The relationship between xenophobic attacks and the local state and its ANC councillors is somewhat different from the relationship between community protests and the local ANC and state. In the case of xenophobic attacks, the local leadership appears to be attempting to consolidate their position in control of the community and its resources, rather than seeking to reconfigure the ANC and find their way into the nexus of power around the local government. Accordingly, neither SANCO nor the Gladysville civic organisation dissolved after the attacks, or allowed themselves to be absorbed into the ANC, but remained strong local organisations rooted in local elites. This is closely related to the distinctiveness of social structure and elite formation in informal settlements, as compared to formal townships, and is discussed later in this chapter.

However, despite these distinctions between xenophobic attacks and violent community protest, it is important to note the interplay between protest violence and xenophobic attacks. In many of our sites, xenophobic attacks occurred as an adjunct activity to the main focus on community protest. In Gladysville community protest morphed into xenophobic attacks. In Slovoview the organisations that mobilised protest were the same as those that were visible in the xenophobic attacks. There are similarities in the repertoires of both. Violent protest repertoires seem to open the way to violence directed at targets other than the state, namely, foreign nationals. Since both protests and xenophobic attacks are bound up with matters of citizenship, suggesting complex popular contestations over its meaning and substance.

In both Slovoview and Trouble, there were substantial local organisations which mobilised against the xenophobic attacks, bringing them to an end quite rapidly in the first case, and preventing them in the second. In two of our other case studies, xenophobic violence was prevented altogether. In Ndabeni, a settled urban township, a coalition of local activists, Rastafarians and influential individuals mobilised against xenophobic violence, while in Bokfontein, a rural informal settlement, a public employment programme and the process of community building that accompanied it empowered local leadership to resist attempts to organise xenophobic attacks.

In both cases there were individuals and groups that motivated their anti-xenophobic stance in terms of a pan-African unity, as well as others who felt foreigners should be expelled because they took jobs, business and women from locals, and because they were involved in crime; but what united them was their conviction that
regulating immigration and the presence of illegal immigrants was the function of the state, and communities should not take the law into their own hands and perpetrate violence against others. In this sense, despite the horrors of the xenophobic attacks in our case studies, there is cause for hope in the substantial constituencies of resistance to violence in many communities.

Summary of key points

- The community protests combined a dynamic of internal ANC struggles with subaltern protest movements against the ANC in local government.
- The protest movements were fighting both for material improvements to their lives as well as for the rights to be heard by government.
- Divisions in the local ANC were an important common feature across the case studies, and this created an opportunity for mass protest.
- The relationship between leaders and crowds was a complex and continuously shifting one; the subaltern crowds and their informal leadership displayed considerable agency in shaping the repertoires of protest as well as shaping and disrupting political performances of the elite.
- The protests tend to leave no durable autonomous organisation or movement in civil society which could continue the process of engaging and pressurising the authorities. However, they do lay down the repertoires of collective action against the ANC in government, which provides the resources for future protest.
- Community protests and xenophobic attacks overlap, with the former morphing into, or sparking outbreaks of, the latter.
- Xenophobic attacks are organised by a combination of formal organisational leadership and informal groups and networks, including South African businesses and unemployed youths.
- They tend to be at their most organised and violent in semi-formal and informal settlements characterised by weak state structures and the appropriation by local elites and ‘civic organisation’ of state control over the allocation of land and criminal justice systems; and these communities tend to be characterised by intense competition over the control of resources.
- Unlike community protests, local organisations implicated in xenophobic attacks, and that present themselves as elements of civil society, tend not to dissolve themselves or be absorbed into the ANC after the violence has ceased, but remained durable structures because of their control over the allocation of resources outside the state.
- Formal organisations and informal networks also oppose xenophobic violence and work to buttress the rule of law and the state’s monopoly over coercion. These are sources of resilience against violence in communities.
Society in transition: class formation, the ANC, the state, violence

Our case studies show that the transition to democracy has unleashed profound and violent forces of class formation that are shaping much of social life at a local level in townships and informal settlements, generating dislocation, contestation over status and hierarchy, fundamental instability in the ANC, undermining and weakening the local state, and producing a “precarious society” characterised by embedded cycles of violence.

Local community life is marked by the formation of two major active classes—the rapid formation of a new elite which monopolises positions of power, privilege and control over resources in the state and local business, and the formation of a precarious underclass of those who have been expelled from work or have never experienced work, those engaged in informal survival activities, as well as the working poor in the growing zone of casualised and precarious work.

Class formation: precarious underclass

We will consider first the position of the precarious underclass in our case studies. Socio-economic precariousness and poverty should be measured both in terms of income poverty and in terms of access to social services, both of which are measured in the tables below. The tables, compiled by Municipal IQ, provide both an index of income and indices of access to social services in the municipal ward where the community protest took place. We present here the data for Kungcatsha, where performance is close to the national average, and for Slovoview where it is substantially worse, as would be expected for an informal settlement.

### Table 3: Kungcatsha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Profile</th>
<th>Ward 3</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds living under R800 per month</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds unemployed</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to water</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to sanitation</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to refuse removal</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to electricity</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to services</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Municipal IQ
Commentators such as Municipal IQ argue that the data indicates that those who engage in protest are not from the poorest regions of the country, but, rather, those who experience deprivation relative to other areas in their proximity. In other words, it is the visibility of inequality that acts as a goad to protest.

No consistent pattern emerges from the broad quantitative data—protests take place both in the most destitute communities, as well as in comparatively better off ones. On the other hand, the overall figures for socio-economic deprivation are suggestive: across four of our research sites, households living in poverty (income under R 800) range from 43–60%, households with no one employed range from 35–48%, and households without adequate services range from 11–55%. From whichever angle these are considered, the data indicates high levels of socio-economic precariousness and poverty in relation to incomes, employment and social services. This is confirmed by interviews with protesters.

In Kungcatsha young male protesters complained that the stadium was more like a grazing patch for cattle than a soccer ground, and the mayor had closed down the township’s swimming pool. Even the amenities that they had enjoyed as children, such as swings in parks, had disappeared. Unemployment left them no option but to turn to crime or drinking.

In Voortrekker conditions vary between the old township and a more recent low-cost housing settlement. In the latter there is overcrowding, electricity is a luxury, residents collect water from a communal tap early in the morning before it runs dry, and indoor toilets are useless because they don’t flush. One of the residents at the communal taps commented that: ‘We grew up in rural areas, and we’re going back to that life here.’ Commenting about the broken roads a resident said: ‘We do not have potholes here. We have graves. Our potholes are so big you can bury a child in them.’

In Azania informants described the desperation arising from poverty: ‘There is just too much poverty here. People are frustrated and angry. The youth are roaming the streets, hopeless and resorting to drugs.’ Unemployment is rife, particularly among the young, and protest marches were directed towards a new mine which had employed people from other areas above residents of the town. The lack of access to basic services, particularly clean water, was a major grievance, as was the shortage of housing and tenders issued to incompetent contractors who failed to complete their housing contracts. The words of residents bade poignant witness to the desire for an alternative

### Table 4: Slovoview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Profile</th>
<th>Ward 95</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds living under R800 per month</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds unemployed</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to water</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to sanitation</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to refuse removal</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to electricity</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to services</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Municipal IQ
future: ‘I have been staying in a shack for the past 23 years, and will die still staying in a shack,’ said one, while another commented, ‘The dream of ever owning a house is fading.’

Class formation: the new elite

At the other end of the class spectrum is the rapid formation of a new elite. Our research identifies three major sites of accumulation which provide bases for elite formation. First is the local state and the various contracts and businesses that cluster around it. The second, and somewhat less important because of limited opportunities, is local business such as township traders and taxi owners. Together, these constitute an accumulation regime in the formal townships. The accumulation regime in informal settlements is more complex. In addition to the two above sites of accumulation, which also exist in informal settlements, there is a further site of accumulation that occupies spaces beyond the control of the state; in some ways it substitutes for functions that the state is unable to organise itself, such as control of land and the provision of certain criminal justice functions.

Local (and other levels of) government provide the primary base for elite formation, because the combination of political power with control over considerable resources makes a transaction between political status and commercial profit relatively easy. Salaries from high-level jobs in the local town council, the power to distribute both high- and low-level council jobs, as well as the opportunities for business with council, and the patronage networks that link the two, are key mechanisms in the formation of the elite, especially in small towns with limited employment opportunities. Across the research sites there is agreement that corruption and nepotism is an everyday reality, whether in the distribution of jobs, the awarding of tenders, or the allocation of houses. ‘The province is corrupt, we’re just fighting for the whole of the province,’ said protesters in Kungcatsha. In Voortrekker it is generally accepted by residents that the ANC and the council are corrupt, that a bribe has to be paid in order to get an RDP house, although even this does not guarantee success. According to one informant, ‘In this town everyone, even the police, is corrupt,’ and a union shop steward described the ANC office as ‘rotten’.

While community members express anger and disgust about corruption, they also seem to accept it as part of life. Thus, protesters are cynical about the motivations of many of the protest leaders, seeing them as making use of the protests to gain access to council contracts, but this did not make them withdraw from protest or seek alternative leaders.

Elite formation is best illustrated through individual biographies. The mayor in Kungcatsha had minimal education and still lived in an RDP house six years after becoming a mayor but was busy building herself a two-storey, five-roomed ‘dream house’ at the time that she was ousted by the protests. In the same town the protest leader, who had grown up in an extremely poor family, was known for his taste in designer clothes, and described how he ‘hustled’ for business:

“I go into people’s offices and demand something. I am a loyal and dedicated member of the ANC. I am not after positions. I am not an opportunist. I will defend the national democratic revolution. But I also believe I am entitled to a portion of the country’s wealth.”

He is at the same time a ‘very religious’ member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and secretary of the SA Communist Party in his ward. The speaker in the council, who was locked in a power struggle with the mayor, was alleged to have offered ‘tenders, jobs’ to some of the protest leaders. Another councillor had led a murderous anti-ANC vigilante gang in the 1980s, but had joined the ANC ‘dreaming of riches’ according to a former MK cadre.

Positions and opportunities are not unlimited, however, and there is intense competition between individuals and the factions formed by their political and economic networks, for control of these resources. In each of these case studies there was intense conflict within the local ANC and the town council, with ramifications beyond the council into the local community as well as upwards into higher structures of the ANC.
As an informant in Voortrekker commented: ‘The protest is politically driven. We are fighting among ourselves. It’s about positions and who supported who. It’s not about capability. It’s about whether I can remote [that is, control] you’. A school principal dismissed the CG as predominantly ANC members ‘who can’t address issues through proper channels.’ One ANC member stated that ‘the greatest enemy of the ANC here is the ANC itself’, while another said, ‘Some say there is a third force. The third force is the ANC itself’.

The stakes are high in these struggles. In Kungcatsha they have been particularly murderous. The first mayor was assassinated shortly after his election; the man chosen by the ANC to replace him was killed on the day of his nomination. A former mayor claims he survived a number of attempts on his life, including an attempt to force him off the road and two gun attacks. The mayor who was the target of the protests had survived 13 attempts on her life according to her bodyguard. A councillor whose house was burnt down threatened revenge against the ‘generals’ who he believes were responsible. The formation of a new class is not a pretty process.

Similar things might be said about traders, although competition is less politicised than it is in local government. In each of the three case studies of community protests, as well as in the xenophobic violence in Gladysville, there were attacks on foreign-owned shops, and in two of the towns and the informal settlement there were indications that local South African businesses may have played a part in fomenting this violence. A South African trader in Voortrekker, who was also a member of the CG, criticised the looting, but was adamant that foreign traders represent unfair competition and should not be allowed to compete in the township, while there were strong allegations in Gladysville that South African traders were behind the organisation of gangs who plundered foreign-owned shops there.

As noted earlier, informal settlements provide opportunities for accumulation beyond the control of the state. In all three such sites, local civic organisations are able to allocate and sell, and resell, stands for the building of shacks. This is an extremely lucrative business, and its control is reinforced by violence and the threat of violence. Although this did not surface in our research, it is easy to envisage challengers from within or outside such organisations attempting to gain control of some of this business, and indeed in Slovoview the leadership has avoided holding elections so as to ensure they can retain control. Nor is it beyond the realm of possibility that some of the leadership within such organisations hoped to benefit from the eviction of foreigners, which would free up shack and stands for resale. This was certainly the outcome in Gladysville.

In Slovoview, SANCO and the local Community Policing Forum (CPF) have also taken control of criminal justice processes with, it seems, the collusion of the local police who are unable to control the area. Complainants need to pay a fee for their cases to be taken up, and criminals can pay a fine/tribute in lieu of punishment. Needless to say, control of crime also involves violence and vigilantism. The process of appropriating state functions has not gone as far as this in Trouble, where there is an ongoing contestation between organisations such as the ANC, the CPF and SANCO over attempting to establish the rule of law in the face of conflict between locals and foreign nationals, high levels of crime and informal vigilantism, and police ineffectiveness and corruption.

Using the appropriation of state activities as a base for accumulation, a thuggish local elite is able to arise through a combination of criminal, extralegal and quasi-state activities; while elements of this elite may enter into partnership with ANC representatives and officials in local government, they are also independent, since their economic base is independent and, in fact, depends on the inability of state officials to enforce the law in their territory. This also accounts for the durability of organisations like these, unlike the organisation of protesters in formal townships. They continue to exist because their leadership has a stake in an independent organisation outside the ANC and local government.

It is significant that most cases of large-scale xenophobic violence take place in informal settlements, as Misago et al. (2010) observe. This is accounted for by the conditions we describe above: a ruthless local elite habituated to the deployment of force; the high stakes attached to control of resources and of the community; a
subaltern experience of using violence to maintain order, particularly in relation to crime, in the absence of the law and order components of the state; and the general inability of the state to impose order, which is more extreme here than elsewhere.

The ongoing differentiation of black communities into a rapidly growing elite and an expanding underclass dramatises the reality of differential citizenship. The underclass is marginalised and excluded from the economic and social dimensions of citizenship, with little access to work and wages, often making do with inadequate shelter and limited access to basic services, with all the dislocating and disempowering social and psychological effects of this. The elite, on the other hand, is able to access various sources of income and assets that enhances its ability to establish and maintain power through patronage networks, even while it is racked by internal conflict and competition over this access. The struggle against apartheid was fundamentally a struggle for black citizenship, and the rapid differentiation of this citizenship, and the draining of its substance for the poorest sectors of black communities, is starkly highlighted by the aspirations that were articulated in the anti-apartheid struggle, which is why the youths address their song lamenting current conditions to the past president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo.

Symbolic order destabilised

The formation of the historically new classes is not simply a material process of accumulation on the one side and dispossession on the other, of struggles to enter one class or avoid being forced into another, and of attendant social dislocation; it also entails disturbance or disruption of the existing symbolic order, and formative projects to reconstitute symbolic order so as to make sense of new hierarchies and distinctions, new interests, and new social distances.8

How will it be known who has power, who is a member of the elite, who has status? This is a particularly urgent question when elite formation is so rapid, and the trajectory from poverty and subaltern status to powerful elite is so steep. A long-established ruling class, or a long-drawn out, intergenerational process of class formation, may evolve more discreet or subtle expressions of status and distinction, but a class (or classes, of which there are more than one crystallising within the broad category of the elite) that tears itself forth from the subalterns through such internecine struggles, and in which individuals remain subject to sudden reversals of fortune, necessarily has to rely on more robust, and even brash, assertions of status. This is doubly so in South Africa, given the nature of apartheid, which consistently denigrated and undermined the capabilities of black South Africans.

Hence, what Dlamini calls ‘the politics of excess’, conspicuous consumption, the emphasis on marks of distinction that bear witness to high levels of disposable income—designer clothes, powerful cars, large homes, expensive parties and largesse to friends and associates (see chapter on Voortrekker). These are the signs through which the new elite attempt to stabilise its power and assuage its uncertainties.

As Dlamini points out, the politics of excess plays itself out not only in relation to material markers of distinction, but also in relation to sexuality and gender. In our case studies, figures with power in the ANC, the town council or the municipal administration are said to have numerous mistresses and to have fathered numerous children with them. Mistresses and girlfriends are given jobs in the administration or, if already employed, are readily promoted. In the symbolic order crystallising around the elite, politics and power are highly sexualised and sexual liaisons with mistresses and girlfriends signify power.

For women in the elite, however, the symbolic terms are reversed: a woman in a position of power who is said to be involved in a sexual liaison with a man is regarded, not as having enhanced her power thereby, but as an extension of the man’s power; she is seen as owing her position to his power in the ANC hierarchy and is

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8 See Bourdieu (2000). Whereas Bourdieu’s work focuses on the analysis of order and how it is reproduced, here I use the concept of symbolic order to analyse contestation and fragmentation of social order.
assumed to be under his control and to be fulfilling a role in his political agenda. Several women in leadership positions spoke about how they are disempowered and disregarded within ANC structures.

Any symbolic order embodies a hierarchy of status and power. For young men in the underclass, as for women in the elite, the symbolic terms of male power are reversed. To have a girlfriend, a young man needs money. Even more seriously, a young man without money cannot pay lobola to the parents of the woman he hopes to marry, and so is unable to marry and start a family. Young unemployed men in our research sites constantly compared themselves to men in the elite, expressing envy, anger and powerlessness, and criticising women for their materialism and their willingness to trade jobs for sex.

In both Kungcatsha and Voortrekker, the mayors who were under attack by the protest movements were women. Here again, the symbolic order through which power is represented was a site of contestation over the meaning of gender and its relation to power. It is official ANC policy to increase the number of women in leadership positions in government structures. However, some of the young male protesters, their masculinity deeply troubled and insecure, were adamant that they could not be ruled by a woman, because women made poor leaders, being incapable and ‘stubborn’.

The emerging symbolic order of the new elite is oppressive—and contested—in other ways too. The young male protesters of Kungcatsha related angrily how the mayor had publicly dismissed the protesters as ‘unemployed, unwashed boys who smoke dagga, abongcolingcoli [puppets] who are not members of the community’. They pointed out, as did many others, that the mayor herself did not live in the town, and that she had minimal schooling. Similar symbolic struggles occurred in Voortrekker. According to members of the CG, the mayor refused to meet the community, and when she did she told them that residents were like Enso digestive salts: they might bubble up in protest but that would quickly die away. Councillors ‘dismayed us, and said, asiphucukanga, sizohlala singaphucukanga [We are not civilised, we shall remain uncivilised]’. But as in Kungcatsha, the mayor herself is disdained because she was for years a ‘tea-girl’ in the Post Office and had only reached grade 4 at school.

Evident in these stories is the destabilisation of the symbolic order and uncertainties over the meaning of different markers of status. While insecure members of the new elite seek to establish their status in the symbolic order by denigrating subalterns—that is, by establishing the terms of symbolic violence against the subalterns—subalterns counter with efforts to contest and undermine the oppressive terms of the symbolic order articulated by the elite.

While much of this subaltern contestation of the symbolic order takes place in language, it becomes most explicit through the insurgent citizenship claims that are articulated in direct protest action. So, for example, elite targets of protest claim that the youth protesters have been bought by disgruntled faction leaders who have their own agendas. Young protesters from Azania respond angrily:

“It is an insult to my intelligence for people to think we are marching because someone has bought us liquor. We are not mindless. People, especially you who are educated, think we are marching because we bored. We are dealing with real issues here. Like today we don’t have electricity. We have not had water for the whole week.”

Insurgent citizenship in this context is defined by its claim for work and housing, for an improvement in municipal services, and to be heard and recognised. An end to corruption also features. The repertoires of protest resemble those that were used in the struggle for full citizenship rights against the racially closed citizenship defined by apartheid, and the protesters in post-apartheid South Africa explicitly claim the rights of democracy and citizenship, especially in relation to police violence against their protests:

“The Freedom Charter says people shall govern, but now we are not governing, we are being governed. (Azania)
The casspirs remind us of apartheid, that we are not free in this democracy. We don’t need casspirs, we need police that respect human rights. (Azania)

The constitution says we have rights. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion... We have many freedoms... but we get shot at for walking around at night. (Kungcutsha)

The police want us to be in bed by midnight. It’s taking us to the old days of curfews against blacks. What if I have been paid and want to enjoy my money? (Kungcutsha)

The case studies illustrate the ways in which the elite engages in a symbolic struggle in order to stabilise the material inequality between classes—the differential access to basic services, housing, jobs and incomes between the underclass and the elite—and render it normal. However, the normality and justice of this state of things is contested by subalterns who qualify and reject the discourse of the elite, countering it with their own notions of a fair and just hierarchy and markers of status. The protest movements constitute an insurgent citizenship which demands the expansion of citizenship rights, in the form of services and jobs, as well as in the form of respect by authority for all citizens, including subalterns, and protest action is itself a disruption of the symbolic order of the elite. Subaltern responses are, of course, contradictory: protesters describe a protest leader they know as trying to position himself for government contracts as a fool and a drunkard, and activists may accuse Zuma and his ministers of ‘playing games’ and ‘making false promises’, but subaltern crowds give him a rapturous welcome at the municipal offices.

Foreign nationals and the struggle over citizenship

Community protests are not the only form that insurgent citizenship takes. In the context of mass poverty and the struggle over livelihoods and resources, subalterns not only protest against elite attempts to re-establish symbolic order, but also engage in struggles to enforce a national citizenship regime through which they are defined as citizens with the right to lay claims to a redistribution of resources through the simultaneous exclusion of foreign nationals as non-citizens whose access to, or accumulation of, resources is thereby rendered illicit. Xenophobic attitudes and xenophobic attacks should be seen, therefore, as a struggle to establish or reinforce barriers of exclusion along the lines of ‘citizenship’; such barriers are simultaneously barriers of inclusion for the locals who perpetrate such attacks. At the symbolic level, such attacks constitute an attempt to enforce a new order of citizenship in South Africa post-apartheid, particularly in the light of the perceived inability or unwillingness of the state to impose such an order of citizenship (See Monson, forthcoming for a nuanced analysis).

Insurgent citizenship, then, is not only a struggle for an expanded concept of citizenship against the differentiated citizenship created by processes of class formation, but at the same time a struggle for new forms of differentiation which exclude other groups—in this case, foreign nationals. The study of xenophobic violence in Gladysville shows how the struggle over the meaning of citizenship is not an abstract struggle over ideas, but a concrete struggle over who belongs and who does not, and that citizenship is, through such struggles, constituted as an ethnic citizenship. Certain ethnicities are confirmed as authentic South African citizens, while others are defined as non-citizens, even in cases where they may hold formal citizen rights.

The ANC: instability and paralysis

The situation described of the rapid class formation of a new elite, and the expansion of an unemployed underclass with limited access to services and housing, the fierce struggles within the elite over access to opportunities, a similar struggle within the underclass over geographical and social advantage, and the symbolic formation, contestation and disruption through which these processes are refracted, all take place around and within the ANC as the dominant political organisation and the one which mediates relations between society and state. The result is a profoundly unstable ANC which at the same time exists in a state of profound paralysis. In the struggle for power and access to resources, networks and factions form, compete and reform. ANC members in Voortrekker described the struggle for power and wealth-generating, factional struggle to the extent that ‘the
The greatest enemy of the ANC here is the ANC itself’, and gave as an example the fact that the speaker and the municipal manager were not on speaking terms with the mayor, but communicated by memorandum despite the fact that the offices were next door to each other.

Instability is reinforced by the duality between the ANC in government and its continued existence as a powerful force outside of government retaining some of its vibrancy as a liberation movement. This duality played as well into ambiguous government authority structures. While the mayor was senior to the speaker and the town manager at the local level, they outranked her politically in the ANC through their membership of higher structures. The result was an organisation with multiple centres of power, paralysed by the interlocking nature of these centres of power and the accommodations and compromises between them, but also destabilised by a new style of deposing leaders inaugurated at Polokwane. In retrospect, it is possible to see how Thabo Mbeki’s strategy of imposing a single centre of power constituted an attempt to contain the destabilising effects of class formation and multiple centres of power on the ANC; ultimately of course this strategy failed, and he and his leadership circles lost power at Polokwane, to be replaced by Zuma with the opposite strategy of attempting to contain instability by incorporating all factions and negotiating an accommodation between them with the result of paralysis and deepening instability.

Of course, the same instability undermines and paralyses the local state, given the deep interpenetration of the ANC and the administration. The result is ineffective and paralysed delivery of services, which in turn reproduces or deepens the inequalities of differentiated citizenship, providing a stimulus for insurgent citizenship in the form of protest movements.

**Summary of key points**

- The transition to democracy has given rise to a dynamic process of class formation, on the one hand the rapid formation of a new black elite, on the other the expansion of an already existing underclass struggling to exist in conditions of socio-economic precariousness.

- While the struggle against apartheid was a struggle for full citizenship rights, post-apartheid class formation is creating a differentiated citizenship based on widening inequalities between underclass and elite including, of course, the entrenched white elite.

- The transition from apartheid, class formation and differentiated citizenship have destabilised the symbolic order, giving rise to intense struggles within the elite, as well as between elite and subaltern, over the hierarchy, structure and meaning of the symbolic order of democracy in South Africa.

- The community protest movements are not inchoate mobs, but are characterised by an explicit discourse about human and democratic rights and constitute an insurgent citizenship struggle against the differentiation of citizenship rights.

- Insurgent citizenship struggles give rise not only to struggles for inclusion on the part of subalterns, but also struggles to exclude others from these rights, in this case, foreign nationals. Xenophobic violence is, in other words, at least partly a struggle over the meaning of citizenship.

- The ANC is at the epicentre of class formation, the conflict and violent struggles through which classes are born, and the destabilisation and contestation of symbolic order in South Africa, giving rise to instability and paralysis.
Collective violence

It is intriguing that none of the research-based accounts of the current round of community protests, or of the xenophobic violence of 2008, devote much attention to understanding the forms and dimensions of collective violence that is at the heart of these collective actions (Alexander, 2010; Everett, 2010; Misago et al., 2010). In South Africa, it seems, violence is a taken-for-granted social fact, rather than a phenomenon to be problematised. However, the meaning and purposes of collective violence may have much to tell us about collective action and society, and in our research we attempt to begin this necessary task.

Burning libraries: the meaning of violence?

In three of the towns we studied, protesters burned down public libraries in the township, together with other municipal buildings. We found this a puzzle. Why libraries? Was there consensus in communities that burning libraries was a good or effective way of drawing attention to their grievances? If so, why? Or was it simply an accident, without any particular meaning, that libraries happened to be burnt down along with other buildings? Is burning down a library a taken-for-granted social practice in communities?

We found conflicting and ambivalent views. In Kungcatsha, young men who had participated in the protests explained that the library was destroyed because it was not a proper library:

“You go to the library and there is no newspaper, nothing. There’s no Internet… That was not a library. What we burnt down was just a room. We burnt the place down so they would build us a proper library… that thing was there when we were born.”

In their justification they claim nothing has changed in the library since the advent of democracy, despite the donation of computers by the Norwegian government.

In Azania, where 20 computers were stolen from the library before it was burnt down, protest leaders distanced themselves from this action, categorising it as a criminal act. But one of the leaders in the active crowds that fought running battles with the police described the first attempt to burn the library as an unplanned event that occurred in the heat of battling and fleeing the police. This fire was extinguished by the fire department. Later in the evening some protesters returned, stole the computers, and set the library on fire, this time successfully. One protester described the burning of the library as an act of anger and frustration, and another echoed the protesters from Kungcatsha, saying it was useless and had old books. On the other hand, the councillor who had arranged the donation of the computers was distraught and angry, describing the protesters as ‘fools… who have never been to the library’, and a teacher described how school pupils who made use of the library would now have to go to the library in town.

A similar cluster of contradictory responses accompanied the burning of the clinic and library in Voortrekker. A church leader in the community maintained that the clinic that had been burnt down ‘belonged to the apartheid regime’ and that the municipal officials had misappropriated money meant for it. The community felt that ‘we deserve much better’. As for the library—“It was a library by name only. You go inside, there is no content.’ Asked about the community hall, he answered: ‘The community hall? That was excitement. You burn one, you burn them all.’ Other informants endorsed his views, but elderly women residents of the township contradicted him: the clinic was conveniently located, and ‘to burn it down for us old ladies with high blood pressure and bad knees… it was a big mistake’. School students expressed a similar opinion about the burning of the library, which they were accustomed to using. A CG leader said that the burning of the buildings was wrong, because they belonged to the community, and another said it was the action of criminals. A teenage school student in Kungcatsha probably came closest to describing the meaning of this action for protesters: ‘People said, this is the municipality, we are going to burn it down.’
Clearly a library or a clinic, and the act of burning it down, have different meanings for different actors in the community. For many it is a public amenity with important practical uses, even if it is inadequate. For others, its manifest inadequacy shows that little has changed since apartheid, and government is failing the community. Its practical usefulness is immaterial. There is a continuity between the apartheid past and the democratic present in the symbolic meaning of library or clinic as a structure that represents authority, and an authority that is indifferent to subaltern voices. Burning it down is a symbolic disruption of that authority, an assertion of the anger and grievances of the community. However, protest leaders who are more prominent figures, occupy positions of responsibility and are conscious of the importance of ‘public opinion’, do not attempt to defend the action of the crowds, but blame them on ‘criminals’—even though in all probability they anticipate the action and share in its symbolic assertion.

It is a symbolism that is well understood, both by community and by authorities, since it was central to the struggle against apartheid authority. Ironically, it is a symbolic action which represents also the disempowerment or subordination of the community, and indeed reproduces it, by destroying the very public goods that are important in the lives of many community members. In this way it sums up the contradictions of violent action, discussed further below.

Violence and local moral orders

The conflicting voices that make different meanings of such events draw attention to the shift in moral register that accompanies the violence of collective protest. The violent disruption of the dominant symbolic order constitutes a popular or subaltern symbolic order with its own morality, and its own rationales, which explain and sanction the use of violence. The words of one protester in Azania calls attention in a vivid way to the shift in moral register that accompanies the resort to protest violence: ‘I am Christian, but when the strikes9 start you put the Bible down and then you fight. It is necessary to use force. The water is clean now because of the strike.’

Other comments suggest that the laws that are followed by the community in normal times and that are integral to the dominant symbolic order, as well as the morality of peacefulness, need to be put aside when the community is not heard: ‘We were not fighting then. We were practising ubuntu. We were still following the laws of South Africa. We were still trying to talk to the mayor. We wanted to talk nicely to them.’

More simply: ‘We thought, let’s barricade the road that passes the township, burn down trains and burn everything. Maybe they will take us seriously.’ And, ‘People of this township are very patient, but this time they were very angry. They were sick and tired of waiting.’ These comments suggest a local moral order in which violent protest is justified in the face of social injustice and indifferent authorities.

Violence is integral to insurgent citizenship in South Africa. Violence—both against the state and against collaborators in the community—was very much part of the insurgent movement of the anti-apartheid struggle, which at its heart was a struggle to assert the rights to citizenship of the black majority, and provides a repertoire of practices when frustration and anger become too much.

Violence is understood as a language, a message, a way of calling out to higher authorities about the state of things in their town but its violence makes it a warning at the same time. For example, a respondent in Voortrekker recalled: ‘Then people said, “The premier undermines us. He’ll see by the smoke we’re calling him”’. This comment suggests that collective violence is a means of forcing the powerful to acknowledge the dignity and legitimacy of the powerless and hear their collective demands. This was echoed in Kungcatha: ‘Actually, when we fought, we were sending a message to the top, to the provincial capital. Because we could see, even people at the top, they know what is going on.’

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9 The word strike is used to describe not only industrial action, but forceful community protests.
Burning down homes is a way of punishing representatives of local authority who have betrayed the needs of the residents, just as collaborators were burnt out of the community in the 1980s, although then they were killed as well. Battling with the police is described as war, like the anti-apartheid liberation struggle: ‘Yes, this was war. We were ready to die for the cause’, and ‘You see now people only use stones to fight the police... but if this brutality continues, people will start using guns. You have militarised the police now, what option are you giving for us?’.

The protesters toyi-toyied, chanting struggle songs and war songs of the 1980s. In Azania, where there is a significant PAC presence, they chanted, ‘Abafana ba APLA batrainwa ngapapontsa’ [The young men of APLA make use of the police to exercise and build more muscles]. The protestors would chant and parade like soldiers when singing this song.

The words and songs of our interviewees in these case studies reveal how the collective participation in violent confrontation can be experienced as empowering for those who are spurned by authority and who are condemned to live on the margins of social life because of poverty and joblessness, especially when it enacts the disruption of the dominant symbolic order and the assertion of a subaltern symbolic order of resistance. Young men who are emasculated by the dynamics of socio-economic deprivation seek to recover their masculinity, in this case by recourse to the symbols and practices of a militarised masculinity through which they can confront and damage oppressive authorities. Jubilant interviewees in Azania described how a police officer had been injured by a rock they had thrown, and in Kungcatsha celebrated their triumph by chanting songs exulting over their enemy, a councillor whose house had been burnt down. In all these cases, subaltern groups who have been structurally denied agency over their lives celebrate the recovery of agency, however brief, in protest and collective violence.

The readiness to resort to repertoires of the past in attacking state property and responding with violence to the violence of the police, in a context of disruption, disorder and contestation in the symbolic systems of South African society, suggests that the legitimacy of the state, which was so fundamentally undermined in the struggle against apartheid, may not have fully stabilised in the constitutional democratic post-apartheid order. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion in many of our interviews that the legitimacy of the ANC may be more deeply rooted than that of the state. While many of the protest leaders in the different case studies blamed the police for provoking the violence of the youth, the testimony of the young male protesters suggests that after several rounds of peaceful protest had been fruitless, they themselves were ready to make use of violence. In Azania, the protest leaders suggested the mayor called the police ‘because the blood was written on all our faces’,11 and in Kungcatsha participants in the protests were similarly frustrated and ready to fight.

The corrosive effects of violence

While the collective violence used by community protesters may seem to have an emancipatory element in its ability to disrupt the dominant symbolic order and contribute to a sense of empowerment and agency on the part of the subaltern classes, it also has a corrosive effect on political and associational life. In Kungcatsha, protesters celebrated their victory in ousting the mayoral committee and electing their candidates in the resultant by-elections, by promising they would use violence again if their new representatives failed to satisfy them:

‘Violence is the only language that our government understands. Look we have been submitting memos, but nothing was done. We became violent and our problems were immediately resolved. It is clear that violence is a solution to all problems.’

10 This is a reference to the announcement that the militarised rank structure (Sergeant, Captain, Colonel, General, etc.) that characterised the police under apartheid was to be reconstituted.

11 Meaning that they were angry and ready to fight.
On the one hand, protest and protest violence can be seen as a form of democratic voice which complements the democratic practices of elections, making up for the deficits of the latter. However, at the same time, the resort to direct violence devalues the democratic practices associated with electoral politics—open public competition between political parties and candidates for the votes of the electorate.

Cycles of violence are established. It is a short distance from violent protests to the embedding of violence in political processes more generally. Thus, in most of our sites threats of violence had been directed against political rivals within the ANC, and this had gender effects, with some women activists articulating fears about attending political meetings because of the threat of violence. Thus, as noted above, mayors and mayoral candidates were assassinated in Kungcatsha. Activists who withdrew from protest movements, such as one who resigned from the CG in Voortrekker, and another who resigned from the SACP in Azania, also reported that they had been threatened with having their houses burnt down as a result. And in Slovoview, Gladysville and Trouble violence is integral to organisational life, the control of land, and of social processes such as attempts to control crime.

Violence to settle disputes and ensure control of organisations, both political and non-political, feeds off local histories of violence, begetting cycles of violence and revenge. A councillor in Kungcatsha whose house had been burnt down promises revenge, revealing the way masculinity, violence and revenge are bound together:

“I absorbed all my anger as a man, but I must take it out. I’m not afraid to get arrested. I’m war. They have declared war. I won’t regret if I do something bad. I would have done what a man as a head of family had to do. I won’t lie, I want to revenge. It breaks my heart you know when my child asks me daddy when are we going back.

Also in Kungcatsha, which has a particularly intense history of violence, a local taxi owner who had been active in self-defence units which battled state-sponsored vigilante gangs during the anti-apartheid struggle, and who was elected the chairperson of the local taxi association which had in turn been racked by violent conflict, talked about the importance of non-violence in dealing with community problems, so as to avoid the mistakes of the past. He led a group of prominent community elders on a visit to the ANC head office to seek help in resolving the protest violence in the community. A few days after our research visit, he was assassinated. His funeral was marked by gunshots, celebrating his role as a fallen soldier, at the same time as he was eulogised for his role in bringing peace to the community. Thus, the local moral order of the community reproduces the uneasy mix of violence and aspirations for peace that characterise South Africa’s recent history.

Xenophobic violence

Xenophobic violence, while it shares some elements with protest violence, also exhibits very different qualities. While the perpetrators of xenophobic violence share the frustration of community protesters about the ineffectiveness of the state, and the unwillingness of government officials or representatives to respond to their complaints, their violence is directed less to disrupting the dominant symbolic order of the state than to imposing a particular order of citizenship in their communities—an order they perceive the state as being unable to impose. Members of communities interviewed for the Misago et al. research into the 2008 xenophobic attacks, frequently said that the attacks against foreigners were an attempt by communities to implement the laws that the government itself was reluctant or powerless to implement (Monson, 2009). Once again, the assertion of citizenship is closely associated with the use of violence to define and expel those who are not citizens, because they are foreigners.

The quality of collective violence against foreign nationals also differs from that which characterises community protests. Xenophobic violence is much more explicitly directed towards destroying the property and the bodies and personhood of its targets. Collective violence in community protests against government operates according to tacit rules of restraint, which marks it out as different from the collective violence of communities in the anti-apartheid struggle as well as from xenophobic violence. Xenophobic violence is also marked by tacit rules of restraint in some cases. Indeed, in the organised pogroms at Slovoview no one was killed. This contrasts with
others where we know foreign nationals were killed quite deliberately. Indeed, in such cases xenophobic violence seems to draw from repertoires of more personal violence by vigilantes against criminals, who are not infrequently beaten or burnt to death, as well as from anti-apartheid repertoires such as the necklacing of izimpimpi.\textsuperscript{12}

Police violence

In all of our research sites on community protest, police action was itself heavy-handed and violent, and was frequently described as provoking the violence of protesters. Indeed, the cycles of police violence and protest violence appeared to be a well-worn and well-understood routine, with each party anticipating the repertoires of the other. Just as much as the protesters drew from the repertoires of anti-apartheid protest, so the police appeared to draw from the repertoires of apartheid-era repression of protest. That is, their actions suggest that the police view protest as a threat to public order rather than as a democratic right which should be protected by the police.

Police violence took the form of tear gassing crowds of protesters, firing rubber bullets at protesters and at times quite randomly into crowds of bystanders, and assaulting and beating protesters. More disturbingly, several respondents, particularly in Azania, reported violent incursions into the homes of suspected protest leaders and the beating of family members, as well as the detention and torture of suspects. This accords with reported behaviour in other sites of protest, particularly in Ermelo and the recent death of Andries Tatane in Ficksburg.

The excess of police violence provides a strange contrast to their low profile and inactivity in many of the sites of xenophobic violence—exactly where one would expect a rapid and forceful deployment of large numbers of police in order to prevent lawless violence. In Trouble, where groups of foreign nationals were armed with automatic weapons, the police avoided any confrontation with the foreigners, and according to locals, made no attempt to disarm them. Generally, the picture emerges of the police adopting a selective approach to implementing the law; on the one hand, acting unlawfully themselves and on the other, turning a blind eye to unlawful actions by South Africans against foreign nationals, and, where the latter were heavily armed, towards their unlawful actions.

Again, this suggests a high degree of symbolic instability in relation to the law and the state. The fragility of the symbolic order may explain the readiness of the police to use violence when confronted by community protest. It may be that, just as protesters seem to accord the state only a provisional legitimacy, so too the police may feel that the challenge to the authority of the state is a direct challenge to their own authority and status; this is no doubt reinforced by the response of those ANC leaders who see a ‘third force’ behind every protest. Where both the police and political authority are insecure about their own status and power, there is a real temptation to assert that power through the unambiguous use of force. It may not be a coincidence that the most aggressive use of force, including allegations of torture, on the part of police occurred in Azania, where the PAC was prominent in the leadership of the protests and appeared to pose a real possibility of electoral defeat for the ANC.

On the other hand, tardiness in protecting foreign nationals may signal a deep uncertainty within the state regarding both citizenship and the rights of foreigners.

\textsuperscript{12} An informer or sell-out.
Summary of key points

• Collective violence in community protests constitutes a symbolic disruption of the dominant symbolic order, underpinned by a subaltern symbolic order (or local moral order), through which the subaltern classes are enabled to assert an insurgent citizenship.

• The collective violence of xenophobic attacks constitutes a project by an alliance of elite and subaltern groups to forcefully impose a particular order of citizenship on their communities, at the same time establishing the symbolic borders between insiders (citizens) and outsiders (foreigners). This can be seen as a dark side of insurgent citizenship.

• Insurgent citizenship is closely linked to violence, with long roots in the anti-apartheid period of struggle.

• While subaltern collective violence in the form of community protests has an emancipatory dimension to the extent that it serves to articulate agency and empower subaltern communities and so expands democracy, it is at the same time corrosive of associational life and politics.

• In particular, there is an interplay between protest violence and xenophobic violence.

• Excessive police violence directed against subaltern protesters is an index of the uncertain authority of the state in times of disorder and symbolic instability.

Conclusion

Our research shows that subaltern collective violence is integrally linked to broader processes of class formation, differential citizenship and the destabilisation of the symbolic order that have attended the transition to democracy in South Africa. The precarious subsistence of a large underclass with little access to secure income or to state services on the one hand, and the rapid shifts in status, conspicuous consumption, uncertainties and internecine struggles of the new elite on the other, generate new differentiations in the field of citizenship. The symbolic order, disrupted and reformed by the end of apartheid and the beginning of democracy, undergoes further disruption and contestation as the elite attempts to stabilise and make sense of new hierarchies and rankings, and a new distribution of power. On the other hand subalterns are alternately dazzled by and challenge these differentiations and hierarchies. At times subaltern challenges to the emerging material and symbolic order take the form of movements of insurgent citizenship such as community protests or xenophobic violence.

Community protests challenge the poverty, rightlessness and lack of voice of the poor, by claiming rights to work and housing, basic services from the local municipality, an end to the misuse of public money, the accountability of politicians and officials, and the right to be heard. The democratic and human rights enshrined in the constitution are used as reference points. This is the content of insurgent citizenship’s challenge to differential citizenship. However, insurgent citizenship is linked to repertoires of violence, including the destruction of government property, disrupting the control of the authorities over the community and punishing corrupt officials. In these cases, subaltern violence serves to disrupt the dominant symbolic and physical order, and assert a subaltern symbolic and moral order of insurgent citizenship within protesting communities.

Xenophobic violence responds to the same experience of differentiated citizenship by attempting to deepen the differentiation between citizen and non-citizen (foreigner), excluding non-citizens from access to work, shelter, business opportunities, and access to basic services, so as to reserve these rights for citizens. Here, as in community protests, citizenship is linked to the practices of violence, and the focus is less on disrupting the dominant symbolic order—although there are elements of this too—and more on asserting an exclusionary citizenship order in communities that have become ‘disorderly’. Indeed, subaltern communities in many cases seem to regard xenophobic violence as a direct way of implementing the laws of the state, which the state seems incapable of doing itself (Monson, forthcoming). The extreme violence against non-citizens is an attempt to stabilise both physically and symbolically the meaning of citizenship and the claims of subalterns to be included in the benefits of citizenship. This too is a form of insurgent citizenship.
This makes it clear that insurgent citizenship is not, simply and unproblematically, a struggle to expand the meaning of and access to democracy and citizenship; it also has a dark side, expressing the local hierarchies and prejudices of local moral orders (Chatterjee, 2004) which do not necessarily expand the meaning of democracy and citizenship, but on the contrary, constrict and limit it. One such element is xenophobic violence, which not only seeks to prevent foreign residents from claiming some of the basic rights of citizenship, but also denies their right to life. Another element is the expression of patriarchal values which undermine the role of women in public and political life. A further element is the leadership role played in some insurgent movements by violent, corrupt and sometimes criminal local elites in an attempt to further their own self-enrichment and control. In all of these ways local insurgent citizenship movements demonstrate their paradoxical combination of liberatory and oppressive symbolic and physical practices.

Subaltern collective violence is revealed through this research to have three important elements. Firstly, it serves to disrupt and contest the dominant order both physically and symbolically, but perhaps at this stage in post-apartheid development, primarily symbolically. Secondly, it serves to establish and enforce an alternative subaltern symbolic, moral and physical order in subaltern communities. Thirdly, collective violence provides an avenue for the assertion of subaltern agency and masculinity. As argued above, subaltern collective violence is intrinsically linked to the conception of insurgent citizenship, as it has developed historically in South Africa.

Looked at from this viewpoint, collective violence may appear to have an emancipatory dimension. But it is also clear from our research that it has a strong corrosive dimension as well, becoming embedded in cycles of violence within political and community associational life. In its most destructive form, violence is deployed against various ‘others’, whether defined by nationality, ethnicity or other social markers. Violence undermines an expanded notion of democracy and citizenship by reducing public participation and democratic choice, undermining public debate, and entrenching male domination of political life. In the cycles of violence, the elite is also able to deploy violence in order to retain control and power, so reproducing differential citizenship. Violence, in other words, is even more ambiguous than insurgent citizenship, having both emancipatory dimensions in its ability to challenge a dominant and oppressive symbolic order, as well as corrosive dimensions which serve to limit and differentiate citizenship even further.

However, this research report also highlights collective resilience and resistance to violence. Substantial constituencies mobilised against xenophobic violence in different communities, such as Trouble, Slovoview, Gladysville and Ndaleni, supporting instead the rule of law and the monopoly of the state over coercive authority. These mobilisations were led by organisations such as ANC branches and CPFs, and by ordinary citizens, and they constitute an important social resource for resistance to xenophobic attacks.

The picture in relation to community protest also suggests that communities prefer peaceful to violent protest. In most cases there was a history of peaceful protests prior to violent clashes, which tended to be provoked by extreme frustration and by the confrontational tactics of the police. Underlying the preference for peaceful protest is the fact that violence invariably hits the poor hardest – the elderly women who attend the clinic, the school students who use the library. Again, the deeply rooted tradition of peaceful protest constitutes a social resource for democracy and containing violence. But it is a tradition that will only survive if it is reinforced by the practices of the state – most importantly, the responsiveness of state officials to community grievances, and the restraint of the police in responding to protests.

Our case studies conclude with the remarkable case of Bokfontein. This shows how addressing the poverty of a community through a public employment programme has addressed both socio-economic marginalisation and collective trauma, rebuilding the resilience and agency of the community. Bokfontein has become a community transformed, ending violent conflict, mobilising against xenophobic attacks, and reimagining its future. It suggests the kind of strategies which may help to transform South Africa more broadly.
Voortrekker

The smoke that calls

Jacob Dlamini

Introduction

In June 2008 Voortrekker became the first site of violent protest since the election of President Jacob Zuma. Since then a pattern of collective violence has spread across the country, totalling 104 major community protests in 2009. The violence has been variously labelled as ‘service delivery protests’ or ‘xenophobic attacks’ or ‘actions against a dysfunctional, local state fuelled by ANC factionalism’. While some define it more broadly as ‘social insurgency’ or ‘riots’ or ‘social unrest’ a local newspaper described the violent community protest, which took place in Voortrekker in June 2009 as ‘havoc’. A national newspaper described it as ‘an orgy of violence’ and the protestors as ‘marauding gangs’.

The violence in Voortrekker was short-lived but caused serious damage to both persons and property. In a span of 48 hours there were three deaths, the burning of tyres, the erection of barricades across all access roads to the township, the burning of private cars and municipal buildings such as the library and clinic as well as municipal trucks, the destruction and looting (especially of maize meal, bread and air time for cell phones) of shops owned by Indians, the burning of some councillors homes and the mayor’s home.

It is significant that these repertoires of violence were preceded by non-violent protest actions in the form of marches, mass meetings, the presentation of a petition to authorities and the call for a ‘strike’ or stay-away. Specific activities in Voortrekker involved organising a mass meeting of about 2,000 residents, drawing up a memorandum listing grievances (mostly about corruption, inadequate service delivery, nepotism, and poor management in local government) and organising a march on 15 June from the township to the municipal offices from where the memorandum of grievances was faxed to senior officials. So a crucial question to ask is how these non-violent forms of protest mutated to the kind of violence that occurred in June 2008.

The Research

A team of two researchers made three visits to Voortrekker over a period of three months in 2009. Their focus was on process, rather than a single event: the key question being on both why and how collective violence had developed in 2009. To try and answer this question the researchers engaged in participant observation and numerous interviews and conversations with a number of informants.

The Research Context

Understanding collective violence in Voortrekker involves locating it in the context of South Africa’s transition to democracy. The present moment involves an unsettling of social relations, a destabilisation of social identities and new political contestations. Voortrekker is situated in a province noted for ‘contentious politics’. By this is meant that there are competing claims from different interest groups which involve the relation of participants to government (Tilly, 2003: 26).
The provincial context involves three specific themes which are relevant to understanding the collective violence in Voortrekker: corruption, factionalism, and manipulation by powerful elites and violence. There are allegations of high-level corruption, specifically relating to the R1.3 billion Mbombela soccer stadium in Nelspruit. Even more dramatic is the claim by the ANC Youth League in the Gert Sibande district in Mpumalanga that it is close to exposing the ‘third force’ that it alleges is behind service delivery protests in the province. The chairperson of the league said that senior ANC leaders were fueling the protests as part of a campaign to topple the present premier. The previous week the provincial secretary of SANCOP publicly accused the ANC national treasurer of funding and fueling the service delivery protests in the province. This is currently the subject of a defamation suit.

These contestations are taking place in a context of heightened economic insecurity and uncertainty. In Mpumalanga, as in the rest of South Africa, despite the ANC commitments to eliminating poverty and the expectations of the majority of black people, poverty and inequality have increased dramatically since 1994. For example, South Africa’s Gini coefficient inequality measure moved ahead of Brazil’s to become the world’s leader among major countries: from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.07 in 2008. The income of the average African person fell as a percentage of the average white’s from 13.5% (1995) to 13% (2008) (Development Policy Research Unit, 2009).

The Research Site: The Town

Situated in a politically contested province, Voortrekker is a poor community marked by fractious, corrupt and divided local government, high rates of unemployment and inadequate municipal services, especially with regard to housing, sanitation and water. It is part of a local municipal area which came into existence in 2000 when the ANC introduced nationwide, local government reform. The municipality, which covers 4876 km², is predominantly rural.

According to the 2007 Community Survey, the municipal area’s population is: 101,256 Africans (95%), 771 coloureds (0.72%), 311 Indians/Asians (0.29%) and 4121 whites (3.87%). This gives a total of 106,459 residents. The municipality has seen a -25% drop in population since 2001 when the overall population stood at 142,897. The sharpest drop has been among Indians/Asians (-58, 81%), Africans (-25%) and whites (-19%). Coloureds are the only community that has seen an increase in population, from 581 in 2001 to 771 in 2007, a rise of 32%. The population density is 22 per km² (less than half the average for the municipality’s 46 per km² or the national average of 41 per km²). Females make up 53% of the population and males 46% (the data is based on the 2007 Community Survey). About 6% of the population has had no schooling, 27% have between Grade 0 and 7, 20% have between Grade 7 and 10, 11% have between Grade 10 and 12 and 12% have Grade 12 without a university exemption. About 1.98% have Grade 12 with university exemption; 1.32% have a Bachelor’s degree, 0.22% an Honours degree, and 0.28% a Masters or a PhD.

About 80% of the labour force earns less than R3200 and the employment rate is about 33%. The biggest employers are agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing (9%), manufacturing (5%), wholesale/retail services (3%), community services (3%) and domestic service (2%). According to the 2007 Community Survey, 19,924 people live in a house or a brick structure on a separate yard or stand, 9188 live in huts/dwellings made of ‘traditional material’, 98 live in backyard shacks, 62 reside in informal dwellings and 67 live in workers’ hostels. About 14,668 people have piped water inside their dwellings, 5502 have piped water inside their yards, 3734 have piped water on a community stand less than 200m from their dwelling, 2561 rely on boreholes, 299 depend on springs, 111 on rainwater tanks, 630 on pool, dam or stagnant water, and 193 on water vendors. About 12,955 have flush toilets connected to the sewerage system, 124 have flush toilets with septic tanks, and 3064 have dry toilet facilities, 4554 use pit latrines, and 150 use pit latrines. Most residents rely on candles and paraffin for their energy needs.
Not all sections of the municipal area are affected the same way by poor service delivery. The situation is worse in rural wards but better in the older parts of the township, and is, incidentally, the first township in the province to be fitted with a set of traffic lights after 1994. Even one of the councillors whose house was burnt down, said that while service was good in the township and new settlements, it was poor in rural wards.

The Sequence of Events

There were five important sequential events in the process of mobilisation, which led up to the collective violence:
1. Anger over a disorganised sports event in April 2009
2. The public launch of the Concerned Group (CG) at a mass meeting in 2009
3. From this meeting a memorandum was compiled and faxed to various officials’ offices on 15 June
4. This was done at the culmination of a march of thousands from the township to the municipal offices
5. The non-arrival of the Premier at a mass meeting on 28 June 2009 to hear the community’s complaints about corruption and poor service delivery in the area.

Several informants maintained that the immediate trigger of the protest action (termed ‘strike’ by residents) was a debacle over the Mayoral Cup. An amount of R150,000 was provided by the municipality to pay for refreshments, prizes and cash for the winners, and about seventy teams signed up. One participant said:

“That is where this thing started… there was no food served during the tournament. It was served late when many people had already left. Even then it was stale. The organiser had spent only R30,000 on catering and pocketed the rest. To this day the teams are still waiting for their cash prizes.”

Clearly the anger this provoked has to be contextualised in terms of the poverty and importance of soccer in this community.

At a mass meeting in the local stadium in early 2009 a loose grouping termed the Concerned Group was publicly launched. This meeting was intended to draw up a memo of grievances and plan a march to Voortrekker. The meeting, attended by an eclectic mix of women, men and youth took place in a half-empty stadium. The CG compiled a number of complaints which were listed in a memorandum, which was faxed on 15 June to the premier’s office as well as the offices of the mayor of the district, as well as ANC President Jacob Zuma in Johannesburg. The faxes were sent at the culmination of a march attended by thousands from the township to the municipal offices. On 22 June, the Premier met with the CG and promised to meet with the people on 28 June to discuss their issues. On 28 June, about 2000 residents were gathered at the local stadium to hear the premier respond to their complaints about corruption and poor service delivery in the area. The Premier didn’t show up.

According to the local newspaper, seeing the MECs, mayors, councillors and officials from the Premier’s office ‘only angered the community members and they (the officials) were asked to leave the stadium immediately’. The officials did not leave immediately. But their departure, when it came, was graceless. The MEC for local government addressed the meeting. He did not go far before the people in the stands start shouting him down, waving their arms and telling him to ‘voetsek’. The MEC tries to speak over the noise; the shouting continues. Then you see the MEC for sports on the ground between the VIP podium and the stands, trying to calm down the crowd. He, too, is told to ‘voetsek’. The crowd is singing. A man in blue jeans and a Blue Bulls top, microphone in hand, approaches the podium. ‘The officials must voetsek,’ he says. ‘The community was promised the premier. They will only listen to the premier no one else, says the man’. The crowd screams its approval.

According to one key informant: ‘That the houses were burnt down was the mistake of the premier. He promised to come but did not.’ The premier had donated money to advertise this mass meeting, ‘then everybody went to the stadium but the premier didn’t pitch. Then people said, “The premier undermines us. He’ll see by
the smoke we’re calling him’.” This comment suggests that collective violence is a means of forcing the powerful to acknowledge the dignity and legitimacy of the powerless and hear their collective demands.

The CG maintained that the violence was a spontaneous outpouring of anger. In the deputy chairperson’s account, there had been long-simmering tension in the township, but the Premier’s no-show, the killings and long-standing grievances over corruption combined to spark the explosion. ‘We were unable to control the mass because the mass had proof of corruption,’ he said.

The Protests

The repertoires of protests in June 2009 in Voortrekker followed a familiar pattern to those established during the anti-apartheid struggle involving peaceful forms of mass action such as marches, petitions, burning municipal property and vehicles, erecting barricades across access roads, burning and looting the houses of discredited councillors and the shops of some foreigners, dancing and singing struggle songs.

However, it is important to appreciate that the context is very different to that of pre-1994. Under the post-apartheid, democratic regime citizens enjoy freedom of assembly, speech and association. These freedoms meant that the citizens of Voortrekker could gather in large, public meetings in the local stadium, which they did on at least two occasions in 2009. It also meant that they could articulate their grievances, formulate their demands, and get a response from a high-ranking representative of the state, the provincial premier. Related to this is the reality that the post-apartheid state is what Tilly (2003) has called a ‘low-capacity democratic regime’ in the sense that it largely lacks the capacity to broker negotiation between contending parties, enforce agreements and prevent escalation of conflict.

According to a report in a local newspaper published on 3 July, the ‘havoc’ started in the evening of June 28 with the burning of tyres and erection of barricades around the township by protesters. The paper said the police spent the night trying to remove the barricades and ‘to keep the protesters at bay’. By Monday morning, June 29, ‘the police were already in the township and a low-cost suburb about 1km east armed with rubber bullets and teargas. All access roads to the township were barricaded and no taxis or any vehicles were allowed out. The few residents who did go to town, had to walk.’ The paper continued: ‘Around 07:00 the community clinic, community hall, public library and the municipal offices in the township were set alight.’ The ‘culprits’, as the paper called them, also burnt down three private cars and three municipal trucks. The local police had called for reinforcements and borrowed armoured vehicles from nearby towns. The newspaper said that, in total, there were 100 police officers brought in to help the Voortrekker police station, which had a staff complement of only 187.

The mayor’s house was set alight at about 12 pm on June 29. A 29-year-old man, who may have been with the group that burnt down the house, was shot dead by one of two security guards watching over the house. From the mayor’s house, the ‘culprits’ then moved to the houses belonging to three councillors in adjacent wards of the township. One councillor only survived having her property burnt down because she still lived with her parents and the protesters could not agree among themselves about punishing the parents for the sins of the daughter. She said shops belonging to Asians, including one a few doors away from her house, were attacked at night that Sunday.

Meanwhile, in a low-cost suburb of Voortrekker a bullet fired during the day on June 29 from a car full of police and traffic officers killed a 21-year-old youth. One of the officers in the car was a traffic cop who lived in the suburb. A rumour quickly spread that one of the councillors whose house had been burned down was responsible for the killing.

By Monday evening, June 29, two men had died, the mayor and four ANC councillors had been forced out of the township, scores of residents had been arrested, and foreign traders in the township had been hounded out and their shops looted, with maize meal, bread and cell-phone airtime proving to be favourite items of the looters.
Tuesday, 30 June, got off to what the local newspaper called an ‘uncertain’ start. There were still barricades but the protest seemed to have died down.

**Different Social Meanings**

This violence against public property had different meanings for different social categories in Voortrekker.

**Municipal buildings: ‘they are eating our money’; ‘These are our things’**

Informants gave varying accounts of why municipal buildings were targeted. Of the clinic, one said: ‘That was not a clinic. People only queued for Panado, no other medicines. The clinic was not up to standard. There were lots of shortages.’ However, others, especially old women, disputed this and claimed that the clinic was conveniently close for their check-ups for medication for arthritis and hypertension. It also created problems for HIV and Aids sufferers who subsequently had to travel to town, a R12 journey by taxi. Similarly different attitudes voiced by different segments of the community related to the burning of the library. A member of the CG claimed that the library was deficient and the local librarian was hardly ever there as she ran a tavern. However, some students said they used the library. As for the hall, one informant said: ‘There is a big difference between a town hall and a community hall,’ suggesting the burnt hall was not for the community.

Libraries and clinics could simply have been ‘soft targets’ and/or symbols of corruption. One informant, who is a religious leader in the community, maintained that the clinic belonged to the apartheid regime and was too small to serve the needs of the community. He said the community believed that councillors and municipal officials had misappropriated money meant for the clinic. As for the library, ‘it was a library by name only. You go inside, there is no content.’

Opinion was divided in the community about whether the burnings were justified. One member of the CG said he was opposed to the destruction of municipal property—‘Lezinto ezethu (These are our things).’ Another informant, a community leader blamed criminals for the destruction. An elderly woman informant said that while she sympathised with the protest, she disagreed with the destruction of municipal property.

**Xenophobic attacks: ‘they are now our in-laws’**

Attacks on foreign-owned spaza shops were justified by one informant on the grounds that foreigners were killing local business. Another said, ‘We’re not xenophobic,’ and suggested that ‘members of the community might have directed their anger towards the foreign traders because they had failed to heed a call from the CG for a stay away on June 29.’ According to the local newspaper, businesses had ‘to choose between closing or losing everything on June 29 because of an intentional fire that will be started if they do not’. Opinions on foreign traders varied widely. One spaza-shop woman trader said she did not have any problems with them in the township—‘I was making R200 a day before the foreigners came… I am still making R200. I have been blessed. I can’t fault the Asians for anything’.

In addition to the South Asians, there are Somalis, Chinese and Zimbabweans in Voortrekker who were affected by the violence. A group of schoolboys interviewed about the attacks on foreign-owned shops were complimentary about the Asian traders. One said: ‘Indians have discounts. You could be fifty cents short, they will still sell to you.’

Hygiene was one factor mentioned by another informant. A spaza shop owner from the township said:

“We were not involved in attacks on Pakistanis. But… they are selling drugs, sleeping inside their shops and sleeping with our underage daughters. We have resolved… we say, these Pakistanis, because they are rich, they overpower us. They must go to the Indian shopping mall in town and open a big wholesaler. We will support you. We don’t want you to close us… We’re not saying they must go out of South Africa. Because they have children in townships, they are now our in-laws. But we can’t compete with them. All along we were doing well, until they came along.”
This statement illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of so-called ‘xenophobia’ in that this shop owner is expressing a complex mix of class, gender and ethnic antagonisms, antagonisms that are heightened by his own situation of economic insecurity.

**Ineffective and Destructive Police Intervention**

Clearly the police in Voortrekker did not know how to manage protests and demonstrations. Several officials reported disappointment at the absence of police protection during the violent protest. In fact, police intervention and use of rubber bullets seems to have inflamed protestor’s anger and, in that sense, escalated collective violence.

But there is a deeper problem evident in a very shallow relationship between the police and the local community.

Despite having been in Voortrekker for two years the police chief said they had no relationship with the council. ‘The councillors only know us when they have a problem. There’s no co-operation. They are Mr me, Mrs me = me, me, me.’ The local police—as with other local authorities—appear to be confused, weak and incompetent. They were conspicuous by their absence from several mass meetings, ignorant of local politics and had to call for reinforcements from nearby towns. The local police station commander said that one reason why he had to do so was because he could not trust the local police officers to do their job. He said that many of them disappeared when they were supposed to be at work on the crucial two days of June 28 and June 29.

It is significant that in Voortrekker, as in many other sites of collective violence, police intervention is justified in the name of maintaining law and order. But in the use of rubber bullets and teargas the state is acting as a patron of violence. Clearly these protests cannot be treated only as a law and order problem and should involve inquiries into their causes and exploring solutions through negotiations.

**The Protestors**

**Social differentiation**

In reports of collective action generally ‘the community’ is often understood as a monolithic entity. This conceals class and other diverse interests. This research was especially committed to disclosing the underlying and, often, obscure configuration of interests, which differ according to class, age, ethnic and gender identities.

One informant said of the township: ‘There is no community here. It is every person for herself. People don’t want to see others succeed.’ Different events in the social process whereby collective violence was generated involved participants of different social characteristics. For example, the public meetings seemed to involve a cross-section of township residents. At the mass meeting in April 2009 when the CG was launched there was a strong presence of older people, women as well as men. However, in video footage of the violent protests such as the burning of the house of a traffic cop, there are many younger people, both men and women. These youngsters were the shock troops for the protests.

**Youth**

All the collective violence against property in Voortrekker involved young people.

One informant said the participants were mostly children from the two high schools in the township who are deprived of any recreational facilities except for soccer fields and poorly maintained tennis, netball and basketball courts. It is significant that the protests happened during the school winter break. Other protestors were part of the 2.8 young million South Africans who are not engaged in either formal employment or further education of any kind.

A difficult question to answer is whether these young people were puppets who were manipulated by political entrepreneurs in the form of either the CG or individuals such as the district mayor who had their own political agendas. ‘Manipulation’ implies passivity, but in this case there were obvious and immediate grievances especially relating to the lack of access to jobs, housing, water, energy and roads. Most of the violence was perpetrated by
young men who re-socialised into the scripts of violent masculinities. For example, video footage of the torching of one councillor’s home in Voortrekker shows that the perpetrators were young men armed with stones and vuvuzelas. Some of these moved into the house, destroying furniture and setting it alight.

**Gender**

While the burning of homes and municipal property in the township was largely carried out by young men, both old and young women were present at the key events. It is significant that Voortrekker, as is the case in many towns in South Africa, has a woman mayor. In South Africa today women are clearly benefiting from the new formal commitment to gender equality and equal gender ratios in deployment. It is striking that women were called upon to legitimise the group that was key to organising the protests, the CG when it was first established. While this suggests that women are not associated with corruption and criminality as much as men, the mayor of Voortrekker seems to have evoked high levels of distrust and dislike.

**Ethnicity**

Apart from age and gender, ethnicity also surfaced in the diversity of social characteristics pertinent to understanding the identities of the protestors. The two social characteristics of looted spaza shop owners in Voortrekker that were mentioned were ‘rich’ and ‘Indian’ or ‘Pakistani’. Thus, the boundaries drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which are a familiar feature of xenophobic attacks, involved both class and ethnic elements.

Furthermore the boundaries between different identities in the collective violence in Voortrekker involved foreigners, defined not only as those of different nationalities, but also South Africans from other geographical regions. The employment by the municipality of such ‘outsiders’ seems to have generated deep resentment. The demands made to the Premier included the one that anybody outside the township employed by the municipality must resign or be killed. ‘These posts should be filled by locals,’ a protestor said, ‘We are sitting at home because people from Pongola, Ermelo, Johannesburg, the Free State and Swaziland are filling posts that should be occupied by us.’

**Class antagonism and aspirations**

Class elements are not only evident in many service delivery protests which involve attacks and looting of shops owned by foreigners, illustrating both xenophobia and class antagonism. This class antagonism is also evident in resentment of the resources of officials of the local state. In the context of high unemployment the salaries of councillors, for example, are the object of intense envy and competition. This unemployment and desperate poverty are clearly behind the demand from the ‘underclass’ that only locals should be employed by the municipality and outsiders should either ‘resign or be killed’.

Much of the recent so-called ‘service delivery protests’ are not just about the lack of basic services but also about class formation. In the process individuals are using the ANC to promote social mobility and the acquisition of wealth.

This is decried by elements within the ANC. For example, ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe, said recently: ‘The biggest threat to our movement is the intersection between business interests and holding of public office. It is frightening to observe the speed with which the election to a position is seen to be the creation of an opportunity for the accumulation of wealth.’ (Kassrils, 2009: 15).

**The Aftermath of the protests**

The aftermath to this collective violence followed the frequent response from the government to service delivery protests, namely, to suspend the local administration. For example, in February 2010 the provincial ANC fired six mayors and appointed seven new ones in what it said was a bid to boost service delivery. Other councillors were redeployed, including a speaker and a chief whip (Business Day, 2010). This pattern was followed in
Voortrekker. The Premier of the province arrived in Voortrekker on 30 June, 24 hours after the ‘havoc’ started, and addressed a public meeting at the local stadium. He announced that the municipality had been placed under administration.

The MEC for local government, acting under orders from the premier placed the area under administration on June 30. He also instituted a probe into the graft allegations levelled at councillors and the municipality by the CG. The preliminary results were announced to the provincial cabinet and later to the CG at the end of September. On 2 October the MEC received the final report. Based on its findings he suspended two councillors, the municipal manager, five senior managers of the council and eleven officials, including deputy directors.

The administrator also made members of the CG responsible for the demolition of the municipal properties destroyed in June. He hired 150 people at about R100 a day to carry out the demolition and made a CG member their supervisor. One of the administrators said the CG had been given the job to pacify them. The chairman of the CG conspired with the supervisor for the bricks from the demobilised library, clinic and council offices to be delivered to his house.

No consensus emerged from the research on whether the violence was successful. To the extent that the violence resulted in the overthrow of the municipal council, we may say it succeeded. However, it is not clear that the administrator running the town is going to deal with the service delivery problems and community grievances that gave what may have been an elite spat within the ANC succor and legitimacy.

The Organisers of the Protest: a group of political entrepreneurs

The CG is a group of political entrepreneurs who played a central role in organising the protest in Voortrekker. A school teacher informant maintained that the group grew out of political and personal divisions within the municipality. He said: ‘The CG is a grey area. I don’t think there’s anything like a CG. It is predominantly ANC members who can’t address issues through proper channels.’ Another said that the problem of political infighting and divisions was bigger than the ANC in Voortrekker. The station commander of Voortrekker questioned the legitimacy of the CG—‘I am not clear about the CG, in terms of their mandate. Were they organised by the community or by someone else? We never heard of a committee meeting where the community discussed service delivery protests. (We only heard of them when) they informed me they were planning to march.’ Some informants maintained the group emerged from conflict between ANC officials in the district, while others stressed their objections to corruption. There were also a range of personal motivations. But they are clearly involved in the patronage networks which operate in Voortrekker.

Political entrepreneurs engage in the work of ‘activation, connection, coordination, and representation’ (Tilly, 2003:76). However, with an extremely diverse membership, it is not clear how representative they are of the wider community or whether they are fully committed to non-violence.

The deputy chair said that the Concerned Group tried to stop the violence. ‘When community members burnt down councillor’s houses, we tried our best to stop them. But the killings (of the two men) led to anger in the community.’ In his account, the violence was a spontaneous outpouring of anger.

The CG began informally with about four members who either went to school or played soccer together. It grew to 30 at the height of the protests and was down to 22 members when we conducted our fieldwork. (The new chair of the group was toying with the idea of registering itself as an NGO to make sure it lived on).

The chairperson of the group is a prison warder at the Voortrekker prison. Members include civil servants such as teachers, a prison warder, government clerks and traffic cops as well as unemployed people. There is also an IFP member, who is a convicted murderer, a drug dealer and many church-going members. The majority consists of ANC and COSATU members. The ANC has 15 branches in the district and one of the first resolutions
taken by the CG was for each member to go back to his or her ANC branch to recruit new members. This would, of course, allow the group to take over the branches and stamp its authority on the ANC.

Other informants were clear that the purpose of the organisation was ‘to fight corruption at the top. Monies were misappropriated. Even we could see that. That is why we supported the march’. The variety of motivations is clear from the informant who when asked why he had had joined said, ‘I am hoping the committee will open doors for me so I can die having worked’. While ostensibly the members of the CG said they came together to fight corruption in general, when pushed they each provided personal experiences of corrupt practices. Membership of the group is somewhat fluid. A member, one of the first to leave, said he did so because the group had achieved its original aim: to force out corrupt ANC councillors, have the municipality put under administration and have corruption claims investigate. Relations between members seem marked by strong personal animosities and political rivalries.

There are doubts whether the collective violence was as spontaneous as the CG claimed. In footage taken from a public meeting held in the stadium one member is seen on video complaining about how the township community has to go ‘through river and border gates’ to secure appointments with councillors and municipal officials, clearly referring to their distance—both geographical and subjective—from the community’s concerns. In the same meeting the chairperson of the CG says, ‘This is not play. We’re not just going to write a memorandum and say things will be OK. 

Kukhona okufanele kushube. Some things must go bad’. However, he qualifies his point to say, ‘We’re not saying people must get hurt. We’re saying we must tighten our belts’. Earlier in the footage the chairman says the people of the township must stand up and do things for themselves.

The CG clearly has a wide range of motives for participation.

Triggers of the Collective Violence

As described above in the sequence of events, two events were identified as triggers of the collective violence in the sense of focusing and mobilising community discontent: the non-arrival of the Premier at a mass meeting; and a debacle over a local soccer tournament. However, it is doubtful if these triggers alone would have produced the outrage that led to the violence perpetrated on 28 and 29 June 2009. Different sections of the community had been complaining about corruption and poor service delivery for years—some for as long as the mayor and her officials had been in office, meaning since 2006 when the current council was elected. These events must be understood in the context of these long-standing grievances.

The Grievances

The main grievances of the community were formulated by the CG in its June 15 memorandum, which cited inadequate service delivery, various forms of corruption and a lack of accountability on the part of local government officials. The group says the memorandum was drawn up in consultation with the different communities of the township. The group, most of whose members come from the old part of the township, said residents from the old township and the new RDP and informal settlements, were invited to public meetings and asked to list their concerns.

The memorandum stated that ‘every financial year our local municipality receives an adequate budget from the national and provincial government, which is always aimed at service delivery. Unfortunately, year in year out inadequate service delivery has always been dished out to the majority of poor of the poorest of this, municipality by the municipality’. In addition it said the ‘municipality excels in its tariff increases, because they do not miss the dates for the increases, but the residents do not see where the money goes to or what it is used for’. The memorandum also cited the misappropriation of funds, nepotism and other unacceptable employment practices, the poor implementation of the municipality’s development plan, failure by the municipality to deal with community concerns, corruption in the local, traffic licensing office and a lack of accountability among
councillors. In closing, the memorandum said: ‘We would like to state it clear that the citizen’s Concerned Group are the members of the community at large, which comprises of different affiliations. We are in no position to be elected as councillors and we are mostly working, but cannot sit and fold our arms while the municipality is misusing the ratepayers’ money. We also support our elected government with the hope of better tomorrow. We pledge that councillors involved in misconduct be recalled to their structures with immediate effect’.

One informant who is a councillor and chairman of the Democratic Alliance in the district said: ‘I don’t think there was one particular thing that caused the riots. It was a collective thing.’ Yet it took the Premier’s failure to visit Voortrekker for the place to burn. Another informant, a COSATU official, said the events of June 28 were, in fact, not the start but the culmination of developments that had been a long time in the works. ‘The things that happened now have been brewing for years,’ he said. The deputy chair of the Concerned Group said: ‘Yonke lentso, uma ath’uyayilandelela, inezizathu (When you pursue this whole thing, you will find that everything has a reason).’

**Material Conditions:** ‘We do not have potholes here. We have graves. Our potholes are so big you can bury a child in them.’

In Voortrekker there is an acute housing shortage, poor service delivery and a criminal neglect of infrastructure and social needs.

These problems are illustrated by conditions in a low-cost housing settlement that grew in the mid-1990s on the south-western edge of the township adjoining Voortrekker. Here electricity is a luxury, houses are in short supply, there are no basic amenities and, worst of all, there are no functioning toilets. Even in those houses that have been given indoor toilets, they are useless because there is no water to flush them. It was common knowledge in this settlement that people wait for the sun to set before venturing across the road to relieve themselves in the adjacent timber plantation. Access to water is a particular problem. The water supply is slow, erratic and women have to queue for long hours.

These material conditions relate to the reality that Voortrekker suffers from a fractious, corrupt, dysfunctional and divided local state, linked to ANC factionalism.

**A Divided, Corrupt and Dysfunctional Local State**

Voortrekker lacks a cohesive local government. It is marked by struggles for access to power and resources, incompetence and indifference to the poor and corruption, specifically, in the form of patronage networks. In Voortrekker there are deep divisions within the executive branch of the municipality and among ANC councillors. According to one informant the speaker and the municipal manager would not speak to the mayor. They communicated by memo even, though their offices were right next door to one another.

The local state is relatively invisible in the sense that access is limited to state officials. Informants reported that local officials in Voortrekker were remote from the community. ‘The mayor has not met the community. You have to cross rivers and then wait six months to meet her.’

In Voortrekker, as in much of the country councillors are weak and remote. Ward committees were created to improve the contact between municipal councillors and their constituencies, but in much of the country they are weak and unrepresentative, and lack the resources to facilitate telephone and travel. The dysfunctionality of the local state is largely due to the ANC policy of appointing councillors from other localities and lacking relevant qualifications.

Led by the mayor, corrupt practices from within the local state disrupt any sense of a just and regulated social order. Residents of the township know that people pay bribes to get RDP houses but the outcome is uncertain.
Asked how people with RDP houses had acquired them, a resident of township said, 'They were just lucky'. Corruption, thus, reduces the citizens dealing with the local state to a dispiriting game of chance.

The idea that a citizen’s engagement with the state is a game of luck complicates the idea of administrative fairness and justice and has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the state. Corruption in both the ANC and the local state often involves the same individuals and is linked to ‘the politics of excess’. By this is meant the personal greed which fuels many corrupt practices. A proliferation of children and mistresses implies the need of resources to support such ‘extravagance’. The sexualised nature of the patronage networks operating in Voortrekker is illustrated by the case of the district mayor who is said to have girlfriends in every department in the area’s municipality. The story is that all of them have had his children.

The politics of excess is infected by ‘local intimacies’ by which is meant overlapping personal, political and familial ties that gives the disputes in Voortrekker both their intensity and bitterness. This reflects the multiple connections that draw people together. Many of the key actors in the collective violence went to school together, played or watched soccer together and were drinking partners. These intimate connections exist in a poor and deprived community so they are infused with intense competition for power and resources. The research suggests that the strong, disciplined, associational life of the anti-apartheid struggle is being replaced by a grasping, corrupt, highly personalised politics which subverts any notion of community solidarity.

The Disorganisation of the ANC

The ANC is at the centre of political life in Voortrekker and has become a battleground for factional interests. Several informants stressed that the problems in Voortrekker reflected the factionalism within the ANC. Another view was that the infighting within the local ANC was not about politics and power, but about wealth. An informer said that the ANC had been ‘privatised’. The CG tried to overcome its problems with the local ANC councillors and office by opening a direct line of communication with the Premier’s office. However, this created another problem. By bypassing ANC councillors and granting the CG a de-facto recognition and legitimacy, the Premier violated the ANC constitution which denies recognition to unconstitutional bodies such as the CG. It is significant that the CG was formed at a time of bitter divisions within the executive branch of the municipality and among ANC councillors.

Historically the container and director of political energies, the ANC, today, is fragmented by corruption and factionalism. However, it is still a dominant force and evokes deep loyalties, which are not contradicted by protest actions directed against ANC-dominated, local government structures. It is paradoxical that in South Africa generally while the ANC is weak and disorganised, it commands deep allegiance. Evidence of a dual repertoire of protests and electoral support is clear in the 66% ANC majority in the 2009 election. According to one informant, the problems within the ANC stemmed from the ANC Polokwane conference in 2007, which had inaugurated a new political style. It had given ANC members a taste for deposing ANC officials with whom they disagreed. Competition for political office and position in local government is overlaid with personal tensions. The factionalism and division within the ANC amplify the confusion in Voortrekker.

Social relations in Voortrekker are highly personalised and highly sexualised. In the context of material deprivation there is an intense competition for access to power and resources both within the ANC and the local state which is given a particular intensity through ‘local intimacies’ and ‘the politics of excess’.

Conclusion

The context of South Africa’s transition to democracy, a period of change marked by intense political contestation, economic insecurity and the disruption of social relations and identities is crucial to understanding the violence in Voortrekker.
Three themes are particularly relevant to explaining the collective violence in Voortrekker: a sense of injustice rooted in different forms of exclusion; corruption and indifference within the local state; and ANC factionalism.

Three forms of exclusion generate the perceived sense of injustice among the community:

1. A political exclusion in the sense of a distance between the community and local government officials and the absence of any space for effective participation in decision-making.

2. This political exclusion relates itself to an exclusion from the services necessary for a productive and dignified life. It is undeniable that since democratisation there is greater access to healthcare, education, clean water and sanitation, electricity and housing in South Africa. However, this access is uneven, and in Voortrekker there was severe deprivation, amounting to a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969). This structural violence is especially clear in the case of the informal settlement on the edge of the township adjoining Voortrekker, where there are no basic amenities and only one central tap.

3. Exclusion from respectful treatment by officials of the local state, a form of ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 2000).

This case study illustrates that what are termed ‘service delivery protests’ often involve community protests that go beyond the specifics of service delivery to include grievances about local government. So service delivery is not simply technical and managerial, but deeply political as it structures a power relationship between the state and its citizens. However, the identity of consumers is trumping that of citizens. A positive relationship is further eroded by how officials in Voortrekker demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to the grievances and demands of the disadvantaged sections of the community.

In one sense the protests signify a failure of local democracy, but in another, they were successful in that the collective violence resulted in the overthrow of the municipal council in Voortrekker. The violence had generated a response from distant and uncaring officials and, in this sense, the burning of property and the ‘thick, black smoke which billowed over the township’ was ‘the smoke that calls’. The experience in Voortrekker suggests that collective violence is a means of forcing the powerful to acknowledge the dignity and legitimacy of the powerless and to hear their collective demands.
Introduction

Kungcatsha was rocked by two weeks of violent community protests in the second half of 2009. The protests started on a Sunday, when a mass meeting of residents in the local stadium decided to call for a stay-away in protest against the town council’s failure to explain to the community what had happened to a missing sum of R30 million. Violence flared up when the police were called in and attempted to disperse protesters with teargas and rubber bullets. Barricades of burning tyres were set up. During the protests a councillor’s house, a community hall and a library were torched, and the council offices and a new community centre were partially destroyed.

A week into the protests, 11,000 residents of the township marched to the town to present a memorandum to the council. They carried placards with all kinds of messages (for example, the mayor must go; a hungry man is an angry man and so on) and chanting, ululating and singing songs, including umshini wami umshini wami (the infamous song associated with President Zuma). Some protesters started to break the windows of municipality offices and tried to set cars belonging to the council alight. The police started to fire at the crowd with rubber bullets and all hell broke loose. The protesters started to run amok, looting street vendors’ goods, throwing stones and missiles at the police and barricading roads with stones and dustbins. Some protesters carried sticks and knobkerries. Passing motorists were stopped and others were not so lucky when their cars were broken into. The police arrested scores of protesters, some of whom alleged police harassment.

The protests ended when a team of senior, ANC leaders arrived in the town and announced that the mayor and her mayoral committee had been ‘recalled’. This looked like a triumph for the protesters and the community of Kungcatsha, but our research suggests a more ambiguous conclusion.

The Research

A team of two researchers made four visits to Kungcatsha, both separately and together, over a period of three months, the first taking place about four weeks after the end of the protests. A snowballing methodology combined with participant observation was used to access all key informants in the community. In the first visit, 22 people were interviewed over a period of three days. This included the former mayor, three community members, two community leaders, one church leader, four municipality officials, ten young people and two police officers.

The Town

Kungcatsha has about 40,000 residents, and is located in Mpumalanga province. The township of Kungcatsha where the protests originated has a high level of income poverty, even though it is not as high as the national average. The number of unemployed households is also high, and equal to the national average. While access

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1 The fieldwork for this chapter was conducted by Jacob Dlamini and Malose Langa.
to water is good, other indicators of service delivery are extremely poor, both with reference to the municipal average of the local municipality, as well as with reference to the national average.

According to a local representative of the Democratic Alliance, it used to be a rich town. It had some of the best farmers in the country and boasted a sizable textile industry. Today, the major companies in town have shut down. The chairman of the COSATU Local says: ‘We can’t sustain our own economy; youth unemployment is a problem.’ He says many young people have no job opportunities, a situation made worse by the failure of the municipality to provide bursaries and learnerships. ‘That’s why when you look at these protests many people were young and unemployed.’

**The Sequence of Events**

**The organisers of protest**

About six weeks before the protests, a group of young, ANC Youth League activists started planning to mobilise the community in protest about the missing R30 million. The idea occurred to them at a traditional cleansing ceremony that was held at the house of Mokoena, a young man of 26, who was in the executive of the SACP and the Youth League, and is recognised in the township as the leader of the protests. Two of the other leaders were Xaba, a 32-year-old woman who is a trade unionist and ANC activist, and Mosoetsa, a 30-year-old electrical engineer who runs a small company with a contract for the maintenance of boilers in the area.

According to Mokoena: ‘Someone remembered that the municipality had yet to respond to a forensic report that had been published in late 2008. We decided to reconvene the next afternoon. It took three days to organise everything. That’s where this thing started.’ The report Mokoena was referring to was a forensic investigation instituted by the Mpumalanga provincial government in 2008 into allegations that about R30 million had been embezzled by councillors and municipal officials. The allegation of the R30 million investment’s disappearance could not be investigated properly, since the municipality could not provide the investment certificates and the bank could not provide bank statements due to the time that had lapsed. The municipality sat on the report and did not share it with the community. However, for reasons connected to infighting between the mayor and the speaker, the report was leaked, allegedly by the speaker, to members of the ANC Youth League, who had organised protests against the municipality in 2006, 2007 and 2008. This meant the story of the R30 million would not go away and that the ANC Youth League now had more ammunition in its arsenal and could reasonably accuse the municipality of a cover-up.

According to Mosoetsa: ‘This was long overdue. We had been talking about service delivery since 2007. Comrades deployed in local government are failing us.’ The group met regularly to plan the protests against the mayor and the council, and then started calling public meetings.

**The protests**

About a month after this group started meeting, the municipality introduced a credit control policy to get residents to pay for services, and began cutting off the electricity supply to the houses of defaulters. The township was, therefore, a tinderbox on the Sunday when the provincial MEC for local government, having heard that there was a danger of community protests, came to visit. First, he visited the mayor and promised to assist in getting the municipality’s affairs into order. Then he met with the activists, who left the public meeting in the stadium that they were addressing, and retired to a community hall in the Indian part of town to hold discussions with him. While they talked, the people in the stadium were getting restless. According to Xaba: ‘They felt we took too long. They marched to the hall to demand water and electricity.’ At this stage, the MEC went back to the mayor and instructed that the electricity should be restored. However, when he reported back to the people in
the stadium, ‘They felt they couldn’t wait, and called for a stay-away and for barricades to be erected, but no burning’.

But the violence started the same day, after the police were called in. The activists placed the blame for this squarely at the door of the police. As Xaba put it: ‘People would converge in public; the police would fire teargas. It made the people wild.’ Mosoetsa added: ‘Then the cops started shooting some and arresting others. That made people angry.’ As a result, the library, a community hall, a municipal office and the house of a senior councillor were burnt down. A man was shot dead looting a shop behind the library, some say by the police and some say by the Asian shopkeeper. Violent clashes continued between young men and the police for about three weeks, with scores injured and others arrested for public violence. According to young men who had participated in the violence, it was the police conduct that angered them, and persuaded them to demand that all councillors stand down.

At some point after the protests had started, a group of eight priests and businessmen, including a former ANC mayor who had been removed from office after three years and had since joined to the UDM, came together to form a Fraternal Committee. In the words of the former mayor: ‘We could see the criminal element was taking over. People who were supposed to be assisted were being victimised. There were no negotiations and there was no leadership in the municipality. The mayor was not speaking to the Speaker. Our main objective was to see order and stability maintained.’ The committee met with the mayor and the speaker, as well as with regional ANC leaders. When it became clear that this was not bearing fruit, the Fraternal Committee headed for the ANC head office in Johannesburg, hoping that the President, Jacob Zuma, might visit Kungcatsha.

In Johannesburg, they found their way into the ANC office, and said they would not move until they had met with the secretary-general. Eventually they met him and were told: ‘Zuma is not a fire extinguisher; put down the flames and Zuma will come.’ A few days later a team of ANC heavyweights arrived and announced that the mayor and her six-member, mayoral committee had been ‘recalled’. The announcement ended two weeks of protest which included non-violent mass action as well as violence to property and person by demonstrators and police.

A bitter strike

It should be said also that part of the tension in Kungcatsha at present comes from the fact that there had been a prolonged strike at the Early Bird poultry farm, one of the last remaining big employers in the area. The workforce at the company is split. While FAWU accepted the wage offer tabled; the rival union DUSA rejected it. DUSA members have been on strike since. However, in an interview with four of the strikers, they explained that they joined the service delivery protests in the hope that the community would support their strike. The employer then decided to apply for an interdict against striking workers. In terms of the court order, striking workers were not allowed to come to work or toyi-toyi next to the company gate. What was unfortunate is that some of the non-striking workers, who were also staying in Kungcatsha, were seen as sell-outs. One of the non-striking workers’ house was burnt, and some were beaten up. What also made the situation worse is that casual workers were hired from the neighbouring communities in the farms. All these measures rendered the strike redundant because the company was able to continue production.

Striking workers saw the service delivery protests as a blessing in disguise. In one of the meetings, Mokoena had said that they would organise a march to go to Early Bird, but this did not happen. The workers felt that the organisers of the service delivery protest used them to achieve their political goals. Many striking workers had hopes that the community would show some solidarity with them, but when the service delivery protest ended people did not care about the striking workers. The strike only ended after seven months. A former mayor negotiated with the employer to allow striking workers to return to work without their needs being met. Criminal charges against striking workers were also dropped. It is reported that many people were just happy to be at work.
Aftermath

The mayor resigned 22 days after she was recalled by the ANC, although the other members of the committee resigned immediately. She eventually resigned after being intimidated by local and regional ANC leaders into doing so. On the other hand, the speaker was among the first to resign after being recalled, possibly hoping to show the ANC that he toed the party line. One reason why he and others wanted the mayor to resign immediately upon being recalled was so that by-elections could be held.

Three weeks after the ANC had announced the recall, three ANC members, drawn from the ANC’s proportional representation list, were sworn in as replacements for the three PR councillors who had stepped down with the recall. The three were among the organisers of the protests; one of them a key organiser. According to the former mayor, even though her branch did choose a candidate to replace her, the election was fraudulent as there were fewer than 67 people at the meeting. According to her, members were visited at home and persuaded to sign the attendance register.

However, the most difficult branch was the one involving the former speaker. The branch also happens to be the one to which most of the protest organisers belong, including Mokoena, Xaba and Mosoetsa. The protest organisers wanted a man named Khumalo to be their candidate, while the former speaker wanted a woman named Mrs Khumalo, a former cleaner at the local hospital, to stand. Between October and December 2009, the branch had three aborted general meetings. According to Xaba, factions fought to get their new members to vote. In the end, Khumalo was nominated by the branch as their candidate. In the by-election itself, he won with 98% of the votes against candidates from the PAC and the IFP. In the two other wards where by-elections were held, the ANC won by 86% and 63%.

On the day of the by-election Mokoena told us: ‘Today it is like 27 April 1994. The people of Kungcatsha are happy to come and vote for their leaders. This is democracy that we fought for.’

Ironically, by-elections in Kungcatsha were held on the 27 of the month, but not that of April. This is a powerful statement. Mokoena evokes 1994’s first democratic elections discourse. Many protestors drew on anti-apartheid discourses even though many of them were too young to have been part of the anti-apartheid struggle. Mokoena also compared the by-election with the 1994 elections on the 27 April 1994. He said:

“Look there, look that side. It is early in the morning, but people are already queuing. This is massive, Comrade. The people of Kungcatsha have come out in numbers to choose their leader…. The masses have spoken through their mass action last year and now they will exercise their democratic right to vote for their leader Comrade Khumalo.”

Overall, the elections were peaceful. There were no reports of violence and intimidation. By early morning many people (mainly the elderly) were already queuing to cast their votes. Many party agents were wearing T-shirts bearing Jacob Zuma’s face. We, the researchers, did not see any party agent for the IFP or PAC in this ward.

It was evident that Khumalo (who was one of the service delivery protest leaders) had a lot of support in the ward. He was a well-known figure in this ward as a result of having led the protest the previous year. His supporters described him as a disciplined cadre of the movement. Some supporters (mainly the youth) wore T-shirts bearing his face and gave voters’ pamphlets saying, ‘Vote for Khumalo’ (this is revealing because his surname is Dlamini. Old people were only told to vote for the ANC. Many of the voters were young males (between early 20s and late 30s). This is contrary to the survey conducted of the post-2009 general elections that many young people were not interested in politics. In Kungcatsha, it was clear that many people had an interest in the by-elections.

It seemed as if the service delivery protests had raised the political consciousness of the youth in this community. Some interviewees made reference to the Bill of Rights, including the right to protest and to get services such
as access to clean water, housing, electricity, health and education. Overall, there was also a sense of feeling victorious that the previous council had been removed. ‘The masses have spoken,’ said one interviewee. In many of the narratives, there was a sense of collectiveness, oneness, pride, excitement and happiness that the will of the people has prevailed. Interviewees drew on both human rights and democratic discourses to justify their violent service delivery protest against what they considered to be an incompetent and corrupt council.

The youth participants in the protest, interviewed on the day of the by-elections, were adamant that it was the violence that created the democratic opportunity to elect new leaders to the council. Interviews were conducted with some of the voters about how they felt about the by-elections. People were very happy to vote. Some said: ‘You see the strike has paid off.’ ‘Yeah we are happy to vote for our leader comrade Khumalo,’ said another participant. There was a lot of excitement in the interviews. However, they asserted that, ‘it is not guaranteed that violence would not happen again. The youth want to see change and nothing else.’ Their hopes were high that Khumalo would fulfil his election promises, but they would resort to violence if he fails to do so: ‘He (Khumalo) knows the process. He was part of the march. If he does not deliver we will also remove him like the former mayor’.

An important aspect to be noted is that many members of this community (especially the youth) now felt that the use of violence was a solution to all their problems. Violence, in many of the interviews, was normalised as the only answer to poor service delivery issues. One participant said: ‘Violence is the only language that our government understands. Look we have been submitting memos, but nothing was done. We became violent and our problems were immediately resolved. It is clear, Comrade Malose, that violence is a solution to all problems.’ Many were feeling that they have the power to remove incompetent leaders. ‘Leaders must toe the line, but if they don’t we will remove them like the mayor and her council,’ said one youth leader. At the party celebrating Khumalo’s victory, the participants sang struggle songs and toyi-toyied, enacting violence symbolically as a legitimate, collective act.

The Violence

This section of the research report explores the views of six young men, who claimed to have participated in the protests, who were interviewed in a focus group, as well as the experience of a 17-year-old schoolboy interviewed separately.

The grievances

When we asked the young men about the source of the violent protests in Kungcathsha, the first thing they referred to was the story of the R30 million. One said: ‘We know that there’s R30m missing and we don’t know how it got lost. What made us fight is we wanted to know how it got lost, who ate it.’ At the same time, the young men were angry at the derogatory language the mayor had used to dismiss their protests: ‘We heard the mayor said the people who fought were not the community but dagga smokers who know nothing… we ended up vandalising because it looked as if these people were not listening to us.’

The young men’s focus on the missing R30 million took place in the context of their broader sense that the mayor and the town council had ‘done nothing for the community’. They complained about recreational facilities such as the soccer stadium, the swimming pool and the library. According to them, the stadium was more like a grazing patch for cattle than a soccer ground, and the mayor had closed down the township’s swimming pool. Asked why they torched the library, which had just been kitted out with new computers, donated by Norway, one man said: ‘You go to the library and there is no newspaper, nothing. How can you go to a library with no newspaper? Hayi! There’s no internet. There was nothing. Eintlik, the things of this place… niks.’ Another added: ‘That thing that they called a library, that was not a library. What we burnt down was just a room. We burnt the place down so they would build us a proper library. Not that rubbish that was there. That thing had been there for a long time.’
The men said corruption and official inertia and incompetence were so endemic that there had been no progress and development in Kungcatsha since democracy. Even the amenities that they had enjoyed as children, such as swings in parks, had disappeared. The shortage of housing and a lack of jobs were also high on their list of grievances. The municipality had demolished a section of the local men’s hostel and promised to build family units in its place. However, the units built through a dodgy municipal tender were so small that in some of them a family of six lived in two rooms. Such conditions encouraged crime. One man said, ‘I don’t think crime will end with these people around.’ The men, some of who confessed to petty and serious crime (from muggings, housebreakings to robbery), said they had little choice but to turn to crime. ‘We have nothing to do, that’s why we get guns and carry out stick ups,’ one man said.

This litany of grievances, clearly, in the view of these young men, provided ample reason for their protest: ‘Actually, when we fought, we were sending a message to the top, to Nelspruit (the provincial capital).’ The men said political infighting within the ANC and lack of leadership had contributed to the violence. The premier of Mpumalanga as well as the mayor of the district municipality under which Kungcatsha fell should have addressed their problems early. They related the general lack of responsiveness of the town council as well to the fact that the mayor comes from a small farming town nearby, rather than Kungcatsha.

The protests were a complex amalgam of the activities of political entrepreneurs and community responses to the real grievances. The result was massive mobilisation and an electrifying atmosphere. As one participant said: ‘I have never seen such a big march in the history of Kungcatsha. The stadium was full during our mass meeting. Everyone was there.’ It is evident that there was a sense of unity and oneness amongst community members, notwithstanding the personal motivations of some of the organisers. We return to this theme below.

The turn to violence

Asked why—even though community grievances dated back to 2006 and the community had been protesting since then—the protests suddenly turned violent in September and October 2009, one of the men said:

“We were not fighting then. We were practicing ubuntu. We were still following the laws of South Africa. We were still trying to talk to the mayor. We wanted to talk nicely to them. We were not fighting then. We wanted them to hear us.”

This quote suggests that at least some township residents were predisposed to resort to violent protests because of the failure of previous peaceful protests and their increasing frustration with local government. Many interviewees drew a distinction between ‘following the laws’, talking ‘nicely’ and ‘practicing ubuntu’, on the one hand, and ‘fighting’ on the other. Fighting, therefore, implies a willingness to break the law, or engage in activities outside the law and the normal codes of interpersonal conduct (ubuntu).

Although the group of young men voiced strong criticism of the actions of the police, they articulated their own agency and volition in choosing violence for good reasons. The dominant tone in their explanation for their resort to violence was anger. The mobilisation of the community to engage in violence seems also to have entailed coercion, as it frequently did in the 1980s. A schoolboy who took part in the protests, said he only did so because there were rumours in the township that non-protesters would be attacked. According to the schoolboy, the protesters included schoolchildren, street kids and some criminals.

It was reported that several shops belonging to foreigners were looted and burnt, and a single fatality was that of a young man shot as a looter in the shop of a Pakistani, some say by the police and others say by the shopkeeper.

It is quite striking how readily the community and its crowds resorted to the struggle repertoires that developed during the 1980s: peaceful forms of mass action such as stay-aways and marches with petitions, burning barricades, burning down municipal property and the houses of those the community has lost faith in, toyi-toying and singing
struggle songs, coercion to enforce participation in protests, and engaging the police in violent clashes. Apart from invoking songs from the struggle, newer songs were made up during the protests specifically targeting local power holders and asserting the strength of the crowd as community against powerful individuals.

The Role of the Police

The interviews, indeed, suggest that both the police and at least sections of the crowds were predisposed to deploy violence and, moreover, that both sides expected it of the other. The men spoke of policemen firing rubber bullets randomly into crowds. One said: 'Guys were sitting drinking beer. The police assaulted them.' Another said during one protest, he and a couple of protesters ran into a yard and hid in a toilet. 'The police came and fired pepper spray into the toilet. What could we do. We came out and as we were coming out, they kicked us.' A third man said the police had imposed an unofficial curfew in the township: 'They want us to be in bed by midnight. It's taking us to the old days of curfews against blacks.'

Most of the interviewees agreed that the police responded to the protests in a violent and, sometimes, random fashion, and felt that the police actions breached the limits of acceptable behaviour. The police service is a fundamental agency of state authority, and their excessively forceful response to the protests suggests that that authority is somewhat fragile, and in turn undermines the legitimacy of state authority. The cycle of protest violence and police violence suggests that the repertoires and practices of apartheid contestation remain deeply embedded, both, in actions of the community and its crowds and in the behaviour of the police.

Triggers

The protest organisers

The protest organisers mentioned that at a traditional ceremony people remembered that the report into the missing R30 million had not yet been presented to the public, and decided to mobilise protest about this. However, this issue was not a new one, and in the telling of the story it seems almost random that this was selected. It may have been a shift in the internal balance of power among the councillors or within the ANC (such as between the speaker and the mayor) that provided the trigger to the protest organisers, either because it presented new opportunities, or because it shut down access that they previously had. The level of intrigue inside the ANC suggests some power dynamics amongst comrades. We should not, however, lose sight of the symbolic importance of the missing R30 million. It is the first issue mentioned by the young men who participated in the violence, before they mention other service delivery grievances.

Mass protest begins

On the Sunday—when the crowd in the stadium decided to launch a stay-away and set up barricades—there were two factors that could be considered triggers. Firstly, the council had recently cut the electricity supply of defaulters, and the demand for electricity to be reconnected was a central theme in the meeting at the stadium. Secondly, the MEC appeared in public meetings with the community at the stadium and with activists at the hall. The presence of a figure of political authority from outside the town—or the failure of such a figure to arrive as promised, as in Azania—appears to be an important triggering factor where a community has lost patience with the local authority.
The Crowd

Leaders and the crowd: Political entrepreneurs or political pawns?

Political entrepreneurs use existing social ills to mobilise community members to rally behind them, but on the other hand, community members are also very strategic in using political entrepreneurs to achieve their own goals of good service delivery.

Community members rejected the dominant view that service delivery protests are purely organised by elite political entrepreneurs who want to get tenders or position themselves for council elections in 2011. Such views do not acknowledge communities’ agency or power to organise themselves and challenge poor service delivery problems. Even leaders like Mokoena were seen as good enough to lead strikes but not to lead the community. This reveals an important point about service delivery protests. Communities have the power to silently allocate roles to different people depending on their strengths and skills. People with loud voices who are good orators such as Mokoena are given the opportunity to lead the march or speak at the mass meetings. These individuals are recognised for their ability to create hype in mobilising the crowd to *toyi-toyi* against poor service delivery.

Crowds within crowds

It is not clear if one can talk of a single homogenous community or a single homogenous crowd. Different elements of the community assemble in different places and in different ways, forming different kinds of crowds with different purposes. Thus, on the Sunday when the protests began, the protest organisers left the stadium to meet at the hall with the MEC. According to informants though, the crowd in the stadium became impatient and decided to march to the hall. Who provided the leadership to the crowd at this stage? Later, the crowd in the stadium decided to launch a four-day stay-away and put up barricades. Again, who provided leadership at this stage?

People gathered in the streets, the police opened fire, barricades started burning. Later, council property was burned down, and crowds of youths engaged in violent confrontations with the police over the next two weeks. Who were the crowds in each of these cases? Did the crowd that burnt down the library and other buildings have a mandate to do so from the crowd gathered in the stadium? Or, was undertaking these extreme actions frowned upon by the majority of the community? Did an informal leadership or a series of informal leaderships emerge in each of these activities? Where were the protest organisers at this point? Were they providing leadership to the violent crowds or were they elsewhere?

Masculinity

Gender and masculinity are important dimensions of politics in general in Kungcatsha, as well as in the protests. Indeed, it might be said that politics and power are highly sexualised in this community. The dominant cultural stereotype of hegemonic masculinity refers to men’s ability to support their wives and children (being a breadwinner), keeping secret lovers, being decisive and having the final say in the house and so forth. In interviews, the participants complained bitterly about councillors who drive flashy, expensive cars, have money and as a result, are able to attract their girlfriends. There was a sense of young males feeling envious and powerless in their inability to achieve the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. The theme that was also dominant in the focus group was that girls are too materialistic, and only date men who have money. Informants told us that women easily get jobs in the municipality because some have sexual relationships with male councillors.
"I want to get married, but I cannot afford lobola because I'm not working. I hate that M-guy (one of the councillors). He took my girlfriend. He has money and I don't have money.

You can't find a girlfriend if you don't have money. You see here in Kungcatsha. We are not happy that we are drinking. We spend a lot of time drinking because there is nothing that we can do. We want jobs, but these guys don’t want to hire us. They are hiring their friends. They must go."

These male participants were frustrated at lack of job opportunities in Kungcatsha and, as a result, they were not able to achieve the ideals of hegemonic masculinity such as having many ‘cherries’ (multiple girlfriends). Collective violence may be one way that disempowered young men can reassert their power, particularly if the targets of their protest are the ones that appear to emasculate them.

**Gender**

It is remarkable that many of the community protests in Mpumalanga, including those in Kungcatsha, have occurred in municipalities that are led by women mayors. Women in positions of power may be a particular target of young men who feel they cannot attract women because they do not have the jobs and money that women require. One of the six young men we interviewed blamed female leadership for the protests. He said: ‘We can’t be led by a woman. Women are stubborn.’

Likewise, the woman councillor elected in one of the ward by-elections is unpopular with the protest activists who support Khumalo, because of her association with the former speaker. Several informants, especially young males, expressed very sexist views in relation to her: ‘Azibafuni abafazi (we don’t want women).’

What does this mean in terms of gender equality in local politics? The female councillor’s daughter mentioned: ‘Girls and women are scared to go to meetings due to high levels of violence in some of the meetings.’

The prevalence of violence in politics has a gendered effect, discouraging women from participating in politics. The mayor of Kungcatsha also experienced disempowerment and lack of support from the male power centres of the ANC. It was clear, she said, that women leaders in the region were being penalised: ‘Maybe (it’s because) the leadership of the ANC don’t drink tots with us. They don’t socialise with us, but the male mayors socialise with them. I’m a home defender. I don’t socialise.’ She said the ANC had become highly competitive and it was ‘the survival of the fittest’; part of the problem was that the Women’s League was weak. ‘I feel the ANC is abandoning us. Unfortunately, the Women’s League in the region, province and nationally has no voice.’ She said the ANC needed women with capacity and that the ANC leadership seemed more supportive of male leaders.

When community protests started in other municipalities, ‘The men got together. They assisted the mayor,’ even when his municipality performs worse than those led by women. ‘Why are we a threat to an organisation that we have worked for so long?’

More generally, politics and power are highly sexualised in Kungcatsha, and women are important symbols of male power. Thus, many stories and rumours circulate in political circles, as well as in the community more generally, about sexual liaisons between key political figures, and not infrequently political behaviour is explained in terms of such liaisons. Women, in other words, are an element in the politics of excess, along with top-range cars, expensive clothes and accessories, and houses.

**Class Formation and Social Differentiation**

It is clear that democracy has brought with it a process of class formation and social differentiation in the community. Nonetheless, the opportunities for high-paying jobs and lucrative tenders are necessarily somewhat limited in a small town, especially one in which industry is in decline. The result is an intense competition within the elite for access to these opportunities, and the power to dispense them to associates. The cost of failure is
high; the mayor who has not completed building an expensive new home before she is deposed is unlikely to 
be able to do so afterwards. The intensity of competition, the importance of the stakes, and the consequences of 
failure may explain the instability of networks and alliances, and may also explain the high levels of violence 
in the form of assassinations in the town.

The state is seen as providing the means for upward mobility, but it is also supposed to effectively provide 
services and improve peoples’ lives. The new elite appears to be consolidating the politics of excess as the marker 
of distinction, success and power; however, there are a chorus of indignant voices from the community that 
denounce the politics of excess, but ambiguously, because they appear not to denounce it as such, but their own 
exclusion from the table. The classification system is unstable and contentious, and a source of resentment and 
anger.

Violence

Durable local histories of violence are embodied in members of the community who were participants in that 
violence—in vigilante gangs, SDUs, armed struggle, taxi wars—and in the way these histories continue to be 
present. Violence and peace are celebrated in an ambiguous mix at a community funeral. Taxi owners and 
politicians continue to be assassinated. The first mayor was assassinated shortly after his election; the man chosen 
by the ANC to replace him was killed on the day of his nomination. The former mayor claims he survived a 
number of attempts on his life, including an attempt to force him off the road and two gun attacks. The current 
mayor, the longest serving at six years until she was ousted in the protests, survived 13 attempts on her life 
according to her bodyguard. A councillor whose house had been burnt down threatened revenge against the 
‘generals’ who he believed were responsible. Divisions between workers in a local strike generate intense strike 
vioence. The youth who were active in the protests celebrate their victory in the by-elections by toyi-toying and 
singing songs that re-enact the collective violence deployed against their opponents, reinforcing its legitimacy. 
It is clear that collective violence is deeply ingrained in local political processes, constituting a valid repertoire 
for achieving political ends.

The ANC

It is clear that the local ANC in Kungcatsha is a highly unstable organisation. Individuals and factions jockey 
for power in the organisation, and particularly for the opportunity to become councillors, or for the opportunity 
to influence the selection of candidates, which, in turn, ensures the candidate's supporters get preferential access 
to business opportunities or jobs. Fierce struggles also emerge between councillors, in this case between the 
mayor and the speaker. Authority within the local ANC is fluid and contested, and has much to do with the 
connections of local leaders to more senior leaders in the regional or provincial ANC. These political connections 
within the ANC tend to trump the formal authority structures of the town council. The alliances and networks 
are themselves not stable. Thus, the speaker, who was said to have passed confidential information from the 
council to the protest organisers, was himself strongly criticised by the organisers, and in the course of the protests 
his house was burnt down.

The Town Council

The instability of the ANC, and it's domination of the town council, means that the council itself is unstable. 
According to the former mayor, since democracy no mayor has served their full term; all have had their careers 
abruptly terminated, whether by assassination or by a coup within the ANC. There is widespread consensus that 
patronage practices are deeply entrenched, and that much of the competition between individuals within the ANC 
is linked to struggles over access to tenders or other resources. On the other hand, most informants in the 
community regard the council as failing to improve or even maintain existing services. Sometimes this is because 
tenders are not completed, and in other instances it seems to be because the council lacks the capabilities to 
provide basic services.
Civil Society

Many commentators, particularly on the left, have hailed the wave of recent ‘service delivery protests’ as a sign of the re-invigoration, or re-emergence, of civil society. The reality in Kungcatsha contradicts this optimism. The protests were profoundly ambiguous, combining mobilisation by political entrepreneurs whose goal was to reconfigure power in the ANC and the council, with a mass movement galvanised by popular grievances from below. Certainly, in the aftermath of the protests, the protest organisers became deeply involved in the contestation over who would become ANC candidates for the vacant council seats, some becoming councillors and others fighting for their preferred candidates. They showed no interest in establishing any kind of autonomous organisational presence which might empower the community to engage more consistently in struggles for service delivery.

The only organisation that actually emerged out of the protest activities was the Fraternal Committee, but this was a structure which relied for its credibility on the notion of a group of community ‘elders’ who were above the fray, and it saw as its role not to mobilise or organise the community, but to seek an end to the conflict and restore order.

It is clear that the community comprises many informal networks and associational linkages, which provided social connections and momentum for the protest organisers to mobilise the community, and for crowds and crowds within crowds to gather, articulate solidarity, and develop collective activities and goals. This, surely, is a form of social capital. On the other hand, these networks are characterised also by instability, competition, rumour and backstabbing, which undermines trust and reciprocity. However, the key reason why networks that centre on activists and political entrepreneurs do not give rise to independent associational life is that they are absorbed into the ANC.

Conclusion

It is clear that violence is deeply embedded in the fabric of this community. The inability of the local council to deliver decent services or improve the lives of the people is a source of deep anger. The failure of the council or the ANC to respond to previous protests increased the anger and frustration of residents. At this point they became willing to use violence, as it seemed the only way to attract attention to their grievances. The instability of the ANC also played an important role in triggering the protests, as struggles within the council’s executive committee between the mayor and the speaker, as well as the ambitions of the ANC youth league activists and protest leaders, provided the community with the rationale and the leadership to undertake protest action. In the turn to violence, the predisposition of the police to control protests with excessive force provoked immediate and violent responses from the gathered crowds.

The protesters, voters and activists appeared to be unanimous in seeing the elections as a victory for their protests and in expecting the new councillors to attend to their grievances. There appeared to be no interest in establishing alternative civil society organisational forms to represent the interests of residents and engage on a continual basis in pressure and negotiations to ensure that grievances are addressed. The popular energy unleashed in the protests was channelled into electoral politics instead. Only time will tell whether the new councillors will address the needs of the community.

One of the results or the successful outcome to the protests is that activists and youth, and many in the community more broadly, regarded violence as a legitimate and effective way of forcing the authorities to heed them. This is a contradictory situation. On the one hand, young people and, probably the community more broadly, see themselves as agents of change and transformation. In many of the interviews, there was a sense of feeling potent and powerful that they have managed to remove the mayor and her council. The strike demonstrated that the youth were brave and fearless in championing the needs of umphakathi (the community). In this sense, the protests and the violence empowered the community. On the other hand, the protesters were aggressive, and destroyed public facilities such as the library and buildings belonging to the municipality. For many, both
perpetrators and targets, violence is traumatic, and this trauma can fuel a cycle of revenge and ongoing violence, as seen in the response of the speaker to the burning down of his house. The success of violent protest is likely to fuel the role of violence in local politics, as in the intimidation of councillors regarded as members of opposing factions, or in the assassinations of mayors.
Introduction

This chapter discusses service delivery protests that took place in Azania Township between July 2009 and February 2010. The main focus of the chapter is on the increasing levels of collective violence that have accompanied many of these service delivery protests. The main research questions are: How did the violence originate and develop in Azania? What were the triggers? What was the sequence of events? Who was involved in terms of gender and age? What were the different kinds of violence (for example, burning of public facilities such as the library, barricading roads and looting shops)? How did the police respond to all of these? Did their response make the situation better or worse? Who were the victims or targets of collective violence? What was the rationale of the protestors attacking people such as foreign nationals? What was the role of formal, informal structures and political organisations in generating, containing, preventing or reducing violence?

The Research

Qualitative methods were employed for this research project to explore community members’ understanding of collective violence on the basis of their knowledge, active involvement, and the ways in which their decision to *toyi-toyi* was shaped.

Three data collection methods were used, namely, focus groups, individual interviews and participant observation. The process of identifying key informants was not an easy task due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Like in Kungcatsha, many participants in Azania were also reluctant to be interviewed until they were given an assurance that the researcher was not a secret agent. Again as in Kungcatsha, it is reported that in Azania secret agents from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) also came to the area, and many activists were interrogated about their role in the protest, creating what in urban violence studies of Latin America has been called establishing a ‘culture of fear and silence’ (Moser & McIlwaine, 2004). What made the situation more difficult was that many of the key informants were still in hiding when the researcher went to Azania immediately after the protest in February 2010.

The research on service delivery protests is a sensitive area of research inquiry; therefore, pseudonyms will be used in the report to protect the participants’ identity. Other participants raised concerns about possible retribution or victimisation from state agents and wanted to remain anonymous. Snowballing technique was used to access all the key informants, in which one informant referred the researcher to another informant until all the key informants were reached. Key informants interviewed in Azania included the mayor, community leaders, youth leaders, councillors and two female activists.

Many people were eager to talk once trust was established, that the researcher was not a secret agent. Some interviews were recorded and others not. Many of the interviews were conducted in Sotho, Zulu and English. The researcher immersed himself into the world of the participants in order to gain their trust; spending time in
Azania, making observations, attending significant functions (for example, weddings and a rally), making follow-ups with certain participants, standing on street corners and going to entertainment places such as pubs and taverns. Facilitating focus group meetings in informal settings such as bars and street corners yielded rich information. Young people (especially in focus groups) were more relaxed in talking about the protests. Unlike the key informants, they were not defensive in their narratives. Some of the participants were cautious about speaking about their role in the protest, preferring to speak in the third person.

One focus group was also conducted with 15 foreign nationals. Overall, this group interview served as a space to ‘giving voice’ to the marginalised groups such as foreign nationals to ventilate their frustrations about attacks on their shops and lack of support from government in rebuilding their business after they were looted and burned down by the protestors. Both individual and group interviews also gave community members the space to talk about their own lived experiences in abject poverty, characterised by lack of essential services such as water, electricity, housing and high levels of unemployment, crime and substance abuse. In many of these interviews, the researcher had to use his clinical skills as a psychologist to empathise with, contain and debrief research participants (especially in cases where participants were traumatised and their human rights were also violated).

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants of the study. Overall, 42 people were interviewed in Azania. This included the mayor, municipality spokesperson, two councillors, four community leaders, one focus group with 15 foreign nationals, one local businessman, three focus groups with 6–8 young people, two school teachers, one priest and four youth leaders. All these interviews were conducted over a period of two months.

The major limitation in this sample is that women were under-represented (only two women were interviewed). This can partly be attributed to the research approach used in meeting the participants on street corners and in

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<th>Table 1: Participant’s demographics</th>
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<td>Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
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<td>Municipality Spokesperson</td>
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<td>One focus group with 15 foreign nationals</td>
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<td>One local business</td>
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<td>Councillor</td>
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<td>Community Leader</td>
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<td>Youth Leader</td>
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<td>Two youth leaders</td>
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<td>Focus group with 8 young people</td>
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<td>Activist/community worker</td>
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<td>Priest</td>
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<td>Focus group with 4 young people</td>
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bars and taverns. Many of these places are ‘masculinised’ spaces. Another major limitation is that police were not interviewed. Despite all these limitations, the information collected in Azania is rich enough to answer some of the key research questions in understanding the social dynamics of collective violence.

**Economic and Social Characteristics**

Azania Township is situated in Mpumalanga, bordering on the two other provinces; a contentious issue since many community members want the area to fall under Gauteng province and not Mpumalanga. One of the arguments is that Azania is 78km from Gauteng as opposed to 560km from Nelspruit. One informant said: ‘We contribute to the Gauteng revenue because all people in Azania buy their goods in Gauteng, but yet we don’t benefit anything from the budget allocated to Gauteng. Our countless efforts in the past to correct our demarcation have fallen on deaf ears and that’s why people have resorted to violence (referring to the recent protest)’.

**Population size**

According to the 2001 census, the population size of Azania was 40,100. The major economic activity is agriculture and mining, which started recently in 2009. According to the Municipality Annual Report (2008), it is mentioned that Azania has high levels of unemployment due to lack of job opportunities (it must be noted that exact figures of the unemployment rate were not given in the report). Statistics South Africa (2010) estimates unemployment to be in the region of 28%, but some argue that the rate of unemployment may, in fact, be higher.

**Employment opportunities**

There are three major sources of employment in Azania, namely, Eskom, which has recently re-opened its multi-million rand power plant; Beef Company, described as the biggest abattoir in southern Africa; and the new mine, which was officially opened in 2009. Despite the new mine, many people mentioned that job opportunities are still scarce (especially the youth). According to Thakali, the resentment and frustration over unemployment and poverty were the causes of why service delivery protestors blew-up into full-blown collective violence resulting in the torching of the only library in Azania. Matome said: ‘This is because the issue of unemployment affects so many people in Azania. People were angry that the mine has opened, but only people outside Azania were working at the mine.’ Like in Kangcatisa, many young males in Azania felt emasculated as a result of unemployment due to their inability to build their own households and pay *lobola* or attract girls because many girls preferred to date only men who were working at the mine. The protestors felt that ‘outsiders’ (men from North-West and Free State) were taking their women and jobs. Interestingly though, these men from Rustenburg and other areas who work at the mine were not attacked for taking their jobs and women like many male foreign nationals.

**Access to basic services**

In terms of basic services and infrastructure, people in Azania complained that they did not have access to basic services such as clean water, housing and health care. Lack of clean water has been cited as one of the major issues why people were protesting against the municipality in July 2009 and February 2010. Table 2 shows the socio-economic profile of Azania in terms of access to water, sanitation, electricity and other essential services.
Lack of housing has also been cited as one of the major causes of people protesting against the municipality. Community members also complained that they did not have access to clinics and hospitals, needing to travel more than 150km to access health services. Following the first protest in 2009, the MECs of Health in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, signed a memorandum of understanding to allow people in Azania to use health services, which is 20km away as opposed to the nearest town in Mpumalanga which is more than 150km.

Problem of substance abuse in Azania

Many community leaders also complained of the problem of substance abuse in Azania. One of them observed: ‘You see many of these kids smoke Nyaope (mixture of dagga and mandrax).’ Other people call it rocklefase. This is a popular drug of choice amongst young people in Azania. Mr Kok, a high school teacher, asserted that alcohol and drug use contribute to poor academic performance in the area. His main argument was that the strike was mainly organised by school drop-outs who wanted to be hired by the mine, although they did not have relevant qualifications. As part of my research approach, I went to some of the popular entertainment areas and met some informants (mainly young people) and informally spoke to them about the protest. Interestingly, one of the owners of the taverns, Gift Makubu, is an active member of the SACP and a former ANC councillor who resigned to become a businessman.

Sequence of events

Many participants mentioned that the protest in Azania did not start in 2009 and gave a long history of the protests dating back to 1996. One of the major issues was the need for the area to be incorporated into Gauteng. People in Azania want to be incorporated into Gauteng for two reasons: the town historically has always been part of Gauteng, and second, because of access to essential services such as hospitals and home affairs. Mr Zamba mentioned that the Pro-Gauteng Forum Committee lost its momentum between 1998 and 2004, but mentioned that all their protests to be incorporated into Gauteng were peaceful and non-violent.

The Pro-Gauteng Forum Committee was revived again in 2006. During this period, the Forum started to work closely with other community groups and political organisations such as the PAC, PAYCO, SACP and Zenzele Landless Community Forum. Unlike in Kungcatsha, the PAC is one of the strongest political organisations in Azania.

Table 2: Socio-Economic profile of Azania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Profile</th>
<th>Ward 1</th>
<th>Ward Average</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds living under R800 per month</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds unemployed</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to water</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to sanitation</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to refuse removal</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to electricity</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of h/holds without adequate access to services</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Municipal IQ

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Azania. Its leaders such as Mr Zamba, Matome and others played an important role in the revival of the Pro-Gauteng Forum and the formation of Zenzele Landless Forum. The Zenzele Landless Forum deals with the question of land, which shows the dominance of the PAC politics in the area. Many ANC leaders in Azania allege that the protest was orchestrated by the PAC and the SACP leaders. However, many leaders of the protest argued that their protest was dealing with pertinent service delivery issues rather than party politics of the ANC and the SACP. Matome, who is one of the protest leaders, gave me a list of memos that they have submitted to various government offices, demanding to be incorporated into Gauteng and being allowed access to hospitals and governmental services in Gauteng. He argued that their protest did not start in 2009. He mentioned that they had so many peaceful protests, but nothing was done to address their concerns. Following a lack of response to all their memos/letters, they decided to call a mass meeting at the stadium on 10 June 2007. In the meeting, they resolved to go and march to the municipality offices. The march was organised and a memo was submitted to the mayor. Solly stressed that the protest to the municipality offices was peaceful and non-violent. He said, ‘We did not loot in all previous marches. Ask yourself why? We did not loot because they called the local police. They know us and we know them. We can’t become violent because they know our problems…but when you call special units. They just shoot everyone. They don’t care. We retaliate.’

The Zenzele Landless Community Forum also organised another peaceful protest on 24 September 2007 to submit a memo of demands to the municipality, which included the immediate allocation of residential sites to all the residents who had been living in mikhukhus (squatter camps), RDP houses, electricity, toilets and water, and completion of all unfinished houses in Wards 1, 2 and 4.

Lack of housing has been raised as one of the major concerns by the participants in the present research project. It is reported that more than 300 houses have been left incomplete. Many people also did not have access to housing. Some mentioned that there was favoritism in how houses were allocated. Many people still lived in shacks in Azania. One participant said: ‘I have been staying in a shack for the past 23 years and will die still staying in a shack.’ Another participant in this focus group said: ‘We are not mindless. People (especially you people who are educated) think we are marching because we are bored. We are dealing with real issues here. Like today we don’t have electricity. We have not had water for the whole week. Did you see the water that we drink? It is so dirty. For me I think it is an insult to my intelligence for people to think we are marching because someone has bought us liquor or something.’ My assessment is that this community has been resilient in exploring non-violent methods until things exploded in July 2009 and February 2010.

The Violence

A march was organised by the youth on 14 June 2009 to submit a memo to the municipality. One of the major demands in the memo was job opportunities in the mine for the youth. The protestors were angered by the fact that the mayor was not available to receive the memo. The memo was received by the speaker of the municipality. Mr Zamba narrated that, ‘in all the memos that were submitted, the mayor was never there’. Two days after submitting their memo to the municipality, they also decided to march to the mine. Again this march was also peaceful and non-violent.

The protestors had a loud hailer and would often use it to call their mass meetings. Notices were put up in public places such as spaza shops, taverns and the local taxi rank. Interestingly, all the mass meetings in Azania were organised on Sundays in the afternoon. Solly said their decision to hold the mass meeting on Sunday was because people ‘are generally relaxed and as a result, everyone will able to attend the meeting. Young people will also attend because they will not be having setlamatlama (Sotho word for hangover)’.

On 19 July 2009, a mass meeting was held at the local stadium. It was agreed in the meeting that they would march the following day on Monday to submit their memo to the municipality offices. Matome says they were surprised to see so many police cars after their mass meeting late in the evening at six. It is not clear who called...
the police, but many leaders suspect people close to the mayor called the police. Matome said: ‘When people saw the police they started to sing and mock the police.’ Matome does not know what happened, but it is alleged that police fired rubber bullets at the crowd and many people were shot as they were running away. He explained that there was then a confrontation with police in the evening until the following day on Monday, and as a result, it was also difficult for the protestors to meet and continue with their planned march to the municipality. People who worked outside Azania were not able to go to work on Monday. Teachers were also not able to go school. School-going kids were also not able to go to school. Shops were closed.

Tim, who is an active member of the ANCYL and one of the protest leaders said: ‘We were caught off guard because we did not expect the police to use maximum force.’ Mr Zamba, the PAC leader in Azania, also said: ‘The amount of police brutality was reminiscent of apartheid.’ Things got worse because the protestors also started to respond violently singing anti-apartheid songs as in Kungcatsha and throwing stones at the police. Through singing and mocking the police, there was a sense of oneness and camaraderie, which the ultimate goal was to fight the injustice of the state in sending special police units to randomly shoot at them. It is interesting on how the construct of ‘comradeship’ became intertwined with ‘legitimising’ violence against any state institutions.

In Azania, many activists called one another ‘Mo-Africa’ (African) or ‘Mioyoni’. The use of the term ‘Mo-Africa’ shows the dominance of PAC politics in Azania in terms of Pan Africanism and Black Nationalist Ideology. It was observed that many of the young males interviewed were also wearing yellow and green T-shirts with the flag and symbol of the PAC. Like in Kungcatsha, many of the protestors in Azania were also young males. It seems identifying themselves as ‘Bo-Mo-Africa’ gave these young males a sense of identity, togetherness and belonging.

Crowds within crowds

As in Kungcatsha, one cannot talk about the protestors as a single homogenous community nor can one talk of a single homogenous crowd in Azania. The notion of ‘crowds within crowds’ also emerged in Azania. All these different ‘crowds within crowds’ played different roles during the service delivery protest. As one crowd barricades roads, another crowd sings. Solly said, ‘Singing gives us power.’ What is interesting is that boundaries between these crowds are not visible. These identities are flexible, fluid, and change, depending on the context in which the protestors find themselves. For example, one interviewee said: ‘I’m Christian but when the strikes start you put the bible down and then you fight. It is necessary to use force. The water is clean NOW because of the strike’. This participant (Christian) felt the use of violence was justified, including attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals.

In their narratives, the protestors felt it was justified for them to use violence as a means of communication to the new ANC leadership led by Jacob Zuma. One participant said: ‘Violence is the only language that this government knows.’ In early August 2009, President Jacob Zuma and a host of cabinet Ministers, including Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Sicelo Schiceka visited Azania unannounced. During his visit to Azania, Zuma and his cabinet made a promise to explore the feasibility of establishing a Further Education and Training (FET) college; speed-up service delivery in terms of housing, access to clean water and electricity; and create job opportunities for youth. Community leaders had mixed feelings about Zuma’s visit to the area which they felt was a public relations exercise to placate the protestors. The protestors felt Zuma would not have come to their area if they did not violently protest. Zuma has visited Azania twice since the first protest in July 2009.

Many participants asserted that they felt excluded from the democratic processes. One participant said: ‘Freedom Charter says people shall govern, but now we are not governing but we are being governed.’ Many interviewees in this research feel the government does not listen to them and only listens to them during the elections. During one visit, hand-written messages of ‘Welcome to Gauteng’ were seen on many public walls. The people of Azania felt their democratic wish to be incorporated into Gauteng to be ignored.
A mass meeting was called on 7 February 2010, a Sunday, following the mayor’s failure to respond to their memo to talk to the mine on their behalf to hire local people. The protestors resolved in the mass meeting that they would march to the mine offices on 8 February 2010. On Monday, early in the morning, they met next to a taxi rank to prepare for their march to the mine offices. Tim mentioned he was shocked to see so many police cars when they met early in the morning to prepare for their protest to the mine. Again people did not know who called the police, but they suspected the mayor did. Some leaders, including Tim, were requested by the protestors to go and call the mayor. Solly does not know what happened, but the police started firing rubber bullets at the crowd, and many people were shot as they were running away. It is reported that the protestors then started to vandalise public facilities, including the burning of the library and one municipality office. Solly further argued that what made things get out of control was the heavy presence of the police. He said: ‘Why bring casspirs (big yellow police trucks). You see, casspirs remind us of apartheid that we are not free in this democracy. We don’t need casspirs. We need police that respect human rights.’ For the protestors, it seemed as though the new democratic government was still using old symbols of apartheid such as casspirs to deal with them, who were now seen as the enemy of the new democratic government. The using of casspirs in Kungcatsha and Azania seemed to remind the protestors of the oppressive apartheid regime. It seems the burning of the library happened spontaneously as another group of the protestors started to push the main gate of the library until it fell. They were later joined by other protestors who broke windows and an attempt to burn the library was made, but the library as a whole did not burn. Only the entrance and a few books were burnt and the Fire Department in town was called to come and stop the fire. It was reported, late in the evening, that some protestors returned and burnt the whole library down, and computers and other valuable items were stolen.

Fighting fire with stones

In the interviews, the participants accused the special police units of being ‘trigger-happy’. The participants spoke about the police firing rubber bullets at them without any provocation. The protests later turned violent as people started throwing stones at the police. It seems sophisticated methods also had to be used in the battle against the police. For example, some protestors dug holes on the road to erect traps for police vehicles. It seems this was the re-invention of anti-apartheid tactics in the battle against the special police units. Talk about re-militarisation of the youth emerged strongly in an interview with Tim. He said: ‘You see now people only use stones to fight the police… but if this (police brutality) continues. People will use also start using guns.’

The power of singing in the battle against the special police units

Like the youth in Kungcatsha, the protestors in Azania chanted anti-apartheid struggle songs. One of the popular songs was ‘Abafana ba APLA batraina ngamaponisa’ (APLA men are using the police to exercise and build more muscles). These young men (the protestors) were now using violence to assert their masculine power over the male police officers. It seems power gender dynamics were also at play between young male protestors and male police officers. Another popular song that was sung during the protest was ‘dubula dubula dubula, dubula (chorus) Baya saba makwalwa dubula dubula (chorus)’. This song talks about how the police shot at the protestors and also how the protestors respond to this act. The protestors through singing this song mock the police that they must shoot them, but they are not going to run away because they are not makwala (Sotho word for cowards). Overall, the cycle of protest violence and police violence seems to be re-creating the ‘culture of violence’ in the new South Africa.

Comtsoxis or legitimate protestors

Like in Kungcatsha, it is alleged that some protestors in Azania also used the protest to commit criminal activities such as stealing 20 computers from the library and looting shops owned by foreign nationals. Does this
represent the re-emergence of comsotsis, in which tsotsis (criminals) masquerade as activists/comrades/protestors while committing criminal activities in the name of service delivery? It was observed that there was a culture of fear not to incriminate others or oneself in criminal activities as all the interviewees were speaking in the third person. This fear was more evident when a 17-year-old boy who flatly refused to take the researcher to a house of one of the protest leaders. In the refusing to help, the 17-year-old boy said: ‘You want them to think I’m impimpi’. Using the word impipi in his narrative conjures up the images of apartheid, in which comrades who were suspected of being informers or spies were publicly necklaced (killed).

Pain and loss over destroyed public property: Contradictions of violence

In her interview, Lebo asserted that ‘the attack on the library was pure crime. The law must take its course’. This view seems to echo the public discourse that the protestors are hooligans who deserve to be arrested and rot in jail. But, it does not help to label the protestors as criminals without taking into account the circumstances under which collective violence emerges. It was clear in Azania that the protestors explored non-violent means to deal with their grievances over a period of 6–7 years without any reply from the state. It seems the use of collective violence was justified and legitimate. In many of the interviews, the protestors felt that it was justified for them to burn the library and the use of violence was seen as the last resort to put their message across. Interestingly, amongst the protestors, violence seems to have attained some measure of legitimacy as an acceptable means of communication. However, this part of the discussion also reveals the ‘contradictions of collective violence’ because Mr Velly, a high school teacher in Azania, felt the burning of the library was not justified. He said: ‘That library was helping our kids to do their school work. You say you want development and FET college, but you now burn the library. It shows these people are stupid. Now kids need to go to town to use the library and do their school projects.’

Is this democratic or apartheid policing?

The role of the special police units in exacerbating violence

Like in Kungcatsha, it was reported that special police units had been called in to control the protests in Azania. The increased level of violence and chaos was squarely blamed on the police. Many interviewees asserted that calling the police exacerbates the situation (especially special units outside the area). Many participants mentioned that they would prefer to march in the presence of local police officers than outside special police units. Their view was that local police officers would be more empathetic to their protest than outsiders because they also experience the same service delivery problems. On this point, Solly said:

“I suggest that police should be present to maintain law and order, but they should call local police. They know us and we know them. We can’t become violent because they know our problems. They also drive their cars on these potholes. They also drink the same dirty water. They will join us to go and march to the mayor, but when you call special units they just shoot everyone. They don’t care.”

The dominant theme in all the interviews conducted was that police’s use of force was almost identical to apartheid-era policing.

Allegations of torture against the protestors

What is more worrying about service delivery protests is the alleged use of torture against the protestors to extract information. Some of the protestors spoke about being tortured by the police. In an article in the City Press (2010), it was reported that police are losing the fight against violent protestors. A random survey has shown that many cases opened during service delivery protests were withdrawn, closed or were still pending. Molefe argues many cases were usually withdrawn when a ‘suspect cannot be linked to crime’. This shows the complexity of service delivery protests that they cannot be solved through legal channels or the criminal justice system. It is important for the government to engage in community consultative processes to try and understand the root causes of service delivery protests.
Politics of the 'Other': Attacks on Shops Owned by Foreign Nationals

In 2008, South Africa witnessed horrific violence against foreign nationals. Interestingly, in Azania, there was no attack on foreign nationals in 2008. In fact, a soccer match was organised at the height of xenophobic violence by both locals and foreign nationals as part of an anti-xenophobia campaign. Many foreign nationals from Gauteng took refuge in Azania. Members of the Zenzele Landless Forum and other community leaders were pro-active in dealing with threats of the 2008 xenophobic violence in Azania.

First attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals in July 2009: Opportunistic attacks or pure crime?

After the mass meeting on 19 July 2009, there was a confrontation with the police. In the process of fighting with the police, shops owned by foreign nationals were attacked and looted. Many people say on the first day of the strike the attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals happened spontaneously, but it seems on the second and third day of the strike the attacks were well-planned and co-ordinated. Interestingly, on the first day, the shops were looted by everyone, including the elderly. Old people were also seen carrying soaps, braai packs, mielie meal and other goods. On the second and third day, it seems people took advantage of the situation to grab high-priced items. Many foreign nationals took refuge at the police station for four months before they returned to Azania, but others decided to leave the area.

Second attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals in February 2010: Operation free grocery

A mass meeting was held on 9 February 2010. Tim as one of the community leaders said: ‘We learnt our lesson from last year. So we did not want to see shops owned by foreign nationals to be attacked again.’ Community leaders met with foreign nationals and told them about their intention to strike and told them to remove all their stocks from their shops. It seems service delivery protests are now seen as the opportunity for unemployed people with no access to money to also ‘pay themselves with free groceries’. It was evident in the interviews that looting of shops owned by foreign nationals was justified. One young male said: ‘Attacking foreigners sends a clear message to this government that we are serious. This government cares more about foreigners than us.’ Community leaders feel it is not easy to identify people that target shops owned by foreign nationals, but they feel informing foreign nationals about the potential strike helped this time around because only few shops were looted as compared to the first strike in July in which all the shops were attacked. In general, foreign nationals asserted that their relationship with locals is very good, except when there are service delivery protests. All of them returned to Azania two weeks after the second protest.

Aftermath

State’s response

Following the protest in July 2009, President Zuma and a host of cabinet ministers visited Azania Township to talk to community members about their service delivery concerns. Surprisingly, another violent protest happened in February 2010 because community members felt nothing had happened since Zuma’s surprise visit in August.

Ministers are just playing games with communities

Following the second wave of violence on 10 February 2010, a high-powered delegation from parliament led by the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Sicelo Schiceka, went to Azania. In his address, he mentioned that significant progress has been made to address grievances raised in the first service delivery protest. The Minister also made an announcement that the decision would be made on the incorporation of Azania into Gauteng by the end of March 2010. One community leader argued that ‘ministers incite violence by making false promises’. This community leader argued that ‘ministers must be arrested and not us for lying to the people of Azania’.

Following the second protest in Azania, one ANC councillor resigned. What emerged during by-elections is that the ANC in Azania is divided into two camps. These divisions became evident during by-elections in which...
some ANC members were campaigning against an ANC candidate in Ward 1. Many ANC members were not happy that the candidate was imposed onto them. Some had questions about the criteria used to select her because they felt she did not qualify to be a councillor. The candidate worked as a teacher, but one interviewee maintained that 'education is not a requirement to be a councillor. You just need to be a loyal member of the ANC and able to lobby people to vote for you’.

No Gauteng, No by-elections

The turnout to vote in Azania during by-elections in 2010 was very poor as compared to Kungcatsha. In Kungcatsha, people were eager to vote during by-elections. They saw by-elections as power of the people to replace incompetent councillors with competent councillors. In Azania, many people did not vote. In terms of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), it is estimated that more than 2000 people were expected to vote, but only a few people voted and many were the elderly. Many young people who did not vote said, ‘No Gauteng, No elections’. Despite all these problems and squabbles, the ANC candidate still won the elections.

Many ANC members believe that if the PAC in Azania also did not have its own internal squabbles, it would have won these by-elections. Like the ANC, the PAC in Azania is also divided into two camps. The PAC camp that contested the by-elections is not well-known in Azania, but despite being unknown it still managed to get good results. One ANC leader said: ‘This is a clear sign that the ANC needs to get its house in order or else we will lose many wards come 2011.’ The theme that the politicians use elections to enrich themselves was very dominant in many of the informal interviews I conducted during by-elections. One interviewee said: ‘I will not vote for someone to drive an expensive car, while I still live in a shack.’

Zuma’s second visit to Azania: Politicians tell a lot of lies

In mid May 2010, President Zuma visited Azania, the second time in less than six months. In his first visit in August 2009 Zuma came to Azania unannounced, but this time around the municipality was prepared for the President. People were given temporary jobs to clean streets and cut overgrown grass at the stadium. However, some community members were happy that Zuma visited the area for the second time as they felt this showed that Zuma cares about the poorest of the poor. The reception that Zuma got at the municipal offices was more welcoming than the hostile reception that he got later at the stadium. A short meeting was held in the municipal chamber in which Zuma met with municipal officials to get an update about their progress since his last visit in August 2009. Zuma’s meeting with the municipal officials lasted just under two hours. The residents of Azania were at the stadium waiting for the president to arrive. They waited for more than 2 hours before Zuma arrived at 13h00.

Is Zuma losing his mojo (touch)?

When we arrived at the stadium people were singing and chanting. The stadium was full to capacity. Zuma and his delegation took the podium. Surprisingly, Zuma did not get a warm reception at the stadium. The crowd was very rowdy as they disrupted the proceedings. On the stadium grandstand, the rowdy crowd was carrying the flags of the PAC, the ANC and the SACP. The crowd kept on singing when they were requested to stop so that the programme could start. Others could be heard screaming ‘Isailethu Africa, Isailethu Africa, Africa, Isailethu’. It was clear that Zuma was embarrassed and humiliated by the reception he got at the stadium. Some ANC members allege that the disruptions were orchestrated by Marima (an ANC and SACP member), Mr Zamba (PAC leader) and Tim (an ANCYL). These ANC members argue that Marima, Mr Zamba, Tim and others just wanted to embarrass the mayor in front of the president and the whole country. My impression was that the residents of Azania had high hopes that Zuma’s second visit would look into the issue of incorporation into Gauteng, but were very disappointed when Zuma announced that the issue of cross-border towns is being dealt with by the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Sicelo Schicke.
Organisational structures in Azania

The ANC

What emerged in the interviews is that the ANC in Azania is divided into two camps. The one camp is more aligned to the mayor and the other camp is more aligned to the protestors. It is alleged that the latter group is more interested to oust the incumbent mayor and gain more access to state resources. In terms of its size, many people in Azania support the ANC, but the last by-elections reveal a different picture that ANC is slowly losing its popularity. Many ANC members believe internal squabbles over positions are damaging the party’s image. Thando said: ‘Many old people still support the ANC, but many young people (especially males) support the PAC.’

This was evident during the by-elections in which 80% of the people that voted were the elderly. When they came to the polling station, many said, ‘They are voting for Mandela’s party’. It seems many old people are just voting for Mandela’s party and do not care about the internal politics of the ANC. Some ANC members feel the ANC in Azania is under threat from the PAC, but they are relieved that the PAC is also characterised by its own internal squabbles over positions. Many ANC members believe if the PAC did not have leadership problems, it was going to win 2011 local elections in Azania.

The SACP

It is alleged that in Azania, the SACP had been colluding with the protestors to fight the ANC-led town council. This view was confirmed by other staunch members of the ANC. However, Mr Makwetla argued that the SACP—post-Polokwane—took some resolutions to work with community structures to deal with issues of unemployment and lack of services. His argument was that his involvement in the Pro-Gauteng Committee was part of the SACP’s resolution to work with progressive community structures. However, this view was rejected by other ANC members in Azania. Their view is the SACP leadership in Azania wants to take the ANC over. They allege these members of the SACP were colluding with the PAC and other youth leaders to organise service delivery protests.

The PAC

The PAC has been cited as one of the dominant political organisations in Azania. Its leaders have also been in the forefront of the protests. Despite this visibility, the PAC has also been characterised by its own power struggles. It emerged during by-elections that the PAC in Azania is also divided into two camps. Unlike in Kungcatsha, PAC is a well-known political party in Azania. Many young males that I interviewed identified themselves as PAC members. In terms of its size, it is not clear how many people are PAC members, but it seems many people in Azania support the PAC. This was also seen during Zuma’s second visit in which many residents were wearing PAC T-shirts and singing popular PAC songs. The formation of the Zenzele Landless Forum to deal with the issue of land also shows the dominance of PAC politics in Azania. Many leaders of the Zenzele Landless Forum and the Pro-Gauteng Committee are also members of the PAC. Many people spoke about the ground being fertile for the PAC to win the 2011 elections in Azania.

Civil Society Movements or ‘just another ploy to access state power’

In Azania, it seems the formation of non-politically aligned associations such as the Pro-Gauteng Committee was initially motivated by the need to deal with pertinent community issues. The Pro-Gauteng Committee was formed in 1996 to deal with the issue of the cross border between Azania and Gauteng. However, it seems the revival of the Pro-Gauteng Committee in 2006/07 was politically motivated. This is because many committee members of the Pro-Gauteng were members of both the PAC and the SACP. In talking about the Zenzele Landless Forum, Matome who is the former leader of the forum said:

1 It must be noted that this report was written before the Socialist Civic Movement (SCM). Since the formation of SCM, PAC has lost its popularity. This can be seen the recent general local elections in which PAC has failed to win any ward.
2 See my point above about the PAC.
“Zenzele was a disguise. It was us. It started in 2007. …We as PAC believe in land. Land first the rest shall follow. As Zenzele we organised marches to demand land. We once occupied this other land by force and that’s how people in Azania got to know about the PAC. Through PASO we also had marches for free education.”

So the formation of Zenzele Landless Forum was the strategy for the PAC to get known by the people in Azania. Based on this conversation with Matome, it seems forums such as Zenzele Landless Forum do not represent the re-emergence of social movements in the new South Africa. It seems that some leaders use forums such as Zenzele and community committees to fight their own political battles. It can be argued that there is a possibility for some of these community-driven committees to become effective social movements in the near future, but for now it is too early to categorise all service delivery protests as representing the re-emergence of social movements in the new South Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, service delivery protests raise a number of critical issues about municipalities’ capacity to deliver essential services to the people, communities’ responses to lack of services, violence associated with the protests and the police’s responses in dealing with the protestors.

In Kungcatsha, it seems the service delivery protests were connected with power struggles within local government structures over state resources. It is clear that democracy has brought new class politics in the new South Africa. Racial apartheid has been replaced with class apartheid in which the gap between the poor and the rich is widening. The poor masses are feeling excluded and marginalised as they see their mayors and councillors driving expensive cars, while they do not have access to essential services such as water, electricity and housing. This seems to create feelings of anger and resentment amongst community members. Political entrepreneurs then take advantage of the situation to mobilise community members to rally behind them. However, this does not mean community members are helpless victims to be merely used by political entrepreneurs. They are aware that political entrepreneurs are using the existing social ills to achieve their own political goals, but they also benefit when minor changes are implemented post the service delivery protest. One may argue that the benefit is mutual, but, of course, political entrepreneurs stand to gain more, and this creates a cycle of violence as ‘new’ political entrepreneurs also emerge to fight against the ‘old’ political entrepreneurs who now have access to state resources. The only way to end this cycle of ‘new’ and ‘old’ political entrepreneurs is to ensure that there is equal distribution of resources.

It seems political entrepreneurs thrive in conditions where people are feeling excluded from mainstream political processes. Lack of communication between municipality officials, ward councillors and community members creates spaces for rumours and allegations of corruption and mismanagement of funds to spread. It is important to involve communities in the local governance of municipalities. Clearly, community members interviewed in this research project understand the key tenets of democracy such as accountability, transparency and consultation. Some community members mentioned that the process of selecting mayors and councillors should be more transparent and community-driven. So far the process is left to the deployment committee of various political parties. It is alleged that some of these deployment committees are characterised by nepotism and favouritism and, as a result, incompetent councillors or people who are not interested in serving the people are elected due to political connections.

Violence associated with service delivery protests is worrying but it does not help for commentators and government officials to dismiss the protestors as criminals or hooligans. It is important to understand the violent nature of the protestors in the context of each and every community. Causes of collective violence for each community are unique. In Azania, our research has revealed that the protestors have explored non-violent methods over a period of four years, but still nothing happened. It seems violence was used as the last resort to 'send the
message to the top' as it was found in Kungcatsha. It is important for the state and relevant stakeholders to be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with service delivery complaints. The state should not wait for libraries to be burned or public properties to be destroyed before they call public meetings to address community problems.

It is also clear in this research project that calling the special police units does not make the situation any better, but makes it more violent. It was mentioned in the interviews that special police units represent apartheid policing. Some police officers were accused of harassing and using maximum force against the protestors. This may negatively affect the police’s relationship with communities. The protestors argued that local police officers should be used to monitor service delivery protests and the protestors are less likely to become violent because local police officers know them.

It seems service delivery protests are also gendered. Like in Kungcatsha, young males in their late 20s were also in the forefront of the protest in Azania. Many were unemployed and due to their unemployment status were feeling marginalised and emasculated. According to Hunter (2005) these young men are without amandla (power). Their age must also be taken into account that at this level of their development they are expected to date or take girls out. However, they feel helpless and powerless that they do not have the economic means to achieve all the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. One may argue that unemployed young males are a vulnerable group. Given their vulnerability, some may easily be incited by the political entrepreneurs to serve as ‘foot soldiers’ in return for food and alcohol. Belonging to a group of the protestors provides them a sense of belonging and worth about their self. Also the violent protest gave them the opportunity to assert their masculine power over foreign national men by looting their shops and male police officers by throwing stones at them. It is important that decent job opportunities are created for young males. Opportunities should also be created for females who are also marginalised in these violent politics of access to state power and resources.

Lastly, it is important that the rights of foreign nationals are protected when communities protest against poor service delivery. Community leaders need to be more proactive in ensuring that the protestors do not misplace their anger and frustrations on other vulnerable groups such as foreign nationals.
Introduction

On 29 March 2010 a group of residents of Slovoview held a protest march close to a wealthy suburb, about 20 minutes’ drive from Slovoview. SANCO, the SACP and the Young Communist League were the organisers of this protest. The march was sparked by the eviction, from land said to be owned by a private developer, of a family that is said to have resided in this area for a number of years. This family sought intervention from a number of sources without success, finally seeking intercession from the political leadership of Slovoview. After having examined the history of the case and its merits the local ANC leadership decided there was nothing they could do as the developer appeared to have the right to evict the family in question.

The aggrieved party was then advised by some to seek help from the leadership of SANCO, which responded without any hesitation and began to organise a protest march that would coincide with the eviction of these residents. However, before the march could go forward, SANCO is said to have invited the ANC to join in a show of solidarity with the family that was to be evicted. This invitation was declined by the ANC in both wards of Slovoview. A common response given by some leaders of the ANC concerning why they missed this opportunity to show solidarity with an aggrieved family was that, ‘We don’t believe in resolving problems by running around the streets. We believe in talking in order to resolve problems. That is how we brought about this new dispensation; through negotiations’.

When we joined the march it was already at the site where the family had been evicted. The crowd, numbering over approximately 200 people, was well behaved and some among them hoisted placards condemning the eviction. These crowds consisted of young men and women. There was singing at regular intervals and chanting of slogans. Marshals kept order and diligently separated the crowd from the police who were standing by to keep watch over the crowd. The crowd did not seem agitated by the presence of the police who were calmly standing very close to the crowd given the small space within which the march was taking place. Shortly after our arrival, the Director-General (DG) from the Ministry of Human Settlements arrived in order to accept a memorandum of grievances. To our surprise the eviction, a key issue informing the march itself, was not on the memorandum. Instead, service delivery, shortage of housing and cuts in water emerged as chief grievances.

After the DG’s acceptance of the memorandum of grievances and his commitment to attend to these grievances, the crowd was ordered, by its leaders, to return home and to do so in a peaceful manner. As the crowd began to make their journey back to Slovoview, the police assisted by ferrying those among the crowd who could make their way back using a relatively small police fleet. While this account suggests that life at Slovoview could be characterised by peaceful co-existence our research, shows that violence is endemic to Slovoview.

The research

This research was undertaken by a team of two researchers over a period of five weeks beginning in the last
week of March and ending in the first week of June 2010. It involved conducting in-depth interviews with key informants on the manifestations of collective violence in Slovoview. The focus was mainly on the collective violence against foreign nationals in 2008. It also consisted of participant observation which enabled us not only to be part of events as they happened but also to experience firsthand a place where our informants live out their everyday lives. This allowed us to locate conversations with our informants within concrete material and social realities. The in-depth nature of our interviews, which range from one to two hours could only allow for a maximum of three interviewees per day. Overall, the number of key informants interviewed in the study is 20. These informants include the leaders of the ANC, SANCO (mainly from Ward 96), SACP, COPE, IFP, CPFs and some leaders from within the NGO sector. We also benefitted greatly from the insights of workers from within the local council as well as some leaders of informal traders.

The town

Slovoview is a densely populated informal settlement situated in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It is home to a population of about 150,000 people. Our interviewees as well as other sources seem to suggest that half of this population comprise of citizens from a number of neighbouring states such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. Of these foreign nationals in Slovoview, the largest number is said to be Zimbabweans. However, foreign nationals from countries further away from South Africa do also make up this contingent. Somalis, Ethiopians and Pakistanis are such examples. With regards to the South African citizens a significantly large number is said to come from Limpopo.

The establishment of Slovoview dates back to 1994 and is said to have been characterised by a number of waves of resettlements. The first wave was that of the resettlement of Zevenfontein residents to Slovoview West. This resettlement commenced the establishment of Slovoview on a piece of land expropriated by Johannesburg City Council. This resettlement was followed later by that of displaced families from Honeydew. According to the chairperson of the IFP, these families had been temporarily hosted by the Rhema Church in its land in Randburg. In 1996, these two groups were joined by a group that had had been removed from the banks of the Jukskei river. Another resettlement took place in 2001 following the Alexandra Renewal Project which saw the relocation of a section of the Alex residents to Slovoview.

These waves of resettlements speak of the crisis of housing in the urban areas of Gauteng and point to the fact that Slovoview was born out of an attempt to address this crisis. However, the attempt to use Slovoview as an example of the resolution of housing problems in urban areas appears to have failed because the place has been overwhelmed by a population density that is larger than the development capabilities allow. Consequently, significant numbers of people are stuck in forms of shelter that were meant to be temporary and transitional. These make-shift forms of shelter made, among other things, of corrugated iron and wood have become permanent and define the daily existence of vast numbers of people.

Two main wards make up Slovoview, namely, Ward 95 and Ward 96. Ward 95 is the older of these two wards and is home to Number 1. This is an area that used to function as a reception area when Slovoview was first established. That is, the early residents of Slovoview used this area as a temporary place of residence while waiting to be allocated formal housing in the form of RDP houses. Thus, from the beginning Number 1 (as it is now called) was a make-shift settlement comprising of shacks made mainly of corrugated iron. Since it was a place designed to host people who were understood to be on a transition to formal housing it lacks the infrastructure necessary for the provision of services. Thousands of people are trapped in squalor because the area has received more people than it can accommodate in terms of its development objectives. The rest of Ward 95 comprises of RDP houses as well as bond houses bought from a private land developer.
Ward 96, on the other hand, comprises mainly RDP houses and plots of land which have been allocated to families and individuals so they can build themselves temporary settlements while awaiting the construction of government housing. These settlements are mainly in the form of shacks made from corrugated iron. However, because these settlements already anticipate development objectives of the local government they have some form of order that is characteristic of settled communities. Thus, unlike in Ward 95, this ward does not have the squalid conditions that are so characteristic of Number 1 in Ward 95. As we shall see later these differences in the quality of housing do have a bearing on the manifestation of collective violence in this area.

Like most informal settlements in South Africa, Slovoview is characterised by a high rate of unemployment, which most people interviewed in this report blame on the existence of high levels of crime. Though reliable statistics would be hard to come by in a place such as Slovoview because of the existence of so many people who are absent in official statistics, estimates, nonetheless, put the rate of unemployment in this place at about 50%. This means that half of the population that could be at work is underutilised and left to roam the streets. Since youth make up the majority of the population at Slovoview they are the ones most affected by this high rate of unemployment. It may not be surprising that they are the ones, young men in particular, who are mainly blamed for the commission of violent crimes.

Contributing to this high level of unemployment, according to our interviewees, is the lack of access to educational institutions at Slovoview. Currently, Slovoview has only one high school which is not able cope with the educational demands placed upon it and so a substantial number of pupils have to look for schooling outside. In order to counter this, the local council has prioritised the building of a second high school which is currently under construction and is expected to be ready for use in 2011. Although in reality Slovoview has two high schools the existence of the second high school is often overlooked because it is privately owned and its fees are more expensive than that of the public school. Besides, it does not seem to have a reputation for excellence that is often associated with private educational institutions.

According to our informants, liquor stores in the form of taverns provide spaces wherein entertainment among young people occurs. This is said to be a consequence of the absence of recreational facilities as almost every available piece of land goes to housing needs. At night, particularly on weekends, these taverns are said to become scenes of violent crime and murder. Scores of people are said to be either robbed or killed on their way from these taverns. On some occasions, people are actually robbed at gun point in these taverns. The perpetrators of these acts of violence are known to all and they are often put to death through mob kills. Thus, a circle of violence resulting from attempts by members of the community to deal with high levels of crime results in mob kills that are said to be a common feature of life in Slovoview.

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However, all is not doom and gloom at Slovoview. A number of institutions that aim to empower the community do exist. NGOs are among these institutions. Those that our research has identified appear to focus on the needs of vulnerable members of the community. Children, women in abusive relationships and illegal immigrants, particularly those with children with schooling needs, make up some of these vulnerable members of the community that NGOs attempt to assist. These institutions represent the other side of Slovoview that is, unfortunately, not well publicised. This little light of Slovoview is overshadowed by reports about violence which have come to shape the story of Slovoview.

The Sequence of Events

The 2008 attacks against foreign nationals

According to our interviewees, the outbreak of the 2008 xenophobic violence was informed by the general catalogue of events that were happening in the Gauteng province at the time. This catalogue of events concerned attacks against persons perceived as foreign nationals and sought to drive them out of South Africa. We say perceived because reports show that a number of South Africans mistaken for foreign nationals were killed during these attacks.
The public meeting

The xenophobic violence of 2008 does not appear to have erupted haphazardly but seems to have been preceded by some event/s that eventually led to the outbreak of collective violence against foreign nationals. A variety of explanations compete for what actually took place before the violence itself broke out. On the one hand, are those accounts in which it is said that while violence against foreign nationals was taking place in Alexandra, which is not that far from Slovoview, a robbery occurred in which a young man snatched a cell phone from a young South African woman. This young woman called for help and men who were nearby responded and caught the alleged robber. On questioning him they found that he was a Zimbabwean national.

According to this account, this foiled robbery, is the one that triggered outrage against foreign nationals and led to crowds that day beginning to stop local taxis in search of foreign nationals. Those who were identified as such were immediately thrown out of the taxis and driven out of Slovoview. The crowds are also said to have gone to the local taxi rank where they did the same thing. Others, of course, are said to have gone from shack to shack at Number 1 and similarly identified foreign nationals and chased them out of their homes. This was accompanied by the looting of their belongings. This driving out of those identified by the informants of the crowds as foreigners from their shacks is said to have been mainly limited to Number 1 where the alleged robbery took place. The identifiers of foreign nationals themselves are said to have been the neighbours of those branded as foreign nationals.

On the other hand, there exists an account, which attributes the outbreak of this violence to the leadership of SANCO. In this version it is said that as violence against foreign nationals broke out in Alexandra, a significant number of victims of this violence began to find refuge in Slovoview. Along with this group of refugees from Alexandra came those who were escaping violence in Attridgeville. According to this account, the presence of these groups of refugees raised an alarm among South Africans who, prior to the arrival of these refugees, were already feeling overwhelmed by the presence of foreign nationals in this area. These locals felt that their place was being taken over by foreign nationals and they decided to stop this from happening.

Their first step, according to this version, was to fetch the leadership of SANCO and to demand the leadership to do something about the influx of refugees from both Alexandra and Attridgeville. Aware of the volatility of the situation SANCO’s leadership is said to have called a public meeting on the evening of the day on which the violence against foreign nationals broke out. What is not clear from this account, however, is the actual discussion that transpired in that meeting on that particular evening. Our informants pleaded ignorance to the discussions that took place on that evening.

This meeting which was supposed to discuss the question of the influx of foreign nationals apparently disintegrated as the leaders of SANCO failed to quell the prevailing sentiment at that meeting that foreign nationals at Slovoview had to be kicked out as it had been the case in both Alexandra and Attridgeville. The leadership of SANCO present in this meeting is said to have been divided over the question of kicking out foreign nationals.

In the end, the minority view lost out and crowds began to leave the meeting in droves.

As they left the meeting point they immediately went to block the roads leading to Number 1. In doing so, they effectively ensured that access routes allowing the police entry into Number 1 were blocked. The task itself was not difficult since there are only two main routes leading to Number 1. Once these routes are closed access to Number 1 is possible only on foot. The level of congestion of the shacks in this place makes such an undertaking insurmountable for someone who is not a resident of this place. This is because there are no streets dividing the shacks; even worse there are no street lights. In a situation of violence this may pose a security threat for outsiders attempting to intervene. Erasmia, the police station responsible for safety and security at Slovoview, is far away, giving those who were blocking access routes ample time to do so. They ensured that the place was sealed before the police could arrive.

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Once the place was sealed from police intervention the crowds, guided by those who identified persons believed to be foreign nationals, began the task of chasing these people out of their shacks. As the victims vacated their shacks some among the crowds began to loot their belongings. Darkness had come down upon Slovoview as this incident took place. Those who were being driven from their homes went in different directions in search of safety. Some ran into the open veld adjacent to Ward 96. Others, with a few belongings they could salvage, sought refuge at a nearby fire station which is close to Number 1. Those who were chased out included men, women and children. Unlike the situation in Alexandra the crowds appear merely to have driven those believed to be foreign nationals out of their homes. The killing of these nationals does not seem to have been on the agenda of these crowds.

While one part of the crowd was chasing out those believed to be foreign nationals, another part of this crowd headed straight to the shops owned by foreign nationals. They broke into these shops, which are mainly owned by Pakistanis, and looted whatever they could lay their hands on. This breaking and looting took place throughout that night. In this case, informants say that the looters were mainly young men and they argue that this was so because Number 1 has an army of young men who are unemployed. They also point out that if and when the police arrive the mobility of young men allows for faster escape from the scene of crime. It needs to be understood that it is not all shops in Slovoview that are owned by Pakistanis that were looted. This looting occurred mainly to those shops that are on the main road at Number 1. Their proximity to Number 1, it can be argued, made them vulnerable to potential violence. It would appear that the same thing can be said about those foreign nationals who were driven out of Number 1.

Some reflection on the crowds

It appears that a variety of agendas informed the constitution of the crowds gathered in this meeting. First, it seems that there was a crowd whose main concern was the presence of foreign nationals in Slovoview which was exacerbated by the arrival of refugees from both Alexandra and Attridgeville. The aim of this crowd, we can suppose, was to get rid of foreign nationals from Slovoview once and for all. Some distinction has to be assumed between people in these crowds who hated the presence of foreign nationals in Slovoview and those who simply saw, in the driving away of these nationals, an opportunity to acquire some valuables. Another component of the crowds is said to have headed straight to the shops owned by Pakistanis and began to break in and to loot. Our informants seem to suggest that this crowd was organised by the ‘leaders of the people’ said to have been organised by some local South African businessmen. Their job, it is alleged, was to ensure the destruction of shops owned by foreign nationals. It was believed that with their shops destroyed the persons in question would leave Slovoview.

The crowds were aggrieved that foreign nationals were responsible for lack of employment and that they were the ones responsible for high levels of crime and murder as the presence of these shops destroyed local businesses. They argued that the owners of these shops sell at lower prices that local businesses just cannot afford. What is obvious from our fieldwork experiences is that the supermarkets are run by foreign nationals. Given the fact that these shops accommodate larger quantities of stock than spaza shops it is possible that they sell at lower prices than spaza shops.

Intervention

It appears that as the violence broke out calls immediately got to those in authority (local councillors) informing them of this unfolding disaster. The councillors informed the police at Erasmia who on arrival found that access routes into Number 1, where the violence was concentrated, were closed. Accounts of our informants suggest that the police were reluctant to leave their vehicles at sections where the roads were barricaded and move into the areas where the violence and destruction had to be stopped. This may not be surprising given the fact that the manner in which Number 1 is designed does not allow easy access by the police. The absence of street lights may have compounded their reluctance to do so. Walking into an area like Number 1 at night, an area in which guns are said to be in circulation may have been perceived as risking personal safety on the part of the police.
The police, as a result, could not intervene and had to wait until the following day in order to be effective. It would seem that those who barricaded the roads knew this very well. This barricading of access roads is said to be part of the rituals of the residents of this area whenever they anticipate confrontation with the police.

On that terrible night, when the police could not bring calm to Number 1, calls moved back and forth between the leadership of the ANC in both Ward 95 and 96. The critical issue discussed was how the violence, destruction of property and looting could be brought to a speedy end. This was particularly pressing because it was clear that the presence of the police alone was not sufficient to stop the violence. The most immediate response the local ANC branches could do was to mobilise existing community structures that focus on community safety. CPFs as well as street committees make up these important structures. Community members reinforced these structures with goodwill in what became a coalition against violence, destruction of property and looting. Accounts of our informants suggest that these initiatives were due mainly to the leadership of the ANC in Ward 96.

The following day, this coalition began, in what one informant describes as a scene reminiscent of the practices of the comrades in the 1980s, to remove barricades that were placed on the roads making it possible for the police to move around. Although their most visible work began on day two of the violence, they had been instrumental in ensuring that the violence did not spread to other parts of Slovoview. Reports of the current leadership of SANCO and the SACP in Ward 96, who at the time were members of the CPF in that ward, state that a mob tried to attack foreign nationals in an informal settlement in Ward 96 and were effectively stopped from doing so by members of the CPF in this area. These informants say this was done in an attempt to ensure that the violence did not spread beyond Ward 95. The strategy of the ANC leadership and the CPFs in Ward 96, these reports continue, was to contain the violence by isolating Number 1 from the rest of Slovoview. This allowed for all available resources to be channeled towards bringing calm to Number 1.

With Number 1 successfully isolated and violence confined to this area, the CPFs along with a coalition of some members of the public, a significant number of whom are said to have been branch members of the ANC in Ward 96, began to head for Number 1. Assisted by the police they began to remove barricades thereby opening Number 1 to police patrol. Asked whether they were not afraid of potential conflict with crowds at Number 1 one of our informants (a prominent leader of the ANC) responded by saying that they had told themselves that they were in a state of war and were, as a result, prepared for whatever outcome resulted. On closer inspection, however, it seem as though this coalition against violence was made up of persons aligned mainly to the ANC. As this leader stated, it was at the same time an attempt to show SANCO who was boss in the alliance. SANCO had to be denied the opportunity to run the show at Slovoview.

Once the strategy to isolate Number 1 had worked (and SANCO was subdued) the police made a declaration that they would be going from shack to shack and house to house in search of stolen goods. Where suspicious goods were found culprits would be arrested and locked up in jail. On the morning of the day that the police were supposed to resume their search, the streets were found littered with goods ranging from grocery, clothing and refrigerators. However, none of these could be traced to any culprits. It is very possible that goods that were littered on the streets were those goods that could easily be identified by the police. (We were not able to identify exactly what happened to these goods once collected).
The aftermath

With the violence finally clamped down, a process of reconciliation aimed at building bridges between the victims of violence (mainly foreign nationals) and the perpetrators of this violence (local South Africans) got under way. Some of the local leaders of the ANC (at Ward 96) appear to have been instrumental in initiating this process and in ensuring that those who had been driven out from their homes returned in safety. These persons had found refuge in a variety of places around Slovoview. There were those who had made the fire station their safe haven, next to Number 1 where police were stationed. Others are said to have found refuge at Slovoview’s Methodist church. The last batch of these refugees had found sanctuary in the open veld next to Ward 96.

This process of reconciliation was of paramount importance given the demographics of foreign nationals at Slovoview. That is, it was significant because half of the population of Slovoview is said to comprise of foreign nationals. Given this reality the potential for counter-violence could not be ruled out. In fact, according to the testimony of a prominent member of the ANC in Ward 96, those refugees who were hiding in the open veld were already planning to fight back. Among those who made up this group of refugees were former soldiers of ZAPU and ZANU-PF. A significant number of these had also worked as police officers and soldiers in post-independence Zimbabwe. Apart from the mere fact of demographic supremacy of foreign nationals at Slovoview, the presence of unemployed former police officers, soldiers and members of VIP units made reconciliation a move of paramount importance given the potential for forms of counter-violence that could have manifested from within themselves.

As we were coming to the conclusion of this research the one thing that remained clear was that the process of reconciliation at Slovoview was standing on shaky ground. In the absence of a vigilant leadership such as the one that seems to have been demonstrated by the leadership of the ANC branch at Ward 96 the possibility of a violent catastrophe is likely to manifest itself in Slovoview.

The July 2009 removals

The outbreak of the xenophobic violence of May 2008 was later followed in July 2009 by another incident that led to collective violence. This incident was sparked by a proposal within the local council of Ward 95 to relocate a section of the community of Number 1 to Ward 96. This section of the community had built their shacks on a water supply pipe that needed to be fixed. In the new place, they were to be given stands, which would relieve them of the congestion characteristic of life at Number 1.

However, before the local councillor could convene a meeting in order to make his plans known to the concerned group, the plan was leaked and fell into the hands of people who misrepresented it. They gave the plan a new spin in which allegedly the councillor was planning to remove the residents of Number 1 to a new place in Brits. In this new version information about problems with the water pipe were apparently deliberately left out. Once the leaders of SANCO were in possession of this information they convened a public meeting at Number 1 in which a decision to march to Council in protest was made. On the day of the protest crowds began to file in front of the local council offices. Young men constituted the majority of this crowd. The leaders of the crowd demanded that the local councillor come out and accept the memorandum of grievances.

While the people were still waiting for the councillor to come out and collect their petition the police arrived on the scene. Their attempt to remove the crowd from the Council property triggered a scuffle between the police and some among the crowds. As this happened, panic struck, and the crowd turned violent as it ran in different directions. Two of the police vehicles and an SABC van that was on the scene became casualties of this violent reaction by the people. They burned down these vehicles and threw stones at the police who dispersed the crowds with tear gas. This marked the end of what was supposed to be a peaceful protest march to the local council.
The aftermath

In the aftermath of this protest march that turned violent the council gathered and took stock of the processes that had led to the outbreak of this violence. Among other things, poor communication was identified as one of the factors that led to the outbreak of this violence. That is, the council felt that the situation could have been avoided had the plan to relocate the concerned section of Number 1 been communicated on time to those who were to be affected. A significant number of our key informants have identified poor communication as a key feature of the operations of the local council in Ward 95.

In order to rectify this mistake the council adopted a door-to-door strategy in which they explained to each one of the affected households the reasons why the council intended to relocate them. The agents of the council were instructed to dismiss the allegations that those who would be removed would be relocated to Brits. They were told to clarify to people that the affected section of Number 1 would be relocated to a new place in Ward 96 within Slovoview. In this new place each household would be allocated a stand in which they would build their own shacks.

Contextualising the events

Although these events of violence provide the reader with a sense of life in Slovoview, they can only be illuminated when located within a broader context of social and political life in the area. This broader context allows us to see how these outbreaks of violence are rooted in and reflect the dynamics of life in South Africa after apartheid. This is a context in which, due to the granting of citizenship across the racial divide, old identities are in crisis and new ones are emerging. In these circumstances identities are polarised due to the competition for the goods that citizenship presupposes.

The sense that foreign nationals are responsible for lack of jobs among South Africans ought to be placed within a context of Slovoview as a reservoir of an unskilled labour force. That is, it has to be located within a background of Slovoview as home to an already cheaper form of labour force that finds penetration into the labour market difficult. Within this environment, therefore, people do not just bear their national identities but also embody identities that are related to participation in the labour market or the lack of it. These identities that people derive by virtue of the acquisition of employment or the lack of it inform significantly the levels of tolerance in relation to foreign nationals. Thus, while, as in the case above, one may not condone violence against foreign nationals one may, nonetheless, advance views that propagate intolerance against them.

Our findings suggest, though, that there necessarily exists no causal relationship between national identity and the identities of the employed or the unemployed. That is, being South African and being employed does not necessarily suggest dispensing with the notion that foreign nationals are responsible for lack of employment of South Africans. Equally, being South African and being unemployed does not necessarily suggest blind adherence to the notion that foreign nationals take away jobs from South Africans. In fact, some proponents of the view that foreign nationals are responsible for the lack of employment among South Africans are themselves employed.

Foreign nationals are also blamed for the high levels of crime that are a feature of life at Slovoview. The presence of people who are not documented is seen not only to pose a security threat but it is also considered a rationale for the high levels of crime prevalent at Slovoview. Why would significant numbers of people who are documented take the risk of stealing while they know that there exist archives that enable the police to trace them? Others who are more sympathetic point to how foreign nationals have no choice but to end up committing crime. This is because, they say, the realities of life in a place where they are not entitled to work and where they have no relatives to rely on leave them with no choice but the commission of crime. Many of these young people, the majority of which are young men, are said to be brought to Slovoview by the work of syndicates that promise
them work. According to a freelance journalist, a resident of Slovoview, it is mainly Nigerians and Zimbabweans who are responsible for these syndicates.

The freelance journalist speaks also of how these young men are a possible link to the many armed robberies of households and businesses that are a common occurrence in Slovoview as well as the surrounding suburbs. He also speaks of how these young men (Zimbabweans and Mozambicans) are often implicated in the violent and gruesome murder of South African women they take as their lovers.

This message of blame further expresses itself in relation to housing. Some foreign nationals are accused of unfairly benefitting from the comfort that RDP houses bring while South Africans who have citizenship stay in shacks. The irony is that while foreign nationals are accused of doing nothing for the community, which in this case refers to doing community policing during nights, their participation in this enterprise is not encouraged since South Africans suspect that they will expose the tactics of the CPF to criminals. Thus, these men are caught in a tricky situation where they are expected to work for the community but that work is viewed with suspicion.

Our research suggests that there are a number of ways by which foreign nationals access RDP houses. In the first one, they access these houses by staying with South African women who are owners of these houses. Some of these arrangements ultimately result in marriage relationships. This becomes the case where foreign nationals concerned have the relevant documents. In the second, South African owners of RDP houses rent out these houses to foreign nationals as they leave Slovoview in search of greener pastures. Our informants tell us that the absent owners of these houses charge as much as R4000 per month in rentals. Payment of these hefty rentals reinforces the notion that foreign nationals are involved in crime.

It is not only with regards to citizenship that competition for resources expresses itself. The alliance partnership made up of the ANC, SANCO and the SACP provide the infrastructure through which these battles are fought. Although this alliance is an alliance of partners it is not necessarily an alliance of equals. The ANC is considered the leader of this partnership. Consequently, it is members of the ANC who get key positions in the local council. This means also that the purse—in the form of tenders, projects and jobs—of the local state reside within ANC hands.

Organisational life provides space for the emergence of Slovoview’s elite and that elite does not emerge as isolated individuals but as people who belong to some common network of relationships. Second, projects and tenders that politicians access are used as a form of reward to members of the public who participate within political structures. In this case, we are speaking with reference to the CPFs. It appears, therefore, that the employment that results from access to the resources that reside within the local state is used to reward the foot soldiers of the politicians. It is not all ANC politicians though who benefit from the resources within the local state. Some of these politicians do not manage to retain their positions within the party list. Some do not manage to make it to positions that matter such as being chairman of the ANC. This denies them power and influence that is necessary to access spaces where important decisions are made.

Some of these ANC politicians who cannot make it to key positions within the party list are said to use SANCO as a springboard for destabilising the local state. These disruptions often take the form of service delivery protests such as the one we have already described. According to the local councillor of Ward 96: “90% of the so-called service delivery protests in Slovoview are due to people who feel left out of the jobs that Council generates. Only about, say 5% of service delivery protests have been genuine.”

These members of the ANC who cross over to SANCO in order to disrupt the local state often do so as a way of embarrassing the local state so that the regional body can intervene. However, whether or not intervention takes place depends on the relationship that those who are being embarrassed have with leadership at regional level. In the case of Slovoview, attempts to invite the intervention of the regional body have not been successful. The leadership of the ANC at Slovoview is aware of the problems surrounding service delivery protests and some
of these leaders are working behind the scenes in order to deal with factors leading to these service delivery protests. Some of the factors they have identified include lack of transparency about the projects within the local council. It is this lack of transparency that, according to this member of the ANC, is a major problem in Ward 95 where many of these service delivery protests begin.

SANCO: Where does its power lie?

The importance of SANCO in social and civic matters is evident in the presence of offices run by SANCO in both the wards of Slovoview. These offices are open every day and deal with social and civic issues. The chairmen of SANCO in both wards preside over cases that people bring to them. In the case of Ward 95, in particular, the chairman appears diligent in running his office.

Members of the community are said to bring a variety of problems to these offices. These range from social to civil problems. An example is given of a woman who was owed R20,000 by a neighbour who was refusing to pay back his debt. This woman took the case to SANCO and the culprit was summoned. The culprit was found guilty and was ordered to pay back what he owed. On top of that he was fined R50 for this offence, which went to the coffers of SANCO. This example needs to be seen as just one example of a number of similar cases that SANCO has resolved.

Criminal cases are also brought to SANCO. It is the leaders of SANCO who then decide the fate of the suspect. The chairman pointed out that the police are not able to prosecute in many of these cases they bring to them. Because of the perceived weakness of the system of justice many cases, he says, have been decided though mob justice. What we are seeing in the instances above is that although mob justice can be a result of a variety of factors, in the case above, it appears to be occasioned by loopholes in the justice system. The chairman points out, ‘when the community is angry we just let them do what they want’.

People in Slovoview also bring their need for shelter—terms of requests for the allocation of land for the erection of shacks—to SANCO. One of the leaders of the SACP in Ward 95 remarks on how because of the existence of this housing scheme, ‘one can never guarantee that one will always own one’s garden because one might come back from work one day to find out that what used to be a garden in one’s yard is now occupied by a new resident’.

These pieces of land that SANCO makes available are not given for free but are made available on payment of a fee. We are told, however, that there is no standard amount that buyers are expected to pay. Clients are charged differently depending on how much they can afford. We are told of a case in which a client was charged R80 for a piece of land to build his shack. Later, another client came who was willing to pay R250 for the same piece of land. The previous buyer who was already constructing his shack was told to cease construction and to make way for the new occupant. This man who was told to stop construction was not given his money back. He would have to wait for his handlers to scout for a new piece of land. The first buyer was a foreign national while the second was a South African.

This power of SANCO and the intimacy it has with the community of Slovoview (particularly that part of the community staying in shacks) needs to be located within a broader historical context of the establishment of Slovoview. Since its establishment 15 years ago, Slovoview has been without institutions that carry out the administration of justice. Police stations are among these institutions. The services of the police, as we have already seen, were provided from Erasmia, a town situated about 20km away. According to the colonel of the police station at Erasmia, this absence of institutions that are supposed to administer justice created a gap that SANCO as a civic organisation easily filled. Since the Erasmia police station was too far from the community of Slovoview the superintendent allowed SANCO, working with the CPF structures, to do the work of the police. The CPFs would arrest suspects, hand them over to SANCO whose leaders would then call the police to apprehend the suspects and prosecute them. This strategy, says the colonel, was weak because it handed over the administration
of justice to people who did not understand the law. It placed too much power in the hands of community leaders and this, the colonel continues, has resulted in abuses that are difficult to break. The auctioning of justice is one example of these abuses. This auctioning of justice is evident in cases where the CPFs apprehend a suspect who then buys his release from the leaders of SANCO and evades facing prosecution through the criminal justice system.

**Reflections on some key themes**

This outbreak of violence against foreign nationals at Slovoview brings us face-to-face with one of the most pressing issues of life in South Africa after 1994, namely, the critical question of identity. The struggle against apartheid concerned the exclusion of black people from both citizenship and the experience of the nation. The democratic dispensation resolved this problem through a process of the granting of citizenship to black people. In this new dispensation the identity of the nation takes on the metaphor of a rainbow nation. That is, multi-racialism and multi-culturalism form the hallmark of the nation in process. While this new era resolves the problematic of identity by doing away with race it appears that it has failed where co-existence between black people themselves are concerned. The new rhetoric speaks to an experience of life that is fundamentally divorced from a critical reflection on the state of the black experience; rather it is the resolution of a problem of identity as it related to the supremacy of whiteness.

This focus on the problematic of race as white domination has given rise to the notion that transition from apartheid to democracy necessarily resolves the critical question of race. Those who subscribe to this view adhere to a simplistic version of the rainbow nation in which citizenship and the nation are definitive tenets of social and political life in South Africa after apartheid. This group mobilises citizenship and the claim to the nation in their attempts to lay claim to resources. A second group argues that the importance of citizenship and the nation, notwithstanding, is of crucial significance to understand that other African nations, many of whom were poorer than South Africa, accommodated freedom fighters from South Africa and contributed to the fight against apartheid. Against this backdrop, they argue, it would be repulsive not to welcome Africans who are in South Africa either because of political circumstances in their own countries (like Zimbabwe) or because they are economic migrants. A prominent member of the ANC in Ward 96 said that after the 2008 attacks he and some of his comrades paid a visit to Mozambique. He spoke about the sadness and shame that they experienced when they got to Mozambique and the first question they were asked by their Frelimo counterparts was ‘what are you guys doing to the struggle?’

What this concern with the history of the struggle implies is the existence of a consciousness that is able to imagine the nation in terms of the collective experiences of black people, which are traceable to their experience of colonialism and apartheid. In order words, there exists an archive in the consciousness of some that necessarily undermines the absolutism of citizenship and the nation that adherence to a simplistic version of the rainbow nation demands.

**Is identity a problem?**

Although South Africa is characterised by problems related to identity, identity itself cannot be seen as a cause of the violence that broke out in 2008. An appreciation of why this violence broke out in the way that it did requires understanding how citizenship and the nation are experienced on an everyday basis by the poor residents of Number 1 in particular. Some refer to Number 1 as a habitat of ‘an army of the unemployed’. Others have pointed out that people live in conditions where there is an absence of services and where they cannot find jobs.

These conversations that we have had with our informants point to one thing that is characteristic of the experience of life at Number 1—an experience of dislocation. That is, the residents of Number 1 experience citizenship and the nation as dislocation. A characteristic feature of this dislocation is living life within conditions of squalor.
This experience of dislocation which is a feature of life at Number 1 exists in contrast to the experience of life in other parts of Slovoview where the experience of dislocation is cushioned. These parts relate mainly to those places where there are formal housing structures, RDP houses as well as in those places where people have been given stands so they can build themselves some temporary shelters. These places are characterised by some form of order that allows for a sense of ownership on the part of the residents and that enables the provision of services of one type or another. In these places citizenship and the nation are experienced as a cushion against dislocation.

It would appear that it is precisely at Number 1 where citizenship and the nation are experienced as dislocation that a nationalist rhetoric that has little or no regard for the wider black experience within colonialism and apartheid is concentrated. Consequently, it is no surprise that violence against foreign nationals manifested itself here, where conditions of extreme material deprivation dominate; and perhaps, leave very little room for the embracement of ideals that seek to transcend the national moment. This may be particularly true when one considers that the logic of citizenship promises access to goods, like housing, jobs, etcetera. Where the presence of others who do not possess citizenship is seen as a stumbling block to the acquisition of these goods, and where there is a sense that the law is unable to deal with these people, the likelihood that violence will become a means to express displeasure appears likely. Nationalist rhetorical messages of animosity against foreign nationals have the potential to be more explosive in those areas where experiences of dislocation among those with citizenship are severe.

Accounts of our other key informants have, however, pointed to the fact that leaders choose to stay in these places because circumstances in these places allow for practices of corruption. They are able to make financial gains through practices of the illegal selling of land, the auctioning of justice as well as through general acts of extortion such as charging shop owners who are foreign nationals’ protection fee (police in this area are said to be part of this last practice of corruption). It would appear, therefore, that although identity has the potential for generating conflict such conflict cannot be understood independently of the material conditions in which people live out their everyday lives. In the case of the xenophobic attack of 2008 we can see that violence was concentrated more in an area of Slovoview which is materially deprived. That is, although the existence of a nationalistic rhetoric that apportions blame to foreign nationals for the prevailing social ills may be found in all of Slovoview, it was mainly in those places where deprivation is acute that violence was seen as an immediate solution.

Summary of key themes

We have located this report within social and political life in South Africa after 1994 showing that the emergence of new identities within this period which are shaped by citizenship and the nation are crucial to an understanding of the manifestations of collective violence. However, the emergence of these identities does not necessarily result in collective violence and it is important to think through the circumstances under which these identities can result in the outbreak of collective violence. An examination of material circumstances in which these identities are lived out provides an important aspect of this exploration. That is, where citizenship and the nation are experienced as dislocation the likelihood that people will use violence in order to claim belonging and membership does exist. Although material circumstances provide an important avenue it is equally significant to understand the role of organisations that shape social and political life of the communities in which these identities are lived out. It appears that with regard to the ANC a South African identity expresses itself in a way that is mindful of and wrestles with the experiences of black people within colonialism and apartheid. With reference to SANCO, this identity expresses itself in relation to the goods that citizenship and the nation presupposes. Dislocation itself allows for practices of corruption and it is difficult to understand collective violence (and violence in general) and the nature it takes without understanding corruption and the forms that it takes. We pointed out that in the case of SANCO this corruption is a result of a long period of the absence of state institutions (particularly the justice system). This absence has given rise to the emergence of ‘people’s justice’ in which those who are the ‘leaders of the people’ make a living out the execution of justice. These practices associated with corruption are not only limited to civic matters but find their way into the local state. These take the form of the
allocation of business deals (namely, local council projects, contracts) to members of the alliance with influence and who have the capacity to cause trouble. Dislocation, therefore, gives rise to local moral orders that form the basis of how citizenship and the nation are experienced.

Conclusion

What our findings seem to suggest is that the outbreak of collective violence is necessarily predicated on the coming together of a number of things and that it is not per se a product of the dislike of foreign nationals. People may dislike foreign nationals and may attribute all sorts of social ills unto them. However, this dislike alone cannot be seen as a reason for the outbreak of violence. There are people in Slovview who dislike the presence of foreign nationals but who regard violence against them as totally repulsive. This means that it is important to explore the circumstances in which this dislike may express itself in violence. Our research seems to point to the significance of understanding who, given a particular context, is excluded and of coming to terms with the nature of their exclusion. It also appears to highlight the significance of understanding how those who are excluded organise themselves and of the dynamics within their organisations. These factors are crucial because they enable us to come to terms with the processes by which collective violence may ultimately express itself.

Also, this research seems to suggest that although the new dispensation resolves the question of the citizenship of black people it does not appear to deal with that equally important question of the experience of black within capitalist modernity. That is, it does not address the status of black people as that of an underclass. This position of subservience manifests itself in the inability of black people to live together with their fellows from the African continent in particular. The new dispensation, therefore, can be said to have failed to resolve the question of race where that question pertains to the experiences of black people within a post-colonial society. The consequence of this is the manifestation of xenophobic attacks. The problems associated with South Africa’s neighbours of collapsing states, like Zimbabwe, and of states with crawling economies merely expose this fact of the continuing subservient position of black people within capitalist modernity.

By resolving the problem of the citizenship of black people within capitalist modernity the new dispensation has opened up an avenue for the formation of a new black elite. It has done this by handing over the control of the political space to black people with citizenship. It is within this arena of politics that the practices of corruption dominate as those who preside over state institutions attempt to appease those who are excluded. Thus, in this new dispensation violence does not only give rise to the practices of corruption but it has become a way of bargaining for the acquisition of goods (namely, tenders, contracts, projects). It has become a central aspect of the practices of corruption, which inform processes of the formation of a black elite. While the new dispensation opens the political space as space for the production of a black elite it fails, nonetheless, to resolve the crucial question of race. Xenophobic violence merely becomes a manifestation of this underlying problem.
Introduction

This chapter examines collective violence in relation to the attacks on foreign nationals in April 2008 in the informal settlements of Matabane, Jacobshoek (Ward 72), Mohale (Ward 71), Sunshineville and Asiyendawo (Ward 71). Though the violence of that day is associated with all these informal settlements, its epicentre is said to have been in Jacobshoek. In this report we explore how some activities eventually translated into attacks against foreign nationals. We argue that organisational life as well as material circumstances in these informal settlements furnishes an entry point into understanding how and why these activities translated into violence against foreign nationals.

On the morning of 18 April 2008 South Africans rose up against foreign nationals in these informal settlements by attacking, looting and ransacking spaza shops owned by these foreigners. Later that day these attacks turned to foreign nationals in general. People were driven out of their shacks, their property was looted and, in some instances, their shacks were burned down. What we have found out is that these attacks cannot be understood independently of the poverty that characterises these informal settlements. This poverty generates individuals who are willing to do anything in order to survive and polarises these communities into divisions of citizens and non-citizens. We show, however, that the notions of citizenship that are deployed in the battle for opportunities emerge out of a long history of insiders/outsiders in this area and that they are in competition with citizenship as a construction of the state. It is competition within the realm of organisational life, nonetheless, that allowed for the tensions between South Africans and foreign nationals to translate into violence.

History of the informal settlements

These informal settlements are situated in Gladysville township in Gauteng. The township was established in the 1930s through a generous grant by a philanthropist, Mrs Gladys. By the late 1980s, the township had a housing shortage. In the early 1990s, many decided to invade the vacant land adjacent to the township, led by local ANC members. Evidently, this move necessitated confrontation with the local state which attempted to thwart this process. However, in the end it was the invaders who were to prevail.

The period following 1996 brought about an interesting dynamic in this area, following the commencement of the building of RDP houses whose completion introduced a more upgraded form of human settlement. The completion marked a new exodus from these informal settlements to the newly built RDP houses, which form extensions to the township and are, therefore, relatively closer to these informal settlements. Only low-income, citizens of South Africa and resident in these informal settlements were eligible for these houses. This first exodus comprised mainly of the generation of the township of Gladysville that first invaded this land in the early 1990s.

According to Class, a Community Development Worker (CDW) at Jacobshoek, the people who got RDP houses were supposed to demolish their shacks; however, 'many of these people decided either to rent out their shacks to those in need of shelter while others sold them over to newcomers'.
The original residents’ departure created a vacuum in these settlements that people from outside the township of Gladysville came to fill. These newcomers comprised of people from other provinces in South Africa as well as from South Africa’s neighbouring countries. The majority of the South African contingent came from Limpopo while that of the foreign nationals were Mozambicans, Malawians and Zimbabweans. In most cases, these were people looking for jobs in the city but could not afford rental fees in the city centre. Some among these new-comers bought their shacks, while others had to rent from previous owners. The exodus to the newly build RDP houses, therefore, generated a situation wherein the previous occupants of shacks in these informal settlements became landlords overnight. This gave them an opportunity to influence social and political life in these informal settlements from without. It has to be born in mind that some of these people were active members of the ANC while in these informal settlements. According to Jacob, one of the comrades after whom Jacobshoek is named, some of these people remain influential and ‘still retain links with their comrades in these places’.

The information on Gladysville from the Department of Housing, which is responsible for the administration of these informal settlements, had no statistics for rates of unemployment and population density in these settlements. This is, according to one informant, because the local government ‘treats these informal settlements as temporary and transitional. People in these places come and go and it is difficult to have actual figures in places where the population is highly mobile’. The Department of Housing had, however, the numbers of shacks found in these informal settlements, which can inform us about provision of services.

| Table 1: Housing provision in informal settlements |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Settlement                      | Housing |
| Jacobshoek                     | 81,200 |
| Mohale                         | 69,0700|
| Koppiesdal                     | 39,0500|
| Sunshineville & Aseyindawo     | 112,7800|
| Mainstay                       | 128    |
| Matabane                       | 979    |

These figures represent actual numbers of shacks on the ground and not an estimation through aerial photography. As this is the only statistics that we managed to find, it is difficult to know how many people are unemployed or were foreign nationals. As researchers, we estimated the population to be around 100,000 people.

We show in this report that the dynamics described above, which go into the constitution of these informal settlements as well the fabric of their social and political life, are critical to an understanding of why the activities which took place mainly at Jacobshoek translated into violence against foreign nationals.

The research

Two researchers undertook this research over a period of six weeks. It involved conducting interviews with key informants on the manifestations and causes of collective violence of April 2008 in the informal settlements of Gladysville. The in-depth nature of our interviews, which ranged from 1–2 hours could only allow for a maximum of 2 interviews per day. Twenty key informants were interviewed ranging from leaders of the ANC and IFP, civic organisations, women’s organisations, spaza shop owners, the clergy as well as some CDWs.
The sensitive nature of this report has necessitated not disclosing the names of places as well as people who served as our informants. Place names as well as the names of people in this report are pseudonyms invented with the sole purpose of protecting our informants. The sensitive nature of this report also imply gaps in the information provided by some of our informants whose role in the activities preceding the violence of 2008 have the potential to implicate them. Understandably, the task on our part was to try and piece together, in the best way we could, how the events preceding this violence unfolded.

The sequence of events

The 2008 Attacks against foreign nationals in Gauteng

In April 2008, a number of incidences occurred in Gauteng, which led to outbreaks of violence against foreign nationals. The first of these started in Wellington. The second one sprang in Monateng and the third in Matjhabeng, an informal settlement near the suburb of Ladygrey, not far from Gladysville. This report will only touch on the events of Matjhabeng because they have a bearing on what later happened at Gladysville. What is important, however, about violence in these places is that it provided a catalogue of events against which the violence at Gladysville unfolded.

The removal of squatters by a cement company

The violence against foreign nationals at Matjhabeng is said to have been as a consequence of the removal of squatters from private land owned by a cement company operating in that area. It is said that this company was selective in how it went about this process; it wanted non-employees to demolish their shacks and vacate the land. According to Ms Mahobe, leader of the All Peoples’ Convention women’s league in Jacobshoek, ‘the majority of these people who had to leave the land were South Africans because the company mainly employed foreign nationals’. Of all our informants, Mrs. Mahobe’s account seemed to be the most clear and detailed.

This removal, which saw mainly South Africans having to vacate the land resulted in two things. First, it resulted in the mobilisation by civic organisations in this area with demands to the local councillor to provide housing for evicted residents. Second, the activities of this mobilisation led to violent clashes between South Africans and foreign nationals. Our interviewees were not able, however, to say exactly how the relations between South Africans and foreign nationals turned violent.

With violent clashes between South Africans and foreign nationals happening at Matjhabeng some foreign nationals resorted to seeking refuge at Jacobshoek and the nearby informal settlements. Upon learning that some of these people were seeking refuge in Jacobshoek and its neighbouring, informal settlements, some agents of civic leaders from Matjhabeng came to these places in search of these refugees.

Jacobshoek catches the cold as Matjhabeng sneezes

The mobilisation for housing at Matjhabeng sparked similar demands at Jacobshoek. Jacob, one of the civic leaders said that the people of Jacobshoek saw in the demand for housing at Matjhabeng a good opportunity to revisit a long-standing issue in so far as service delivery issues at Jacobshoek were concerned. There had been only one exodus to the RDP houses in the 1990s since the inception of Jacobshoek. The government chosen by black people had forgotten its promises to the people, he says. It would appear, then, that a history of unfulfilled promises for housing, which are said to be part of every local government elections, provided fertile ground for the service delivery mobilisation.

No sooner had the community mobilisation for housing started the service delivery bag expanded and came to include every other issue that the community members found relevant to their understanding of service delivery. Electricity, which was not installed to households at the time, was one of the key service delivery items of this mobilisation process. According to both Jacob and Caesar, community members demanded the immediate installation of electricity to all households. According to our fieldwork experience this demand has been partially
met as only shacks of persons who could afford to pay had electricity metres attached to them. Significant numbers of shacks survive on illegal connections. The mobilisation for service delivery took the form of community meetings led by Jacob’s civic organisation, where community members voiced their service delivery grievances.

On 17 April 2008 an important event finally brought this mobilisation process to a climax. It was a public meeting called by Jacob’s organisation to organise for the march which was to take place the next day. The attending members of the community were to undertake a number of things. First, they were supposed to draft placards that they would carry for the march on the following day. Second, they were to discuss the contents of the petition that was to be handed to the government officials in the capital. The second aspect was riddled with controversy, says Class, as there was ‘a presence already of people who were saying that foreign nationals had to leave this place’. These people wanted this item to form part of the petition.

The organisers of the meeting, however, deny knowledge of the presence of such people on that day. This denial, nevertheless, could be seen as a way by which these leaders attempt to rewrite a narrative that absolves them of responsibility of the violence against foreign nationals. They do acknowledge, nonetheless, that in retrospect they realise that the meeting comprised of a number of constituencies. In our view, Class’s account that an anti-foreigner sentiment was present in that meeting is plausible. As Class observes: ‘if one is organising a march and one realises that there is an anti-foreigner sentiment one has to cancel the march for the safety of people.’ We assume that it is precisely this issue that these leaders want to avoid.

Jacob says that in the first of these meetings community members wanted to know from councillors as to when ‘their democratic right to housing would be met’. He claims that community members saw this as a good opportunity to force councillors to deliver on their obligations. This reference to ‘the community’ as the main actors in the meeting has denied us an opportunity of understanding the possible role of these civic leaders in engineering the community protest.

The demand for housing came to be couched in a general service delivery language which, as we have found out, constitutes a battle cry for civic organisations in these areas. This demand for houses at Matjhabeng spilled over to the informal settlements of Gladysville where service delivery demands exploded. According to Ms Mahobe, each community placed emphasis on the service delivery issue most pertinent to it. This demand for service delivery, as a result, simply provided ammunition to a long-standing battle between civic leaders and councillors. Although civic leaders in this area are hesitant to say, it seems as though this demand for housing coming from Matjhabeng provided a window of opportunity for them to sort out their political rivals.

The ease with which these civic leaders responded to demands for housing ought to be located within a broader context of promises for housing which the local government had been making to these communities. This was probably part of the rituals of electioneering, but they backfired during this time as civic leaders in these informal settlements of Gladysville saw, in the protest for housing at Matjabeng, an opportunity to press councillors to deliver on their promises.

The protest march

The morning of 18 April, the day of the protest march, was tense. According to the testimony of Mrs Khumalo, the secretary of the ANC women’s league in these informal settlements, the morning was characterised by pre-march activities in which ‘some young people were stopping local taxis and telling people that they could not go to work because everyone was expected to go to the march’. Consisting of both males and females, they were very aggressive, but exempted Mrs Khumalo because as she says, ‘I told them that I was going to take care of their children while they were going to march’. Mrs Khumalo runs a crèche at Jacobshoek.

At the time of the march, the marshals and the organisers were on high alert. The crowds had gathered in large numbers, majority of whom were young men and women. With chanting and singing of songs associated
with the struggle, the march left Jacobshoek for Gladysville police station. The march proceeded to the Gladysville police station because the organisers wanted a police escort. Unfortunately, Jacob says that, ‘we were told that the station commander was not at work so there was no one with authority to delegate a police escort’.

After failed negotiations, the organisers decided that the march could not proceed without police escort. Of course, they were aware of the volatile context in which the march was taking place. Though they do not admit, the organisers probably saw on that morning, perhaps, from the size of the crowd, that the potential for things going wrong was high. This, notwithstanding, it is difficult to understand why the officers on duty could not simply phone the station commander and let him know of the request of the marchers. In any case, since in the absence of the superintendent a police contingent could not be allocated, the leaders of the march decided that it was best to cancel the march and return home. According to Jacob’s report though, ‘the march was deliberately sabotaged by some ANC leaders who influenced the police to undermine the community. This whole story that the superintendent was absent was made up’.

From protest to xenophobic attacks

Disappointed and angry that they could not proceed to the city, the crowds returned back to Jacobshoek. As they entered Jacobshoek hell broke out as some among the crowds began attacking shops owned by foreign nationals on the main road dividing Jacobshoek from the township of Gladysville. Others went to the shops that are within the informal settlements themselves and began to attack them. They ransacked these spaza shops and, in some instances, overpowered owners as they tried to lock their shops. Although individuals took what they could, it is said that men often looted beer and cigarettes. The women generally grabbed bags of mielie-meal. Within a blink of an eye shops owned by foreign nationals in these informal settlements were ruined. As Mr Mabaso whose spaza shop was destroyed says:

"the shop owners were not expecting anything sinister because protest marches usually happen but our shops never get burned or attacked. What we are used to is the usual crime that targets businesses. As for this thing we had never known."

Mr Mabaso continues and says that by the time the police arrived it was too late. His shop and other shops in that area were completely ransacked. He says that he feels he was lucky because they did not take away his life and the lives of his children. Although the stock was gone and freezers were pillaged, electricity connection damaged and some other valuables stolen, he was just feeling glad to be alive. The pain of loss and suffering was present in his voice. In fact, as we left his place he stated that he was very happy that someone had cared to visit and that he was able to talk about this unfortunate incident.

With shops belonging to persons deemed as foreigners destroyed and pillaged in a matter of hours, the violence then turned to persons that mobs considered as foreigners. This violence is said to have happened in the latter part of the day as people returned from work. In some cases they evicted the occupants of these shacks and then looted what they could before setting these shacks alight. In one incident the occupant of the shack was not so lucky because he hid himself underneath his bed. A mob then broke into his shack and looted whatever they could. Once finished they set the shack alight without, apparently, noticing that someone was hiding underneath the bed. Tragically, he died cruelly underneath his bed. His death was to add up to the deaths of three other men who are said to have been foreign nationals. Our informants could not, however, say how these other men died.

Of all the informal settlements Jacobshoek and Sunshineville are said to have experienced the most intense forms of violence. Thus, Mohale, which lies between these two places, found itself in the middle of an explosive violence. Accounts of our interviewees vary from those who say that the violence in these informal settlements took only 2 days to a minority view, which says that it lasted about 2 weeks. Those who say that it took about 2 weeks also point to sporadic acts of violence between mobs of South Africans and foreign nationals, which happened mainly at night.
The aftermath

With businesses owned by foreign nationals destroyed and significant numbers of foreign nationals driven out of their shacks and their property looted or burned down, some people began to put in place a new order to take over the buildings in which foreign nationals ran their shops. As we have already pointed out, some of these individuals had bought these properties from previous South African owners. They had extended these buildings from simple shacks to mini-supermarkets. It is such shops that became targets of the self-imposed new owners. These new owners are allegedly 'bo-clever', and originally from the township of Gladysville. That is, they are not rural boys. Once they had taken over these shops and realised that they could not operate them, they went to fetch Somalis many of whom were previous owners, to come and operate them, says Chipa.

These Somalis, however, returned not as owners but as tenants of these new owners. They had to fix these shops in order to do business and thereafter started paying rent once the shops were operational. The lucky ones were those who had expanded property owned by South Africans and used to it to run their businesses. These individuals, if they had enough resources to continue after the violence, only had to fix property and continue with the rent.

Of course, political parties, religious leaders, women’s organisations and some community leaders played a crucial role in ensuring the return to normal community life in these informal settlements once violence had subsided. Some of the leaders of these organisations looked for accommodation to house foreign nationals who had been driven out of their homes (schools in the township of Gladysville were used for this purpose). They had to secure donations so as to ensure that these people had food to eat. Mrs Maboya, the leader of the Progressive Women’s Movement, describes the situation in these temporary camps as ‘one of great desperation. Women with children, in particular, were the ones most affected. You can imagine having to nurse children in a place that you share with a hundred other people and that does not have the necessary amenities’.

While these people were temporarily housed in these camps, politicians and councillors held public meetings with these communities with the aim of facilitating the return of refugees. We are told that in the initial stages the sentiment was hostile to the return of these refugees. However, with time the sentiment softened and it became possible for refugees to return to their homes. Some, nonetheless, decided that it was too risky to go back to their previous homes and opted to be deported to their home countries. Those who returned to their homes started new life with goods received through the general good will of the members of the public. Although the intervention ultimately led to the return of refugees to their shacks, it did not do much to the business people who had lost their spaza shops. What these people were asked to do was to go to the police station in the township of Gladysville and fill forms detailing the value of stocks that they had lost. No effort was made by police to recover any goods that were stolen. So, the looters got away without the police sending a signal that their actions were distasteful. Indeed, as they say in Gladysville the looters ‘had free lunch’ given the fact that their looting took place on the eve of Easter.

The looting and destruction of property as well as attacks on foreign nationals did compel the former minister of safety and security, Charles Ngqakula with political heavy weights from the area to come to Gladysville. Attacks on foreign nationals, however, became the primary focus of his visit in Gladysville. He wanted police in this area to ‘identify those who were responsible and to have them arrested’. As we have already pointed out, though, no one has been arrested for this carnage. So, if those who looted and destroyed property and chased away foreign nationals did so because they sought to call the attention of politicians to their plight then they lost an opportunity as attention and sympathy went to foreign nationals.
On the battle for survival: Exploring organisational life at Jacobshoek

Questions of organisational life seem to be at the heart of the carnage of April 2008, and this violence cannot be understood independently of the tensions between civic and political organisations. In fact, our research shows that these tensions continue to characterise contemporary social and political life in these informal settlements. While these tensions are ultimately about access to the resources represented by the local state, they also have their roots in the competition for the resources that life in the informal settlements avails. These resources make up the general order that both civic and political organisations compete for.

This competition manifests itself in diverse ways and areas. Salient among these is the battle for the control of land. Ability to gain control of land in these areas brings with it significant material gains. When we began this research, my colleague, Kindiza, took me to Jacobshoek and, among other issues, he showed me a place that marked the end of Jacobshoek’s eastern part. What surprised him was the extent to which shacks had mushroomed from the previous demarcation line to the new one that we found on the commencement of our research.

Our inquiries led to some interesting discoveries. Thandi, the assistant to Maisie, told us that the mushrooming of these shacks was a direct consequence of the activities of civic organisations. It is to civic leaders—like Caesar and Jacob—and their colleagues that Thandi was referring to. These were the people that allegedly sold land to people who wanted to erect their shacks. Thandi pointed out to us that the local Department of Housing was working in conjunction with the local councillors to determine who qualified for the allocation of land. This selling of land by Caesar and other comrades suggests that their practices encroach into a sphere that is supposed to validate and legitimise the local state. Caesar and his comrades were well aware of this. When asked what their organisations did, they said that ‘we are here to assist the community with everything that affects their lives’.

Indeed, Caesar seems to be right. When we went to interview him in October, we found a young man in their office who had brought R500, which he apparently owed to one of his neighbours. After his payment Caesar reminded him that he still had an outstanding balance of R1000. He was reminded that he should honour his obligations and that the office would not want to find itself chasing after him. This was an interesting example how civic organisations helped members of the community with everything. In this particular case, Caesar and his comrades were acting as debt collectors, on behalf of a member of the community.

Thandi told us that a piece of land meant for the erection of a shack can range from between R1000–2000, while the rate for such land in other settlements was about R700. Thandi’s claims appear to contradict the claims of the leaders of these civic organisations that their assistance to the members of the community is free of charge. In any case, it does not seem plausible that people who are unemployed could spend so much of their time carrying out deeds of charity. The assistance that community members receive, therefore, seems to generate income for these leaders.

In providing land for the erection of shacks, civic organisations appear to cater for all with no discrimination against foreigners. Anyone with the money gets the land.

This may appear to favour foreign nationals because they do not have to go through a bureaucratic system to gain access to land available. Their dilemma occurs where the application for RDP houses is concerned. Some of our informants tell us that because of these desperate conditions foreign nationals buy citizenship from corrupt home affairs officials in order to access RDP houses and the other goods that accrue with the acquisition of citizenship. This encroachment by civic leaders on a domain that is supposed to demarcate the presence and operation of the local state, which is evident in the selling of land, allows and engenders the practices of extortion. It breeds parasites that address their own dilemmas of being unemployed by preying on community members. The very dire conditions in which people find themselves sustain these practices of extortion. The desperate nature of the circumstances in which people in these communities generally find themselves generate suitable conditions for the breeding of parasitic leaders.
At Jacobshoek, it is not only civil leaders who are implicated in practices geared towards the selling of land. Councillors too are said to be part of this lucrative industry. Councillor Maisie, for example, who is in charge of Jacobshoek, is said to be part of this industry. Mrs Khumalo says she has firsthand experience, which confirms that Councillor Maisie is part of this industry. She says she used to own a plot of land on which she grew vegetables for her crèche and at some stage she was approached by Councillor Maisie who said she needed the land to settle destitute people. Though I was not willing, she took the land forcefully and she settled her people. I learned later from those people that they had bought the land from her and that each had paid R500.

While the encroachment of civic leaders into the domain that makes the local state legitimate allows for practices of extortion, the involvement of councillors generates practices of corruption. It generates corruption because councillors preside over the mechanisms that ought to make the local state legitimate and necessary. Where these mechanisms are abused for purposes of self-enrichment the consequence becomes corruption. The sense that councillors abuse these mechanisms for corruption’s sake is also manifest in the following conversation with Class, who is a community development worker at Jacobshoek—‘We know that office is corrupt, Maisie is corrupt. You should come and see when there are projects here. You find that these projects go only to her own people, the Xhosas. You will not find anyone other than her people’.

The office of the councillor is, thus, seen as an office that drives the personal interests of the incumbent councillor. In this case, the incumbent is seen to use this office in order to empower people from her own ethnic group; as a result, she is seen to lack fairness and objectivity when it comes to the distribution of resources within the community. The perception that those who hold office as councillors empower certain cabals is prevalent among interviewees who are not councillors.

It could be said that Class is dismissive of Councillor Maisie because he has no confidence in women’s leadership in the informal settlements. However, it does not follow that because a person is prejudiced against women’s leadership he will necessarily manufacture malicious stories against such a person. Thus, Class’ claims need to be given the benefit of doubt. Whether or not Class’ testimony is correct, though, what appears significant is that the likelihood for practices of corruption exists for those who hold offices as councillors and projects residing within the local state form an arena through which these practices of corruption exhibit themselves.

We assume that it is precisely this contestation for material resources which are accessed through extortion and corruption and the battle for position of councillor that ultimately forced Councillor Maisie to flee from her home in Jacobshoek and to find residence somewhere in the city’s suburbs due to an attack on her shack by some unknown persons. In the aftermath of this incident, Councillor Maisie felt that her life was under threat and she requested the leadership of her party—the ANC—to find an alternative place to accommodate her. The leadership responded by placing her somewhere in the suburbs of the city. Our observation is that in her absence the place fell into the hands of civic leaders who probably saw, in the events leading to the mobilisation for service delivery at Matjhabeng and the nearby townships, an opportunity to finally dislodge her for good. Of course, other interest groups such as the South African owners of spaza shops saw in that service delivery mobilisation an opportunity to advance their own agendas. Our research indicates that attempts by civic leaders to dislodge councillors are a general feature of everyday political life in these informal settlements. Some councillors, however, are better at managing it than others.

What is to be noted is that both Jacobshoek and Sunshineville were under the leadership of women councillors when the violence occurred. In both cases these women exercised their leadership from without. The councillor of Jacobshoek lived in a municipal house in town while that of Sunshineville lived in a RDP settlement near the township of Gladysville. Thus, in a way both of these leaders are absent from their communities. Both are accused of poor leadership in these communities. In fact, some of our interviewees argue that the leaders of civic organisations in these areas managed to organise with ease precisely because of the alleged absent leadership of these two councillors. Their leadership styles created vacuums in leadership which leaders of civic organisations
were able to fill. The violence in other areas where councillors were visible and of assistance to members of the community is said to have been minimal. If these claims are correct, then it can be said that inadequate leadership was a crucial factor contributing to the developments leading to the outbreak of violence.

It is, thus, clear that competition for material resources generates two things. First, it gives rise to contestation and disruption of the symbolic order that is supposed to validate the sanctity and legitimacy of the local state. This happens as civic leaders arrogate to themselves the symbols that are meant to demarcate state power in their practices of extortion, which include the selling of land. This leads to the challenge of the dominant version of symbols that make the local state legitimate. Second, the dominant version of symbols that make the local state legitimate are undermined from within as those who preside over the local state power embark on practices of corruption. This leads to a weakened state at the local level. The mobilisation for service delivery was taking place within this context of a weakened local state.

**What caused the violence against foreign nationals?: Reflections on the impact of material realities on persons**

Our premise is that an adequate explanation of why the mobilisation for service delivery led to violence against foreign nationals needs to reflect on the impact of the material circumstances of poverty and unemployment on some of the inhabitants of these informal settlements. Our research suggest that where poverty and unemployment are endemic people’s inclinations to subscribe to some lofty societal ideals dissipate. These inclinations dissipate because, abandoned and feeling there is nothing of value for them, people devise ways aimed at giving themselves a sense of worth. As this happens, society’s norms and values come under severe challenge.

The critical role that poverty and unemployment play in the general social decay in these informal settlements is even acknowledged by those who lost their businesses in the violence of 2008. Mr Mabaso, who owned a spaza shop, gave his own understanding of why people became violent against him and destroyed his spaza shop.

“You know, there is something that we cannot avoid and that is a person is a person because of food. When a person has no food, I tell you, he becomes the same as an animal. The problem in a place like this one is that it is full of people who are hungry.”

The sense that poverty makes people sick is captured by the response of pastor Mzimba who leads a Zionist church in Jacobshoek. When asked why South Africans turned violent against foreign nationals, this is what he had to say, ‘You know, the truth is that hunger makes a person sick. When you are hungry your spirit or psyche (umoya) becomes sick’.

The thrust of Pastor Mzimba’s argument was that where people are hungry their capacity to think for the humanity of other people lapses. Mrs Khumalo thinks that this sickness is a direct result of the tactics that the liberation movements employed against apartheid. She argues that the liberation movements’ ways of fighting apartheid by whatever means deemed necessary ‘led to the erosion of ubuntu and, as a result, people have lost compassion for one another’. Poverty and unemployment, she believes, ‘simply make things worse’. Her response is interesting because it locates this sickness that our other informants point to within a broader historical context of the anti-apartheid struggle.

What is important in these discussions is that they imply that there exists a fundamental relationship between the way people conduct themselves and the circumstances in which they live out their lives. It seems that it is somewhat deceptive to expect people who live in conditions of endemic poverty and unemployment to concern themselves with the critical question of social cohesion, because the circumstances of their lives do not encourage them to make social cohesion a priority of their lives. Those who are concerned with social cohesion in communities, therefore, have to ensure that they contribute to the upliftment of the poorest of the poor.
Significant, also, is the notion that poverty and unemployment make people sick. That is, these are people who are uncaring, unreasonable towards others, and egotistic. Such people have no regard for social conventions, norms and values. We argue that their conduct is a consequence of the feeling that democracy and citizenship exclude them. In their quest for the realisation of their own humanity and dignity these people are willing to break norms and conventions in order to ensure their own survival. It is the counter morality emanating from this sheer struggle to survive that appears to have made the field ready for those subaltern agents who organised violence against their competitors who were foreign nationals.

Some of these individuals who attacked foreign nationals are said to have been organised by South Africans who own spaza shops in these informal settlements. It turned out from our conversation with Sheik, the leader of the Somali organisation that Somalis in the informal settlements of Gladysville knew of the possible attack to their shops. However, they were doubtful, given the fact that such a thing had never happened in this place.

If they had known that it would indeed happen they would have done what they usually do when in possession of such information. They would have brought their vans and loaded their stocks to fa"ade the place, says Sheik. Well, that was never to be.

While Sheik and some of our interviewees implicate South Africans who run spaza shops in these informal settlements the councillors unilaterally put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the leaders of civic organisations. They regard these leaders as directly responsible for organising violence against foreign nationals.

Ironically, although councillor’s say they know who was responsible for the violence they do not seem to have had the courage to institute charges against anyone. This raises two possibilities. Either they do not have solid facts that can stand scrutiny in a court of law or they simply are afraid of the consequences that such arrests may generate. If the latter is the case, then it says a lot about the effectiveness of the state at this local level. It may be reasonable, nonetheless, to believe that some of the leaders of civic organisations were involved in organising violence against foreign nationals. This is because civic organisations in these informal settlements have a habit of carrying out services for money. Thus, the possibility that they may have been hired by business persons to chase foreign nationals away cannot be dismissed.

The possible involvement of civic leaders in the violence, notwithstanding, what seems apparent though is that as these leaders mobilised for service delivery other interest groups saw in this an opportunity to advance their own causes. The South African owners of spaza shops are such an example. A handful of our informants allege that these meetings took place in the taverns. Plans to drive Somalis out of Gladysville seem to have, with time, encompassed all foreign nationals. Whether the inclusion of foreign nationals in this sinister plan was part of the initial strategy by business persons to drive Somalis out or whether it was a phenomenon that developed at a later stage is not clear. What is obvious is that it was during this period that an anti-foreigner sentiment emerged. This sentiment took the form of a narrative of blame against foreign nationals. This narrative blamed foreign nationals for taking away jobs from South Africans. It also blamed them for taking away wives from South African men and it further blamed them for drug pushing. One of the councillors, Mr Khoza, says that what was interesting about this narrative of blame is that:

“You would find a young person who is not yet ready to even work saying they take away our jobs, or you would find them saying they take away our wives. Then you would wonder but you are way too young for these things. Then for me it became clear that these things are being said from their homes.”

Clearly, the notion that foreigners take away jobs, or that they take away wives and push drugs had been in existence before the violence took place. Even in the aftermath of this violence we find that such views still prevail. That is, they did not suddenly emerge in the period preceding the outbreak of violence. What seems to have happened, however, is that during that period these notions came to be packaged in such a way that they
furnished a hymn of blame that intended to cause outrage against persons deemed as foreign nationals. The message was driven in a way that sought South Africans to rise up against foreigners.

Endemic conditions of poverty and unemployment ultimately generate cultures of survival, which have a potential to undermine dominant versions of moral narratives. Consequently, endemic poverty and unemployment undermine not only the local state, as we saw above, but the broader values that hold communities together. It is contexts such as this one that subaltern agents such as the South African owners of spaza shops take advantage of because they provide conducive grounds for bringing about an order that favour their interests.

Who are foreigners?: Insiders, outsiders and competing notions of citizenship in South Africa after apartheid

Poverty and unemployment, which are characteristic features not only of Gladysville’s informal settlements but also of many areas in which South Africa’s excess population resides, appear to have placed a significant emphasis on people’s origins. That is, in a context where significant numbers of people have to compete for jobs and opportunities, knowing where one’s competitors come from has become important. This is because knowing where one’s competitors come from allows for the creation of a polarity between insiders and outsiders, which then serves to provide grounds for discrimination. As we show later, this polarity was an important aspect informing the violence of April 2008.

The material that is summoned for the creation of insiders and outsiders are diverse and depend entirely on a given situation. The following incident seeks to illustrate this point. On the morning of 19 April, two spaza shops were ransacked, looted and destroyed. One belonged to Mr Mabaso who lives in Jacobshoek and the other to Mr Zitha who lives in Mohale. What we have found out, ironically, is that both are citizens, and, therefore, did not seem to understand why shops owned by South Africans had to be destroyed in a war directed at foreign nationals. On closer inspection, however, we realised that there existed—before this violence—a narrative of both Mr Mabaso and Mr Zitha as foreigners.

According to their own accounts, both came to South Africa from Mozambique as young men in search of work in the mines in the 1970s. They have since worked in various mines, construction companies as well as firms. In the late 1980s both of them acquired South African citizenship and in the early 1990s they took their early pensions and started to run their own businesses in the informal settlements. They are both married to South African women and have children with them. Their wives stay in RDP houses while they live in Jacobshoek where their businesses are located.

The question that needs to be asked then is why these men’s spaza shops were destroyed? Why did those who attacked their businesses see these South African citizens as foreigners? Our research seems to suggest that where a narrative of origins exists, which locates a person with South African citizenship outside of the borders of South Africa, such an individual is immediately seen, in the eyes of some South Africans, as an outsider. That is, that narrative of origins delegitimises the claim of such a person to a South African national narrative of belonging which citizenship seeks to foster.

Tim, a CDW at Jacobshoek, had this to say when asked whether persons with South African citizenship who come from outside South Africa have the same rights as the rights of South Africans born in South Africa—‘you see, people who are from outside who have citizenship from this country can do anything they want but they cannot take part in politics. No, we cannot entrust political office to such people’. When Tim was asked to say why such people could not be trusted with political office his response was that, ‘those people are in reality not South Africans. It is only their children who can be seen as South Africans and they [that is, their children] can participate in politics, not their parents’.
The notion that persons with South African citizenship, who come from other countries other than South Africa are in essence not South Africans, is common among our interviewees. Even those who have South African citizenship were seen as foreigners and as persons, therefore, whose property could be ransacked and destroyed. In fact, Mr Mabaso says that even after the violence there are some young people who ‘come to this shop and call us Makrikamba’ and who threaten that ‘one day we will drive you out of this place for good’. Words such as Makrikamba are words, therefore, which seek to delegitimise the right to belong to South Africa.

In those cases where violent mobs were not in possession of narratives of origins of persons they suspected to be foreign nationals they devised their own forms of criterion in order to decide who were South Africans and who were foreign nationals. This is evident in the following conversation with Pastor Mzimba. This is what Pastor Mzimba said:

“Except for those people that they knew for sure because they are their neighbours they had their ways of testing whether one was a South African or an outsider. For instance, a group could simply stop you and if you cannot speak Sesotho then you are immediately seen as an outsider.”

There are two important issues that need to be pointed out in relation to the pastor’s comment. The first concerns the fact that in some cases the foreignness of some people had to do with the prevailing narratives of dominance. In the case above this foreignness articulates itself in relation to a narrative of the Northern Sotho as a dominant ethnic group in this area and, therefore, as an identity that is chiefly definitive of South Africanness. Any person’s claim to a South African identity, as a consequence, has to be tested against the backdrop of the narrative of the Northern Sotho as a dominant identity in the area. It is no surprise then that failure to demonstrate proficiency in Sesotho immediately disqualified one as a South African.

Pastor Mzimba, as well as other informants, pointed out that those looking for persons said to be foreign nationals would also accept as South Africans persons speaking languages they could identify with. That is, the emphasis was not purely on the dominance of Sesotho in this area. However, this also suggests that if an aggrieved party looking for foreign nationals understood no other language but Sesotho then in this case Sesotho could become the criterion for defining what constitutes a South African identity. That is, whether or not persons were seen as foreigners or South Africans depended to a greater extent on what those looking for foreign nationals found as acceptable or unacceptable markers of a South African identity. This issue of language informs everyday tensions between the inhabitants of these informal settlements as they do the rest of the country. According to Tim: ‘it is our brothers and sisters who speak English in particular who face immediate discrimination because they betray themselves that they are foreign nationals. People immediately think, how can a black person in an informal settlement speak English.’

The second point relates to the fact that inability to speak Sesotho, or any other language that assailants may find as an acceptable marker of a South African identity, immediately locates one not only outside accepted group narratives in this area but it also places one outside the borders of South Africa. That is, it marks one as a foreigner. This is because these accepted group narratives function in a way that defines citizenship. In this sense then, citizenship is not something that one has because one has acquired civic rights and the documents validating such rights. Instead, it is something that one has because one belongs to a group whose narrative of origins traces itself to somewhere within the borders of South Africa. Since these narratives of origins revolve around language and in some cases people’s pigmentation, they are more concerned with ethnic citizenship than with civic citizenship. That is, they are about individuals’ origins and not with whether these individuals possess the relevant documents that testify to their belonging to a national narrative of citizenship.

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1 Makrikamba is plural for lekrikamba, which is a derogatory word directed at a person who is a foreigner of African descent. Persons referred to as such are generally from countries north of Limpopo and those who are dark in complexion, and for that matter, become victims of such characterisations.
The discussions above seem to suggest that the competition for jobs and opportunities between South Africans and foreign nationals in these informal settlements, which is taking place in contexts characterised by endemic poverty and unemployment, has given rise to conceptions of citizenship, which are in competition with citizenship as a narrative of the state. However, these emerging notions of citizenship need to be seen as arising from a long history of insider/outsider, which has historically been a feature of life at Gladysville. All our informants attest to the fact that discrimination of outsiders has historically been a feature of life at Gladysville. That is, people who were born and bred in Gladysville have historically discriminated against those coming mainly from the rural areas. They referred, and continue to refer, to such people as Batswakoa (outsiders) and generally exclude them.

Mrs Khumalo told us of an incident in the late 1990s, which illustrated this. She went to the municipal office to apply for an RDP house, where she was told by the man helping residents with the application of these houses that there was no vacant house available for her. As she was leaving, someone else who also worked in the municipal office who knew her came out to greet her. Upon learning that she wanted to apply for an RDP house he took her to the man who had turned her application down. When they arrived he introduced her to this man as ‘Bro Tim’s wife’. Once the man who turned her application process down learned that she was Bro Tim’s wife he apologised and asked her to fill the forms for an RDP house. However, Mrs Khumalo was too appalled by this incident and, to the embarrassment of the man who turned her application down, she refused to fill the forms. ‘To this day,’ she says, ‘he cannot look me in the eyes.’ Although her husband had already passed away when this incident took place, he was one of the well-known ‘boys’ of the township of Gladysville. Mrs Khumalo, on the other hand, came to Gladysville because she got married to Bro Tim. It is only by virtue of association with her late husband that she receives recognition as an insider and as deserving of the allocation of resources that are mainly reserved for ‘locals’ who, in this case, are ‘children of Gladysville’.

This example seems to point to the operation of a narrative that takes the ‘origins’ of a person as the basis for informing how such a person has to be treated. Of course, as our informants correctly point out, these ‘myths of origin’ have their foundations in the history of apartheid and the particular ways in which it structured relations among black people. The urban/rural divide comprised one of the main ways informing how these relations were structured. It separated blacks in the urban areas from those in the rural areas who were under the rule of Bantustan leaders. This gave rise to antagonistic identities characterised by despise of the rural blacks by their urban counterparts. Although the granting of citizenship to blacks from rural areas has undermined these divisions, the squabbles, which have been a feature of that period, continue to this day.

What we have attempted to do in this section is to show that in a context of poverty and unemployment, knowledge concerning the origins of people has become important. It has become important because, in a context of competition for jobs and opportunities between locals and foreigners, it furnishes grounds for the construction of the other whose exclusion from the job market is considered justifiable. We have shown that the narratives that go into the construction of the other (the foreigner) are informed by the myths of the dominant locals. These narratives give rise to competing notions of citizenship that are in contradiction to citizenship as a narrative of the state. We argue that xenophobic violence is a result of these notions of citizenship that are exacerbated by poverty and unemployment. However, these changing notions of citizenship cannot be seen independently of the historical operation of a particularistic logic of insiders/outsiders characteristic of Gladysville.

Implications for the state

Xenophobic violence, and different forms of violence against other persons, undermines the rationality of the state, which seeks the protection of all who reside within its borders. However, poverty and unemployment can equally be said to facilitate processes that lead to the undermining of this logic, as these two elements undercut the dignity of persons. The state, therefore, ought to make poverty and unemployment its key priorities. Where
people’s material needs are not met, as a result, the likelihood that they will construct their own order, which may run into contradiction to that which the state aspires to, increases.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to highlight a number of issues that are important to an appreciation of the outbreak of violence against foreign nationals in the informal settlements of Gladysville. This violence cannot be understood independently of the poverty and unemployment that is characteristic of these informal settlements, the dynamics that are a feature of organisational life, competing notions of citizenship as well as the role of subaltern agents. The endemic poverty and unemployment in these informal settlements generate an army of destitute individuals, some of who are willing to do anything in order to ensure their own survival. For some of these individuals involvement in crime becomes a way of ensuring their own survival.

Poverty and unemployment also informs dynamics within organisational life. This is evident in the competition for material resources which lie within the domain of the local state. These contestations result in extortion with regard to civic leaders as opposed to the corruption of those who preside over the local state. This contestation for material resources renders the local state weak because civic organisations arrogate unto themselves the symbolic power of the local state. As this happens the dominant version of the symbols and mechanisms that validate the local state become disrupted. This disruption due to practices of extortion and corruption render the local state relatively ineffective. At this local level, therefore, the dominant version of the state is fiercely contested.

In the context of poverty and unemployment these communities have become polarised into divisions of citizens and non-citizens. These binaries allow for discriminatory practices where competition for opportunities is concerned. We showed, however, that conceptions of citizenship that are deployed in the battle for opportunities emerge out of a long history of insiders/outsidens and that they place purchase on people’s origins. This emphasis on origins undermines state-centred, civic citizenship and privileges ethnic citizenship. This binary contributes to the disruption of symbols that legitimise the state at the local level and suggests that the violence of 2008 was a consequence of the undermining of state-centred symbols.

Overall, we have argued that the violence of April 2008 in these informal settlements can be attributed to the presence of significant numbers of individuals whose dignity has been undermined by poverty and unemployment and who are willing to do anything in order to secure their own humanity. When given an opportunity some of these individuals are likely to embark on acts that may lead to the denigration of others. These individuals may provide a standing army to subaltern agents eager to bring about alternative social arrangements. The likelihood of the realisation of such acts is even higher in contexts where the capacity of the state to secure its own version of order is undermined. If individuals can loot with impunity and the state is not able to use force to challenge their actions, then its weaknesses become apparent.
Trouble

Mobilising against xenophobic attacks

Karl von Holdt

Introduction

Trouble is situated in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan municipal area. It is a semiformal settlement of 70–80,000 people, consisting of RDP houses and shacks, which came into existence in the mid-1990s. The wave of xenophobic violence that rocked South Africa in May 2008 affected Trouble as well as the surrounding areas. In Trouble, attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals were met with force by heavily armed foreigners, as well as community mobilisation against xenophobic violence.

In Trouble the protests resembled those in several of the other case studies in this research project. Mobilisation against the incumbent councillor appeared to involve wide layers of the community, but was led by the leadership of the ANC branch and particularly the ANC Youth League, and was marked by road barricades, violent clashes with the Metro police, and attempts to destroy public property.

This chapter describes the xenophobic violence and community responses.

The Research

A snowball methodology was used to identify key informants, with the emphasis on the organisational leadership of political and community organisations, as well as on the grassroots activists in those organisations. Interviews were lengthy, qualitative and wide-ranging, and were supplemented with less-formal conversations with key informants in informal settings such as travelling from one place to another in the car, or having meals together. Altogether some 18 individual and group interviews were held with a total of 31 informants.

It is important to note that the research would have been impossible without the assistance of Moloantoa Molaba, a resident of one of the nearby townships, and long-standing union and political activist. Not only did his knowledge of the communities and network of contacts endow the research with invaluable social and cultural capital, but his participation also offset the alienation effect of a white stranger asking questions about protests and violence in black communities.

Trouble: The Place

Trouble is a semiformal settlement expanding on the outer edge of the urban zone, some 5–6km from Ndabeni, along a main road. The segregated landscape of apartheid—African townships, separate developments for coloureds and Indians has been overlaid and disrupted by the new settlements of post-apartheid urbanisation: shack settlements followed by RDP housing developments occupying the open spaces between the old townships and spreading out into the farmland beyond.

Trouble came into existence in the mid-1990s, when shacks first appeared on the open land beyond a suburb designated for Indians. A man called Trouble established himself as the first leader of the community by selling
plots for R50 apiece to those who wished to erect shacks. The place grew rapidly, with people moving from the overcrowded houses and backyards of the nearby townships, as well as from small towns and rural areas as far afield as the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The 2001 Census records a population of 25,000 while the figure of 35,000 registered voters in 2009 suggests a total current population of perhaps 70–80,000, including foreigners. The area is about to be re-demarcated into two wards rather than one.\(^1\)

The RDP housing programme began in 2004, according to informants. The RDP houses, each with an outside flush toilet, are located on generous-sized plots, which some residents have used to build additional brick or shack dwellings, while others have created smoothly swept sand yards, planted with fruit trees. Some display flowerbeds or patches of lawn. Others are overgrown with grass and weeds. The RDP houses are interspersed here and there with bigger brick houses and the occasional big home surrounded with high walls. There is a large section of shacks with rough broken roads, where people are waiting for RDP houses.

There are three main tarred roads through Trouble, but access into the residential areas is on rough un-tarred roads. There are no amenities like sports fields, libraries, municipal buildings, shopping centres or parks. There are two schools, and their halls are used for community meetings. There are numerous spaza shops and taverns scattered among the RDP houses and the shacks, but nowhere that you can buy takeaways or cooked food.

There are large numbers of foreign nationals living in Trouble, mostly Mozambicans and Zimbabweans. Although many are said to have obtained RDP houses illegally by bribing SANCO and the Ward councillor, the majority live in the shack sections of Trouble. Most of the spaza shops are owned by foreigners. More recently, a number of Somalis and ‘Asians’ have established bigger and better-supplied shops and mini-marks.

Ndabeni—the township closest to Trouble—presents a very different picture. The township consists of six wards; much of it comprised of the old apartheid four-room houses, which are significantly bigger than RDP houses, as well as areas of bigger and more varied housing. There are several shopping centres, as well as well-established taverns and spaza shops in amongst the houses. There are both formal outlets and informal operations where cooked meals such as ribs and pap or chicken can be eaten on the premises or taken away. There are numerous churches and schools with playing fields, as well as clinics, a hospital, the police station, municipal hall and offices.

Ndabeni also has a section consisting of rows of migrant hostels, which are clearly poorly maintained and managed. Next to and behind the hostels is a dense and growing shack settlement. Ndabeni was one of the sites of vicious warfare between Inkatha and the ANC-aligned community organisations, which took the form of violent, armed battles between the Zulu-speaking residents of the hostels and township residents of a variety of ethnicities, including Zulu-speakers.

Ndabeni has experienced two historically distinct waves of immigration of foreign nationals. The first took place under apartheid, when a trickle of migrants from other countries in southern Africa found their way to the township and settled there, often intermarrying with South Africans. Over time these migrants came to be regarded as ordinary members of the community, and many were granted permanent resident or South African citizenship status. The more recent wave of post-apartheid immigrants tends to be concentrated in backyard shacks, which they rent from house owners. Some of them have also established spaza shops.

While many residents of Ndabeni still have formal-sector jobs in the nearby industrial area, or in the towns of Ekurhuleni, the vast majority of residents of Trouble are unemployed or underemployed.

\(^1\) There are anomalies in the Census figures, as they also record a population of 25,000 for 1996 which was the year, according to informants, when Trouble was first established. Further research will be needed to untangle this.
Xenophobic violence
Trouble: Foreigners arm themselves

In May 2008—the time of the xenophobic attacks in other parts of Gauteng—there were several incidents in which the spazas of foreign nationals in Trouble were attacked and looted. According to some respondents, this was one of the first incidents in the month-long spate of violence. The incidents in Trouble appear not to have been reported in the press, or any of the other published accounts of the sequence of events. It proved difficult to piece together a coherent account of who perpetrated these attacks or how they were planned. There was a rumour that the ANC Youth League or the street committees of the CPF were responsible, but this account was rejected by all our informants; the general feeling was that unorganised youths were responsible.

The account by the deputy chairperson of the ANC branch, Cde Ntshukumisa, is fairly typical:

"We just heard that foreigners must be taken out from us. It was just a rumour that the Shangaans, the foreigners, must be attacked. We just hear all around here, in the taxi, wherever you go. We did not take it seriously because it was just a rumour. But then there was a night when that thing materialised. There were gunshots all around here on that day. We found out that some people were injured from being shot at, members of the community."

From the various accounts we heard, it seems as if spaza shops and small supermarkets owned by foreigners were attacked in several different parts of Trouble that night, and that the foreigners rapidly responded by organising themselves and undertaking heavily armed patrols. They were said to be armed with very big and long machine guns, unlike anything any of the respondents had seen before.

We interviewed a young man, Steve, who had been shot in the spine with one of these weapons, and is now a paraplegic. He told us that two young men he knew had attempted to rob a foreigner’s spaza shop, and had been badly beaten up by the owners. A crowd gathered around the battered robbers—about 3000 people according to Steve, which is an unlikely size but does convey the impression of a large crowd. Those gathered there, including Steve, became angry and decided to march to the spaza and demand an explanation from the foreigners.

As they approached, however, one of the foreigners took a large machine gun from under his coat, and the crowd turned and fled. Steve, who had been at the front, also turned to run, but the foreigners opened fire and he fell to the ground, wounded. According to him, the police were present, having arrived on the scene as the crowd was gathering, but did nothing to challenge the foreigners or seize their weapons, being fearful, he thought. While he lay on the ground, one of the police officers came over and nudged him with a foot. When he groaned, the officer commented, ‘So you’re still alive,’ before going off with his colleagues.

Of the two robbers, his former friends, one had been mentally damaged and could no longer talk sense, and he did not know the whereabouts of the other.

After the attacks had been repelled, foreign nationals organised regular patrols at night, in trucks and on foot, to make sure they were not surprised again. Several accounts, both by foreign nationals and locals, stress that South African residents who were opposed to xenophobic violence also participated in these patrols. Trouble was clearly very tense at this time. Young Youth League members described their fear, encountering such patrols at night. A young woman described such an encounter:

“"They were many. They were walking. And they were looking for people who harassed foreign nationals. So the guys I was with ran away, but I did not run away. I stood there, and luckily I found that there was one guy I knew, a South African, a Zulu. He greeted me. Actually he was just making me aware as to what was happening. Because if he was not there those guys would have attacked us or killed us."
A foreigner, a young Swazi man who works in his uncle’s spaza shop in the shack section of Trouble explained that the patrols did not simply come into existence after the first attacks; foreigners, too, were aware of the rumours, and of the first xenophobic attacks early in 2008 in Cape Town: ‘We saw how bad things were in Cape Town and we were all shocked, we were all shaken’. Foreigners from different countries got together to plan a response, called community meetings that included South Africans, and decided together to start patrolling in shifts at night:

“There are South Africans who did not go in favour of xenophobia. They were patrolling with us, participating with us. So that’s what happened here, it was like the United Nations if I may say so, that was good, that was good. We dealt with it [xenophobia], we fought with it. In fact, we conquered it in our place.”

This informant conceded that the patrols were armed:

“Yes, I won’t lie because maybe some of them were having weapons, because you don’t go to war without anything, we need to have some shield so that when the first stone is thrown… This is a thing all of us can see, because once these people attack, they don’t attack using their bare hands. In Cape Town they were burning things, they were having some things to scare their victims.”

Foreign nationals felt they had to defend themselves, as the police could not be depended upon:

“Honestly, I would say they were scared, because during the xenophobic attacks [in 2008] they were hiding. As one of the patrollers, I would be lying if I say I ever saw any police officer during those attacks.”

However, while in the shack sections at least some South Africans patrolled jointly with foreigners, in others residents organised their own patrols as they feared that foreigners were planning to attack them.

Organising against xenophobic violence

The ANC branch and the CPF responded immediately to the violence, calling a public meeting of residents in order to mobilise opinion against xenophobic attacks. Actually, like the foreign nationals, the ANC had prepared in advance; as rumours of violence had increased, the regional structures of the ANC had sent instructions to branches to oppose xenophobic violence. The branch leadership had, in turn, gone to different sections of the community and explained that Africans from other countries were their brothers and should not be attacked.

The meeting after the violence was tense. Some of those at the meeting, including young men from Ndabeni who had heard about the violence, argued vociferously that community members should contribute money so that guns could be bought to fight the foreigners. The ANC branch leadership argued against this, pointing out that the foreigners were well trained militarily and dangerous, and that guns bought in this way ended up in the hands of criminals being used against the community, as had happened in the wars of the early 1990s. Those who wanted to buy guns accused the ANC of protecting the foreigners. But, according to Cde Ntshukumisa (often referred to as Ntshuks):

“The majority of people from here did not want it. They said, what do you say as the ANC? We had an argument in the meeting. We ended up pointing fingers at each other, but at the end people realised who told the truth, and who didn’t. Most of the people did not support xenophobia. They did not like it. Actually they did not want violence.”

According to Ntshuks, the majority of the community was opposed to xenophobic violence. Among the reasons were that foreigners help the community by charging low prices in their shops, that they are ‘just as our own family now’ because they have married the sisters of locals and they have children together, and because they had noticed too that the attacks on foreigners were mostly directed at looting their shops, which meant that they
were actually criminal activities. ‘That is what made people angry. The community would not support that kind of thing, because tomorrow those criminals would come and steal from you.’

Importantly, they wanted to avoid community violence, remembering how the violence of the early 1990s forced people to flee their homes in townships like Ndabeni. They felt that violence should be dealt with by the state, not the community:

“Other people were saying that when a person attacks you in your house you have to defend yourself. When the issue of weapons was raised then people said the government must act. People then said the police are there. The police must be called.”

Having won a moral victory at the meeting, and heeding this mandate from the community, the ANC branch called the police to a second meeting. Here the police explained that anyone found with a weapon would be arrested, and promised to try and apprehend the foreigners who were armed, ‘so people cooled-off’. Immediately after this meeting, the ANC leadership visited all the sections of Trouble together with the police, to continue their work of dissuasion.

Reasons for mobilising against xenophobic violence: the law and the state

Asked why the ANC branch had taken such a strong stand against xenophobic violence, when so many in the community articulated xenophobic attitudes, Ntshuks explained that the regional ANC had already instructed branches to counter xenophobia before the actual attacks, when the rumours first started surfacing; the branch had at that stage gone to all sections of Trouble in an attempt to counter the rumours. It was the role of the state to manage the problem of illegal immigration:

“We are being mandated by our organisation that the government is going to deal with this thing. Now, as the people we cannot take our own decision, but the government will come. That is why as the members of the ANC we stand at that point, because our organisation told us that the government will take action about those people. Those who do not have the IDs, they will take them back; they will try to sort that problem. We got most of our support from people who were asking what the government was doing about the situation because we cannot just take the law into our own hands whilst the government is there.”

Ntshuks here is articulating a strong view against ‘popular justice’: the law and coercion are properly the domain of the state, and cannot be appropriated by the community. In this he believes he has the support of the majority of the community. He made the same point in relation to the illegal occupation of RDP houses by foreigners:

“When they have to go out of the houses, they have to go out in a proper way, verification must be done, and people must be moved out properly. Even if the houses do not belong to them, and they bought them, there must be proper procedure followed so that even those who sold the houses can be arrested, because this house belongs to the government, and you are not supposed to sell government’s property.”

A respected office bearer of the local CPF articulated a similar view:

“The CPF was the main organisation organising against the xenophobia because it is part of law enforcement to prevent crime and prevent violence. It was the CPF and the ANC that were active in this. It is in the nature of the CPF to be against violence, and to stop wrong things.”
Law and Order in Trouble

Interviews with the ANC branch and the CPF suggest that these two organisations are important bulwarks in asserting the authority of the state and the law in this community. However, this is clearly a difficult struggle. The state is not very visible in the community generally, as there is a distinct lack of state amenities and services, in contrast to the long-established township of Ndabeni: no municipal offices or buildings, parks, shopping or office centres, public transport, clinic or police station.

The one, highly visible activity of the state is the construction of RDP houses, but this is mired in controversy, as the allocation of jobs by the contractors is said to be subject to nepotistic relationships with the local councillor and SANCO. There are allegations, backed by affidavits, that the allocation of houses is corrupt, with both plots and newly completed houses being sold to locals and foreigners. This, together with other grievances, has created a deep rift between the ANC branch and ANC Youth League on the one side, and the local councillor and SANCO on the other.

These struggles affect the community, as the CPF office bearer sees it:

"The problem with SANCO is when they call a meeting it never ends well. ANC and SANCO are always attacking each other, with accusations and counter-accusations. So we do hear rumours, but we see them as the same ANC/SANCO quarrel."

He refers as well to the fights over who should get RDP jobs and contracts, and contractors who don’t pay the salaries to those who work on the houses, and are next seen driving 4x4s. Even those who have been allocated RDP houses are insecure in their ownership:

"A truck can arrive with furniture in your yard and people move into your own house, because it has been sold by SANCO. There was a case of one house that had five different owners claiming it; they went to the police, but were told that the CPF should sort it out."

According to the office bearer, the housing department accepts the authority of the CPF regarding rightful ownership. Asked if the housing department can be trusted, he answers: ‘We have to trust Housing or there would be chaos.’

The control of access to land by powerful, local figures in Trouble is not a new thing; indeed it is inscribed in the founding of the settlement, when the man called Trouble charged newcomers for the privilege of calling a plot their own. In this, Trouble is no different from most other informal settlements, as other studies in this project show. After the time of Trouble, iikomiti—committees elected by the community in mass meetings in the different sections—took over many of the tasks of managing access to plots, as well as any wider disputes in the community.

The CPF office bearer was himself a participant in one of iikomiti:

"I joined to serve the community, but I ended up doing wrong things through these committees—taking money from the community in order to register them at the municipality as plot holders, for example. They were doing wrong things, like selling land in the shack sections. They would subdivide the plots, so that 1810 became 1810A, 1810B, 1810C. Fortunately I realised it was wrong in the end. I always wanted to work with the police, so eventually I joined the CPF."

As the CPF became stronger, iikomiti tended to decline but now SANCO appears to be playing a similar role with respect to plots and houses.

The local police—the police station is in the nearby, previously coloured suburb—is another agency of the state with which community members have frequent contact, but neither does this strengthen their faith in the
authority of the state. Both the CPF office bearer, who lives in one of the RDP sections, and a young woman who leads the CPF patrollers in one of the shack sections, agreed that levels of crime are very high in Trouble. According to the office bearer, the main crimes are housebreaking or house robbery, as well as street robberies and fighting in taverns. ‘At any time someone can just walk in your house and instruct everyone to lie down and take your goods, like this stereo or TV.’ Most of the criminals are young people who do not have jobs and resort to crime to make a living. According to the woman patroller, ‘You will find that he is 17, already he is a criminal, and he breaks into our shacks and steals. He steals here and sells to my neighbour; he steals from my neighbour and sells to me.’ She also blames foreigners for the high levels of crime.

Both complain that the CPF does not get much support from the police. The office bearer says that when they are called to a crime scene, or when the CPF has apprehended a criminal, the police often arrive late, or drunk, or they are unhelpful. He alleges that the police take bribes as well. As a result, the CPF is becoming unpopular in the community, and he is considering resigning.

The patroller also said that the police offer little support or protection, and take bribes from suspects and from foreigners. The overriding conclusion she draws is that the state is absent: “People cannot talk [when they see crime] because they are scared. If I talk that person will be arrested today, tomorrow he comes back and he is after me. Even ourselves, we are getting scared. We are having threats from jail. This other guy raped an eighteen-year-old girl who is still in school. He was arrested by us, we called the police. Every time he sees someone from here, maybe they have gone to see their relatives; he sends a message with them: ‘tell that girl and her group that I will be out very soon and I will deal with her.’ So somewhere, somehow, you feel what is the use of patrolling? At the end of the day I do not have protection. We were a very big number, we were 28, but since people see that the threats come to us, not the police, they are pulling out, one by one. I do not know, is it our government or what, I do not know. Who is failing us, we do not know. We do not even know where to go.”

Asked whether the law exists in Trouble, she is bitter: “I would like to put a big no, the law doesn’t exist, the law doesn’t work for us…. As long as you have money, you can live the way you want in this country of ours. You rape a kid, you have money, you don’t even go to court, and you are out. I am talking from what I have seen, I have been to courts, I have been all over, what I’m saying is what I’m sure is happening here, in this country of ours. As long as you have money, then you are a free man.”

It is the sense that the police are unreliable and the state is absent that leads people to resort to ‘popular justice’. Both CPF representatives said that suspects are sometimes killed by mobs. According to the patroller: “We had two murders this year, they took the law into their own hands, the reason being, he is arrested today, tomorrow he is out, what’s the use? What they do is they catch a criminal, they won’t come to me, they will whistle their whistle and then the community gets up and the next thing you go there, the guy is already beaten up. The community does not care as long as he is dead, a criminal is a criminal. You steal other people’s things, you deserve to die, and they do not give a damn.”

She said that, as a CPF leader, it is best to stay away when such a thing happens, because someone in the community will tell the police that you were there, while ‘they protect each other’. If the police learn that someone from the CPF was present where ‘somebody is dead by mob justice’, then ‘we are in for it’. Usually the police arrive too late to protect the suspect.

The office bearer explained that the CPF actively protects criminals from being attacked by removing them from the scene where they have done bad deeds:
"Sometimes community anger is so great that they try to take the suspect from the CPF, and in some cases if the CPF doesn’t hand over the suspect to the mob, they could be attacked themselves."

He described one occasion where a crowd tried to shoot a suspect who had been apprehended by CPF patrollers with his own homemade gun, ‘but fortunately the police came fast that time’. There was a fight, but the police managed to put the suspect in the van. The community stoned the van, but the police managed to get away.

These interviews paint a picture of a community where the rule of law is tenuous at best, because agencies of the state are characterised mostly by their absence, and, when present, are experienced as corrupt and unreliable. Violence is woven into the fabric of community life. Residents feel they are at the mercy of violent crime, and at times resort to ‘popular justice’ to punish or kill criminals, and there appears to be wide acceptance that this is a legitimate practice for the maintenance of some form of order.

In Trouble, the CPF emerges as an embattled agent attempting to assert and maintain the rule of law in the face of the weaknesses and corruption of policing, the assertiveness of violent criminals, and the frustration, anger and fear of residents upon whom the criminals prey. As the CPF office bearer says: ‘It is love for the community that motivates the members of the CPF, they want to see the community safe and protected… It is in the nature of the CPF to be against violence, and to stop wrong things.’ The street patroller says simply:

“There are pastors, there are presidents, and I believe fighting crime is my calling… I know I have made a very big difference in this community as far as crime is concerned. I am a brave lady, I am very brave, I know I am.”

Conclusion

Trouble resembles Slovoview and Gladysville in many respects. However, this study highlights the sources of community resilience in preventing or resisting xenophobic attacks. South African locals participated in anti-xenophobic patrols with foreign nationals. The ANC branch, the CPF and SANCO mobilised against the informal groups that advocated arming and attacking foreign nationals, and mobilised the police to attend meetings and stress that attacking foreign nationals was a crime. Not all those who mobilised against xenophobic violence were necessarily free of xenophobic attitudes, nor did they necessarily oppose the expulsion of undocumented foreign migrants from the community or the country; what they did oppose was the use of extra-legal force by citizens. They believed in the rule of law and the monopoly of the state over coercion. At the same time, there was a substantial constituency that saw foreign nationals as an asset to the community because of the low prices in their spaza shops, and regarded them as community members by virtue of their liaison or marriage with South Africans. This constituency supported the organisational leadership in their opposition to violence.

Trouble is clearly a fractured community where the rule of law remains fragile—crime, the ineffectiveness or corruption of the police, and vigilantism all undermine the authority of the law. Likewise, the illegal selling of land and houses constitutes a form of appropriation by local elites of government functions; members of the ANC allege that the ANC councillor and SANCO are party to this corruption, undermining the authority and credibility of the state. Residents do not feel very secure in their possession of their homes or in the face of criminal violence. The state is, in any case, a very remote presence in Trouble. In this, it resembles the communities of Slovoview and Gladysville.

In this context it is easy for informal groups—or, in other communities, more formal organisations as well—to mobilise and attack foreign nationals, both out of a sense that they are breaking the law, whether as ‘illegal immigrants’ or as agents of crime, and because they themselves are very unlikely to be apprehended by the police or prosecuted in court for such attacks. Foreign nationals, likewise lacking any faith in the efficacy of the law or the state agencies tasked with implementing it, relied on their own organisation and weaponry to repel the attacks of xenophobic locals. Their own ability to deploy force undoubtedly played an important, if not the most
important, part in the success of the campaign by the ANC, CPF and SANCO to persuade the community to desist from organising further attacks on foreign nationals.

This chapter suggests that the authority of the law and the state are constituted not only by state agencies and actions, but also in society, by the citizenry. In Trouble there is a deep argument within the community over the law and the state, and whether extra-legal 'popular justice' on the part of residents is justifiable. Popular initiatives to protect the rule of law and assert the authority of the state are important resources in the struggle to stabilise democracy and citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa. However, it is important to note that many of those advocating the rule of law and of the state in relation to crime and xenophobic violence, were also two years later involved in community protests against the councillor and the role of SANCO in corruption, in which young protesters deliberately and explicitly engaged in street battles with Metro police and the destruction of public roads. So here too, as in other communities, attitudes towards the law and state authority are ambiguous and shifting, depending on context.
Introduction

This chapter provides ethnographic findings of fieldwork conducted in Bokfontein between August and September 2010. The main focus of the chapter is on the history of Bokfontein, how this community was formed and the challenges it had in its inception. The intervention by Organisational Work Crew (OWC) to help this community deal with some of its challenges, community-based healing and reconciliation initiatives to help this community deal with the history of violence, and the implementation of Community Work Programme (CWP), its benefits and limitations form part of this report. Furthermore, the report also focuses on the role that the Bokfontein Development Forum (BDF) and its leaders play in creating developmental opportunities for the people of Bokfontein, challenges that these leaders face in dealing with issues of xenophobia, service delivery, community conflicts and development.

It is interesting to note that despite a lack of basic services, the community has not resorted to any form of service delivery protest. It is evident in the report that developmental initiatives such as CWP served as a protective factor in giving this community a sense of power in realising its own potential to develop itself. In the report, the difference between OW and CWP are discussed. The report also discusses three forms of violence that existed in this community, namely, forced removals, conflict between community members and xenophobic violence. In conclusion, recommendations are provided.

Background to this research

The community of Bokfontein was chosen as a site of research following our meeting with two of the community developers, Gavin and Tary, who collaborated with this community to implement the CWP. Our interest to research this community was informed by earlier research in four communities in which there have been violent service delivery protests against lack of services, such as access to water, electricity and housing. Many of these service delivery protests were often accompanied by xenophobic attacks on shops owned by foreign nationals (See our chapters on Kungcatsha, Voortrekker, Azania, and Slovoview). In trying to understand the increasing level of collective violence, a number of questions were asked to understand better the nature of collective violence in the four communities. The dynamics, in terms of sequence of events, was the same in that the protestors in all these communities always explored non-violent methods before resorting to collective violence to ‘send the message to the top’ as in Kungcatsha. Also what emerged was that some community leaders used existing social ills to mobilise community members to rally behind their call to protest against poor service delivery and recall mayors and councillors who were considered to be incompetent and corrupt and replaced them with their own candidates as in Azania.

The general picture that one had about service delivery protests was doom and gloom until one heard about the community called ‘Bokfontein’ in Brits. The description that Gavin and Tary gave about this community sounded ‘magical’ or ‘utopian’; that despite a lack of essential and basic services, this community had not resorted to any form of collective violence. Gavin and Tary also told us that there were no xenophobic attacks in Bokfontein during the 2008 xenophobic violence and that Bokfontein was a ‘refugee place’ for foreign nationals running...
away from Alexandra and Diepsloot. The explanation given for this phenomenon was that this community is self-reliant in developing its own community projects with the help of Gavin, and that both foreign nationals and locals work side by side to develop the area. This community was chosen as a research site to explore the impact of CWP, what happened at the time of the xenophobic violence, and the role that community leaders play in containing, preventing or reducing violence.

Gaining an entry into Bokfontein

Both Gavin and Tary facilitated our entry into Bokfontein by talking to key stakeholders, unlike in Kungcatsha, Voortrekker and Azania in which community leaders were initially reluctant to talk to us until they were given some assurance that we were not secret agents from the NIA. In Bokfontein, all the key informants were eager and open to talk to us even before a rapport was established. This is because in other towns, violent protests had recently taken place, and it is alleged that secret agents were arresting activists for interrogation about their role in the protests. In Bokfontein, the key informants had nothing to fear. In fact, there was a sense that the key informants in Bokfontein used our first meeting to tell ‘their story of forceful eviction and suffering and also how this story turned into something healing and emancipatory’.

Overall, there was a sense of feeling victorious in their narratives. However, in some of the interviews, the researcher had to serve as a container for all the negative feelings and emotions that the participants had about lack of basic services in their community.

Research Methodology

Interviews as a method were found to be suitable for this research in understanding the world from the participants’ perspective and own lived experiences in this community. The researcher visited Bokfontein over a period of two months to collect data, staying in the community every weekend from Friday till Sunday, attending meetings, soccer matches, and making observations of people working in different community projects as part of ethnographic research. Home visits with some of the home-based care workers were conducted, some of which left one feeling angry and despondent after seeing the living conditions under which some of our people still live after sixteen years of democracy. Many people in Bokfontein still live in abject poverty with no access to basic services.

The researcher also attended community meetings to understand some of the local dynamics, for example, a community meeting in which there was tension between local spaza shop owners and a Somali shop owner who had recently opened a new shop in Bokfontein. This meeting gave some insight on how issues that could potentially lead to violence are peacefully negotiated and resolved in this community. The researcher also interviewed people who were working in the CWP and visited some of the participants in their homes. Some people were met on street corners and informally spoken with about their lived experiences and challenges that they face in Bokfontein. Many people did not mind being stopped and asked questions about their community and living conditions in Bokfontein. People were eager to relate that things were ‘bad’ but they had not lost hope that one day their community would be like other communities and have access to basic services. Many of these conversations were quite unstructured, but still yielded useful information about the living conditions in Bokfontein. The researcher also went to other sites such as the soccer ground to watch matches and spoke with the spectators about the World Cup. Attending soccer matches helped to gain more trust and build a solid rapport with all community members.

Follow-up biographical interviews were conducted with two community leaders based on the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2003). I decided to do biographically based interviews with these two community leaders to know more about their life histories, hopes, interests and future goals, to know what may have shaped these two leaders to be so committed to see positive changes and development in their community of Bokfontein. The two community leaders reported that they found follow-up biographical individual interviews to be useful in helping them to
reflect at a deeper level on what it means to be a community leader in a disadvantaged community such as theirs. Overall, the two leaders were less defensive and receptive of some of the critical comments made by community members.

Lastly, interviews were done with the local councillor and two municipality officials about the municipality’s capacity to deliver essential services to the people of Bokfontein.

The story of Bokfontein begins here

Forced removal 1

Bokfontein is an area, which includes various farm plots near Hartebeesfontein dam in the North West Province. The residents of this community were evicted from nearby farms in Hartebeespoort Dam in 2005 and taken to Bokfontein. Many reported that they have been staying on these farms for many years (which legally qualifies them to be owners of the land), until the new owner, Dr Smith who wanted to use the land to build new up-market houses for the rich, bought it. Dr Smith had had various meetings with community leaders to discuss and negotiate the possibility of buying this community new land in Bokfontein for relocation purposes because the farm on which he wanted to build new houses was worth millions of rands. It was agreed (the proof of this agreement has been lost) that Dr Smith would buy this new land for the community, but some community leaders felt that it was important that the municipality of Madibeng be invited to be part of these talks with Dr Smith. Two municipality officials (one of whom the researcher has spoken to) were invited to be part of the meetings with Dr Smith. The community wanted the municipality to help them with all the legalities involved to sign the deal with Dr Smith. In many of the interviews, the participants mentioned that they feel betrayed by the municipality. There are suspicions that some municipality officials may have received bribes for this community to be forcefully evicted from their farm to Bokfontein.

Many of the participants described their eviction as reminiscent of forced removals under apartheid. Their homes were bulldozed. Their building materials and graveyards were also destroyed. Some participants complained that due to forced eviction, they are not able to appease their ancestors. They attributed some of their difficulties, for example, lack of job opportunities to angry ancestors. They felt that the only way to appease their ancestors was to go back to the farm and collect their ancestors’ remains, but this was not possible as new, up-market houses had been built on their graves. One community leader said, ‘Eviction robs you your dignity, respect and self-esteem. It robs you your history. Your children do not know where you come from.’ Others narrated that their eviction was very traumatic and humiliating. They felt that the current government led by the ANC did not care about them because they were forcefully removed and dumped in the middle of nowhere with no access to water and other basic services. In terms of the law, alternative accommodation including access to basic services should be provided when people are evicted from their homes. In the case of Bokfontein, this requirement was never met. Their removal violated basic human rights as enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Section 28 of the Constitution was also violated in that following eviction many children were not able to continue with their schooling due to the long distance between Bokfontein and Hartebeespoort Dam. Many people also lost their jobs as domestic and farm workers due to lack of money to commute between Bokfontein and Hartebeest every day. Many participants asserted that eviction destroyed their lives. They had nothing when they arrived in Bokfontein. There were no roads, toilets or access to water. The place had nothing. People had to start from scratch with no help from the state to rebuild their lives. Amongst those evicted were foreign nationals from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho who were also working on the farm.

Forced removal 2

In August 2006, another neighbouring community in Melodi was also forcefully removed by the municipality to Bokfontein for illegally occupying private land that was earmarked for low-costing housing. Again this group of people described their forced removal as humiliating and traumatic. Many of these evictions seem to centre
around housing rights as enshrined in section 26 (1 and 2) of the Constitution that ‘everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing; and the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right’.

Since 1994, there has been increasing reports of forceful evictions of people from their homes, flats (mainly in the city centres) or private lands occupied illegally. The rise and the formation of social/civic movements such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and Abahlali baseMjondolo was to militantly mobilise and galvanise communities to fight for their rights and access to basic services such as housing, water and electricity. These social movements (especially Abahlali baseMjondolo) fought against the forced removal of informal settlements by the municipality in Durban to sell the land to private housing developers.

Interestingly, the two communities which were evicted to Bokfontein did not fight or resist their evictions. As a result, their stories of eviction were not even covered in the mainstream or local media.

**No go areas: Us and Them**

These two communities were forced to live together and share a small piece of land in Bokfontein. The first group, which was evicted in 2005, saw the new group that arrived in Bokfontein in 2006 as intruders who were not welcomed to their ‘land’. So the community was divided into two sides (community one and two). It is reported that there was bloody violence between members of these two communities for a period of two years. People in community one were not able to go and socialise with people in community two and vice versa. There were no-go areas as in the East Rand and other parts of KZN during the conflict between ANC and IFP supporters (Langa & Eagle, 2007). Interviews reveal that the nature of violence that existed in this community was organised along one’s community of origin (whether a person came from Hartebeest Dam or Melodi). It was a situation of ‘us and them’. It is reported that levels of crime were also very high due to violence that existed between the two communities. Some participants described the situation at that time as a ‘war-zone’ in which the two communities would attack each other.

It is possible that the violence that existed between the two communities was a power struggle over limited resources such as water (which was being provided by the municipality on an ad hoc basis before they erected their own borehole) and the limited space to build their shacks. It is also possible that violence was used as a form of projection to eject unwanted feelings about the self. Here, one may argue that the two communities were angry about their evictions but unfortunately their angry feelings were displaced and projected on each other. Fanon (1968) highlights the impact of the unresolved trauma of colonialism on the psyche of the oppressed in contributing to the violence that we see in postcolonial societies. For Fanon (1968), oppression dehumanises people and turns them into violent individuals. Seedat et al (2010) note that ‘xenophobic violence represents the spillover of repressed trauma, manifest through the transfer of anger and hatred of the former “colonial masters” onto an equally or more vulnerable “other” through physical acts of denigration’. Other scholars (Kirsten, 2008; Cock, 2001) attribute the increasing level of violence in post-apartheid South Africa to the ‘culture of violence’ that developed under apartheid. Field (2008, as cited in Seedat et al) suggests some form of ‘national healing’ to heal the psyche of the nation, but argues this process needs to be different from the TRC process, which has been criticised to have privileged the perpetrators of violence over the victims (see Hamber, 2009 for detailed discussion of this point).

Returning back to the story of Bokfontein, it seems the organisational workshops organised and facilitated by Gavin and his colleagues have helped a great deal in helping residents of this community to reflect more about their pain, sufferings and mourn losses of their evictions, and start working together to rebuild and restore their sense of humanity and dignity. Many participants agree that development would not have been possible in Bokfontein if people had not been assisted as a group to deal with their anger and effects of the collective trauma.
Developmental initiatives in Bokfontein: OW and CWP

OW as a community-based healing initiative

In this section of the chapter, I discuss the distinction between OW and CWP in Bokfontein. OW was initiated and implemented by Gavin Andersson and his team in 2008/9 to help this community deal with all its challenges, including the effects of collective trauma. Collective trauma is the trauma that is experienced by the community as a whole (see chapter by Mogapi). The evictions experienced by the two communities in Bokfontein could be classified as collective trauma. The psychological impact of collective trauma at a community level involves the following symptoms if left untreated: anger, hatred, bitterness, revenge, alcohol abuse, violence, suspicion and mistrust of one another.

OW is rooted within the participatory action model and consciousness raising informed by the work of Paulo Freire (2007). According to Van Vlaanderen and Neves (2004), the key principles of participatory action model and consciousness raising are consultation, people-centred development, social justice, equality, capacity-building, empowerment, citizen participation, and giving priority to learning and human development. It was clear that many of these principles were followed and applied by Gavin and his team in their work in Bokfontein. Firstly, a needs assessment was conducted. Secondly, based on the findings of the needs assessment, all community members were invited to come and attend the organisational workshop. Some of the themes covered in the organisational workshop included dealing with the past, helping community members to see their community with new eyes and imagining the future. Many participants interviewed in this research quoted the organisational workshop as the turning point of life in Bokfontein because the workshop also dealt with practical skills ranging from community mapping, models of development, and how to deal with the problem of crime, alcohol abuse, xenophobia and violence.

The participants in the organisational workshop found all the lessons informative and empowering in restoring their sense of collectiveness, respect, dignity and honour. The workshop also helped the participants process their angry feelings about the past and encouraged them to imagine the new future in which they will live in peace and harmony. The spirit of community development, collective responsibility, positive self-belief, high self-esteem, empowerment and citizen participation were also cultivated and fostered. New meanings about the future were also created. The community as a whole also decided to choose a new name, *Ditshaba Dimaketse* (meaning the Nations are surprised). I must acknowledge that as the researcher I was also surprised at how residents of this community worked together to achieve peace, stability, development and prosperity. One community leader reiterated that all these developments would not have been possible without the intervention by Gavin and his team to help them deal with their collective trauma and feelings of anger about their evictions. Another issue that needed to be addressed was the divisions that existed amongst community members along ethnic lines and community or country of origin. Discussions were publicly held about issues of identities and difference. Community members were forced to do some self-introspection to look at their life histories, cultures and draw new identities for this community. This involved challenging people’s attitudes and stereotypes about each other. A sense of oneness was fostered amongst community members and a positive impact has been felt in the lives of people in Bokfontein. Firstly, it dealt with the collective trauma that this community has suffered. Following this, community members started seeing each other as ‘human beings’. Interventions also addressed the economic needs of communities. In his book, *Transforming Societies after Political Violence*, Hamber (2009) noted this as one of the TRC’s limitations, the failure to address the economic needs of survivors of apartheid violence. In their newly published text, *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*, Kaminer and Eagle (2010) also agree with Hamber that the PTSD model is a western construct which places more emphasis on medication and individual psychotherapy and neglects other social, economic, cultural and political processes. In her groundbreaking work with survivors of political violence in Guatemala, Lykes (2002) as a community psychologist also insists that community-based healing initiatives should go beyond the psyche of the individual to address both economic and psychosocial needs of communities at a local, district, provincial and national level. These are some of the lessons that we can learn for the South African context.
CWP as safety net in creating job opportunities for unemployed individuals

The Community Work Programme (CWP) developed out of the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), which was initiated by the South African government to alleviate poverty and unemployment through providing short-term work opportunities and training to unemployed individuals (Nzimakwe, 2008; Philips, 2004). According to Philips (2004) the main objective of EPWP was to provide people with skills, while working in order to increase their chances of getting long-term job opportunities. Nzimakwe (2008) in his article notes some of the achievements of EPWP in the last five years that it created more than 661,000 work opportunities at a cost of 12.8 billion rands. Despite some of these achievements, there are some key challenges facing the EPWP. This includes lack of support from other government departments (except the Department of Public Works which is seen as the main driver of the project), lack of capacity in many municipalities to implement EPWP-related projects, lack of leadership to comply with all EPWP guidelines and poor training and skills transfer. Moreover, one of the major challenges of EPWP was the failure to create long-term job opportunities with long-lasting impact on communities (Nzimakwe, 2008). One of the recommendations was the formation of the Community Work Programme as an anchor to support EPWP and reach marginalised people in semi-urban and rural areas.

CWP was first piloted in 2008 in Bokfontein and Munsieville. During 2009/10, it was adopted as part of the government strategy (EPWP II). Since then, CWP has been rolled out to forty-nine sites. It has reached 70,000 people and aims to reach 250,000 people by 2014. The programme is currently funded by the Department of Co-operative Governance (Philip, 2010).

**Methodology**

In terms of its methodology, CWP is based on the Organisational Development Model in which community participation is highly valued in identifying and prioritising ‘work opportunities’ in their respective communities (Philip, 2010). Unlike EPWP, which takes a top-down approach, CWP is driven mainly by community members at a grassroots level with the support of the implementing agencies called Seriti and Teba. Community members decide on projects that they would like to implement. In most cases, projects that are commonly chosen include home-based care for HIV and AIDs patients, care of orphans, social programmes to deal with alcohol abuse, crime, violence, gardening projects, campaigns to clean the environment and road maintenance (Philip, 2010). Members of the community are encouraged to participate actively in processes of decision-making in respect of all issues that affect them. Philip (2010) noted that CWP also empowers local leaders in terms of programme management skills.

**Structure of CWP**

According to Gavin: ‘CWP is designed to provide an employment safety net, by providing regular employment to participants, with predictable number of days of work provided per month.’ CWP provides a regular work of two days per week or eight days per month. People get paid R50 per day. CWP is designed to employ at least 1000 people per community.

In Bokfontein, it is reported that more than 800 people are employed in the CWP. Exact figures in terms of gender and age need to be ascertained, but my observation is that both, young and old, males and females work in the CWP. It is open to everyone. The requirement to work in the CWP is an identity document. Foreign nationals submit their asylum papers to be employed in the project. Those that do not have relevant papers are assisted by community leaders to apply for them in Pretoria.

In Bokfontein, people work on Wednesday and Saturday. The working hours are from 08h00 to 15h00. People work in various projects such as road maintenance, gardening, home-based care, after-school care, cutting grass, installing pipes for water, and working on the park. In terms of work allocation, each group has one or two coordinators who take the register every day, allocate duties and supervise their work. The register is then sent to the managing agency, Seriti or Teba, for cash payment at the end of the month.
Benefits of CWP

Many participants mentioned that CWP had really helped them as an employment safety net, while searching for permanent jobs. Others mentioned that CWP has also helped to reduce poverty levels in Bokfontein. There are no job opportunities in this area as farming plots surrounds the area. Now CWP is the main source of employment. Many people mentioned that they work in the CWP (for two days per week) and use other non-working days to look for other work opportunities at the mine and other companies in Brits. Some succeed, while others still struggle to find permanent jobs. Some people with full-time jobs work from Monday to Friday and on weekend (Saturday) work in the CWP to supplement their income. Many people were very appreciative of CWP and were of the view that it was relieving poverty and hunger. Some participants mentioned that with the little money (R400 per month) that they get they are able to support their families. Working in the CWP was giving people a sense of purpose in life. One can argue that employment is a protective factor against mental disorders such as stress, anxiety and depression, which in turn contributes to high levels of violence, alcohol abuse and crime. It is clear that creating job opportunities can also help to break the cycle of violence and crime in many communities. Bokfontein is a good case example of how the CWP has helped a great deal in reducing the crime level in the area. As part of CWP, a Community Policing Forum was formed to deal with crime-related issues.

Specific projects of CWP in Bokfontein

Road construction

In Bokfontein, there was no access road when people came in 2005 and 2006 respectively. During the rainy seasons, it was difficult to enter and leave the area. Vehicles were also not able to move in and out of Bokfontein. Road construction was chosen as one of the CWP projects. The workers were given all the road construction tools such as hammers, tape measures, wheel barrows, hardhats, spades, and so forth. These tools are funded through CWP.

A tarred road has been made now. The leadership managed to negotiate with the neighbouring mine to donate stones to make the road. Making the road involved intensive and hard labour with both men and women working on it.

All the people who work on the CWP wear yellow work suits. This uniform was provided as part of CWP. Many participants mentioned that they feel proud of themselves to be doing something for their community.

Food Gardening

As part of CWP, the community was provided with shade net to start a food gardening project. Other community members work on gardens. There are three vegetable gardens.

The vegetables produced in the gardens are given to vulnerable households. Many of these households have family members that are too ill to work. Some are also affected and infected by HIV and AIDS.

Home-based care workers

As part of CWP, home-based care services are provided to families of the sick or child-headed households. Many of these cases are related to HIV and AIDS. Patients who are too sick get vegetables grown from the food gardens. Home-based care workers cook, clean and bath some of the patients.

In Bokfontein, people do not have access to health services. There are no clinics or health services. There is a mobile clinic that comes once a month. Many are too sick to go to Brits Hospital. Home-based care workers look after all the people who are sick in Bokfontein. This has had some negative psychological impact on them. Studies found that home-based workers become emotionally affected following the death of their patients. Their risk of burn-out is very high.
Another challenge is that home-based care workers did not have all the necessary equipment such as gloves, cotton wools, and bandages to clean and wash their patients. In terms of my assessment, some home-based care workers presented with symptoms of burnout. They were feeling overloaded and exhausted. It is important that home-based care workers are provided with emotional support and continuous training on how to care for people who are very ill. However, on the other hand, caring for people who are sick can be a source of strength. Home-based care workers create new positive meanings out of helping sick people.

Education

In Bokfontein, there is no school. The nearest school is more than 30km away. Only children whose parents can afford to pay the transport fee of R150 per month can go to school. Community leaders recently negotiated for the transport to be reduced to R120 per month, but still many parents cannot afford this. Here, many parents complained about CWP that the money that they earn is not enough to meet all their economic needs.

All the participants interviewed mentioned that they wish they were working for more days so that the money will be enough for them to support their families in Bokfontein and still send money back at home to the rural areas. The complaint in all the interviews was not about the money that they earn per day but the wish to work for at least 10–14 days per month because they will then earn R800–1000 per month. Many argued that that amount of money would be enough for them to meet all their economic needs.

Drop-centre

Many children in South Africa live in abject poverty. It is estimated that more than 50% of South African children live below the poverty line. Children who grow up in poverty-stricken communities are at risk of malnutrition, diseases and premature death (Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development, 2006). Many of these children are living in urban (townships) and rural areas. According to the Birth to Twenty study (2002), malnutrition is one of the most serious problems facing children in South Africa. Causes of malnutrition include poverty and unemployment, poor feeding practices, and eating foods that are low in nutrients. The South African government through the Department of Social Development has introduced a food scheme to provide children in crèches, primary and high schools with food. In Bokfontein, there is a Drop-Centre in which children get food every day. A group of women cook for these children as part of CWP.

Building a park to attract tourism

As part of CWP, other workers are working at Polar Park. The community hopes to use the park as a place where community members can come and relax. They have braai stands at the middle of the park. They hope people will come and have parties there. They also hope to attract tourists who come to Hartbeespoort Dam to come and visit their community. The community has also planned building a swimming pool at the park. There is also cement work which they envisage becoming a fish pond ‘so that people can come here and enjoy nature’. There is a half-built lapa, some trees, swings and a jungle gym. There is also an open space for children to play. Overall, it seems this community is dreaming big.

Water supply

In Bokfontein, people do not have access to water. Initially, the municipality used to deliver water on trucks, but this was very erratic and the community used to spend days and weeks without water. Recently, the community has managed to get a borehole to pump water. Community members are hard at work laying water pipes to supply households with water. Currently, people buy water. They pay 50c per 20 litre. Lack of water has been a source of service delivery protests in other communities. Interestingly, despite a lack of essential services such as clinics, schools, water and electricity, the people of Bokfontein have never protested.
Electricity

In Bokfontein, people also do not have access to electricity. They use paraffin stoves to cook and candles for some light at night. Those that can afford it use generators as a source of electricity. The participants narrated that all their complaints about lack of water and electricity have been submitted to Madibeng municipality but nothing has been done. The community is now taking its own initiatives to generate its electricity than to wait for the municipality. They mentioned that they are currently working with a company to develop sweet sorghum-based renewable energy project, which will be piloted soon. What is interesting here is that this community takes on opportunities to network with various stakeholders to come and assist them. The community currently has managed to secure some funding from one of the mines in Brits to come and build a multi-purpose centre, but the major stumbling block is that the land where this community lives does not belong to the municipality. Sadly, there are possibilities that this community may be evicted again if the municipality fails to buy this land for them. The possibility of being evicted again is the major worry for many community members.

Housing

In Bokfontein, all people live in shacks. There are no houses. Initially, people also did not have access to toilets and had to relieve themselves in the bush. In partnership with ABSA, the community managed to raise some funds and the money was used to buy fifty toilets. Some households still do not have access to toilets. It is mentioned that the municipality has been promising to build RDP houses but again nothing has happened. In talking to the local councillor, he agreed that the municipality has dismally failed the people of Bokfontein in terms of service delivery. In September 2010 the Premier Maureen Modiselle ordered an investigation into allegations of corruption in Madibeng municipality. Like in other towns, it is clear that Madibeng municipality in Bokfontein is also characterised by allegations of corruption, political infighting and nepotism. The difference as mentioned earlier is that the people in Bokfontein did not resort to any form of collective violence to protest against poor service delivery in their community.

No xenophobic attacks in Bokfontein

In 2008, South Africa witnessed violence against foreign nationals. It is reported many foreign nationals were attacked and their goods stolen and also destroyed. Surprisingly or interestingly, it is reported that there were no xenophobic attacks in Bokfontein. Many participants said the OW as an intervention has helped them to understand issues of identities and respect for diversity. One community leader said: ‘We’re all people of Bokfontein. We don’t use words categories such as Tswana, Zulu, or Zimbabweans. We are just Africans. We are one. We are all human beings.’ Many people I interviewed shared this view that ‘We are all Africans’. Community members (including two community leaders and the councillor) shared an example of how they prevented residents from the neighbouring community who wanted to come to their area and chase out all the so-called foreign nationals in Bokfontein. One leader said: ‘We said to them, “Not here.” Here we are all Africans. We are all one. We are all human beings. No one has the right to attack another person.’ Interestingly, all the participants mentioned this would not have been possible (to stop xenophobic attacks in their area) if they did not attend the OW. It seems the OW worked wonders in this community. It was an eye-opening experience for community members to respect and know one another and celebrate their diversity (for example, learning each other’s culture, singing each other’s songs during the workshop and working together in some of the tasks for CWP).

However, this does not mean xenophobic attitudes are non-existent in Bokfontein. In the extract below, it seems the dynamics of Bokfontein in terms of the population size are different as compared to other townships such as Alexandra, Diepsloot and other places were xenophobic attacks were violent.
Malose: In terms of percentages, how many are outsiders?

M: It’s about 60% and 40%.

Malose: So they are more?

M: Yes they are more. 60% of the people are people from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and so on."

Many participants that I interviewed confirmed some of the views expressed in the extract above. Firstly, many people mentioned that xenophobic attacks would not be possible in their area because of the number ratio between South Africans and foreign nationals. It is reported that 50-60% of people living in Bokfontein are foreign nationals as compared to 40% or 50% of South Africans (NB: It must noted that these figures are not official, but estimates). Secondly, other participants went further to say it is not easy to differentiate who is a foreign national or not because many foreign nationals are fluent in local languages such as Zulu and Tswana (this is something that I also observed as the researcher). Does this mean markers of someone as the ‘Other’ are not so clear in Bokfontein? Refugees and other African immigrants are identified as the ‘Other’ based on their cultural and physical features that include the skin colour (too dark), hairstyles, accents, vaccination scars, and dressing style.

The language, accent, dress code and physical appearance are seen as markers or signifiers of difference. More recently, xenophobic violence across South Africa highlighted the influence of symbolic and other social markers in the identification, stigmatisation and discrimination against refugees. Thirdly in Bokfontein, other participants mentioned that xenophobic attacks would not happen in their community because their leaders are against it. I found the quote ‘there is no one who can instigate it’ to be very interesting.

Exploring non-violent methods to deal with a community dispute

During one of my visits I went to a meeting that was called by the community leaders to discuss Bokfontein Business Forum’s unhappiness about a new shop that has been recently opened by the Somali foreign national during the course of my fieldwork. The main complaint by the Bokfontein Business Forum was that the new shop sells cheap items and as a result, they have been losing their customers. Interestingly, the community was divided around the issue because members of the business forum wanted the shop to be closed, while community members wanted the shop to continue operating because they were happy with cheap prices.

The dominant sentiment expressed by community members was that members of the Business Forum must also compete with the new Somali shop owners by also reducing their prices. Other community members said, ‘If the new shop owner leaves all shop owners must also leave because they are also not South Africans. All the shops belong to the Shonas. These people they own tuck shops but we did not make it an issue and we are supporting their businesses. But today they come and say the Somalis must go.’ The community was really divided over this issue. Some subtleties about xenophobic attitudes were also coming to the fore that if the new shop owner leaves, all spaza shop owners must also leave because they are also not South Africans, but Shonas from Zimbabwe. In fact, some residents were happy when the South African Government announced that the special dispensation to allow Zimbabweans to move in and out of South Africa would come to an end on 31 December 2010. Some community members (mainly South Africans) privately said to me these people (referring to Zimbabweans) must go back to their country because ‘they come and all of sudden they want to control us’. Some were using the government’s announcement to justify their views that foreign nationals come here to commit crime and take their jobs. All these narratives show that xenophobic attitudes are existent in Bokfontein, but they are not overt and visible. I call this ‘subtle xenophobia’. My argument is that xenophobia will not disappear as long as the economic status and living conditions of the poor remains unchanged. Xenophobia is not just a hatred of foreign nationals. It is about power and class struggle between the poor of the poorest. To defeat xenophobia means changing various institutions to bring equity, economic power and transformation.
We are not xenophobic, but we are fighting for our economic survival

In Bokfontein, the struggle was between community members and the Business Forum. However, members of the Business Forum mentioned that it was not possible for them to compete with the new Somali shop owner because their businesses were too small to sell items in lower prices. They complained that:

M1: We buy mielie-meal at R35 in Brits and we sell it for R50. This guy sells it for R35.00, the very same price we pay at Brits. It means he is killing all the small businesses.

M2: What I think is that these people must go because our businesses [were affected]. Since these people came my business [got struck]. And I have no other job, I survive from this business.

M3: They must just leave peacefully. We are not fighting them – And we do not have a tendency to discriminate about where people come from.

M4: We do not care whether people are foreigners or not.

M5: We are all struggling because of one person.

M6: The government said Vuk’uzenzele, and when we try to do that the Somalis pull us down.

I found all the views expressed by the members of the Business Forum to be very powerful. Their argument was that the new shop would kill their small business and were quite clear in this group meeting that their argument to say the new shop must be closed was not influenced by xenophobic attitudes, but everything was about their economic survival in this impoverished community of Bokfontein. The two community leaders (Mr Mohlala and Mr Ledikwa1) were also present at the meeting. They supported the Business Forum on the basis that, firstly, the new shop owner did not follow proper channels in gaining an entry into their community. He was supposed to have met with them as community leaders to negotiate his entry. Secondly, Mr Mohlala and Mr Ledikwa mentioned that they wanted to empower local shop owners who have been part of their struggles for the past four to five years. Although both Mr Ledikwa and Mr Mohlala wanted the shop owner to leave, but they felt they did not have powers to chase him out. They mentioned that they did not want to impose their views on the community.

The local councillor, Mr Maake, also attended the meeting. In conclusion, it was decided that the community with the help of Bokfontein Development Forum should internally deal with the issue without resorting to any form of violence. It was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was decided that the community with the help of Bokfontein Development Forum should internally deal with the issue without resorting to any form of violence. It was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality. Following this, it was agreed that the matter should also be reported to the municipality. A delegation was sent to the municipality.

Other suggestions were made that the new shop owner must contribute groceries every month to the Drop-Centre (which cooks for vulnerable children in the community) (I’m not sure if the shop owner has agreed to this suggestion or not). This case study shows the role that committed community leaders can play in containing and preventing xenophobic attitudes from turning into full-blown violence. Misage, Monson, Polzer and Landau, (2010) in their report of 2008 xenophobic violence, also recommend that meeting and training community leaders at the grassroots level can make a significant difference in terms of preventing xenophobic violence. However, it is important that such initiatives do not stand alone but are linked to processes of social and economic change and transformation. I think this has been a protective and resilient factor that CWP was in place in Bokfontein to address some of the economic needs. Without CWP, maybe this community would also have had xenophobic violence, but they had something to fall on while people in Alexandra and other townships that turned violent had nothing to rely on, except to displace their anger on foreign nationals as a source of all social ills in their communities

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1 Both Mr Ledikwa and Mr Mohlala mentioned that they do not mind if I use their real names in the report. They said they want people to know about their story. Their wish is that a book must be written about Bokfontein so that people can read about its challenges and achievements.
Why were there no service delivery protests in Bokfontein?

Service delivery protests have been spreading like wildfire in the last few years in South Africa (Alexander, 2010). Many of these service delivery protests are blamed on lack of services, allegations of corruption and power struggle amongst political leaders to access power and state resources.

In Bokfontein, the two key community leaders—Mr Ledikwa and Mr Mohlala—were vehemently opposed to service delivery protests. Mr Ledikwa asserted that he was opposed to service delivery protests because they created a culture of violence. He argued that toyi-toyi teaches people to be violent. He said: ‘Today people see leaders as people that shout and use violence. Look at the ANCYL President! He does not have respect for elders. He thinks being violent and calling people names is being a leader.’ Mr Ledikwa argued that there was a need to teach children good manners, and that violence did not solve problems. He said further: ‘Children need good role models. So when we toyi-toyi we become violent. What are we teaching our children? Are we not teaching them to also be violent?’ Mr Mohlala in his individual interview also shared Mr Ledikwa’s sentiments. He also asserted that service delivery protests do not help, except to destroy the public property. Both Mr Ledikwa and Mr Mohlala mentioned that they believed in negotiations to solve community problems. They have had countless meetings with Madibeng municipality, but nothing has happened. Both Mr Mohlala and Mr Ledikwa denied my insinuation that their situation is a time bomb waiting to explode. They asserted that they would continue to explore other opportunities than to wait for the municipality to bring changes to their community. They mentioned that the mine had now also promised to help them buy their current residential land so that all their developments could continue.

They also mentioned that they plan to open their own supermarket as an income-generating project. All relevant documents have been completed for the supermarket to be opened. The stock has already been bought. All these activities are done under the auspices of Bokfontein Development Forum2, which is an independent entity that helps create opportunities for the people of Bokfontein. Mr Ledikwa as Chairperson and Mr Mohlala as Secretary lead the BDF. It has more than fifty registered members and plays a leading role in negotiating business opportunities for the people of Bokfontein.

It is possible that many of these initiatives served as resilient and protective factors against service delivery protests. It seems community leaders in this community (unlike in other towns) are preoccupied with issues of reconstruction and development than petty political infighting in municipality offices to access state power and resources. This shows that community leaders can either play an important role in containing or condoning service delivery protests. In Bokfontein, it is the former. All community members interviewed mentioned that there would never be a service delivery protest in Bokfontein because their key two leaders are opposed to any form of public unrest. In some of the interviews, there was a sense of anger and frustration amongst community members that their leaders are a stumbling block for them to hit the streets like in other towns and toyi-toyi against poor service delivery. The main question is, is this not a time bomb waiting to explode? For how long will the two community leaders continue to be good ‘containers’ of any form of service delivery protest in Bokfontein?

Conclusion

It is evident in this research that the community of Bokfontein has managed to deal with some of its challenges, although there are still major problems facing this community. Clearly, the forceful evictions had some negative impact on community members, but OW has helped them to process all the negative feelings in a positive and constructive manner. Through OW, the community has also managed to mourn and deal with its losses of evictions. Overall, OW shows the importance of initiating projects that are driven by community members themselves. It

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2 There is a difference between Bokfontein Development Forum and Bokfontein Business Forum. BDF has 30— to 50 members. It is an agency that helps create opportunities for the people of Bokfontein, while Bokfontein Business Forum is a forum for local spaza owners in Bokfontein.
is evident that community participation is at the heart of OW. Community members play a significant role in identifying problems, priorities and also projects that need to be initiated to solve all community problems. This has helped to give community members in Bokfontein a sense of ownership over all their community projects. Community leaders are also feeling empowered to network and mobilise more resources to achieve their ideal future goals.

Clearly, the community of Bokfontein is slowly moving away from the position of helplessness and marginalisation to the position of power and empowerment. This was evident in many of the interviews that I conducted in which there was a sense of feeling empowered. Empowerment, as Rappaport (1981) defines it, is a process in which people and communities gain control over their lives through exercising their right to participate in the social and economic processes that structure their lives. According to Rappaport (1981), empowerment should ideally constitute one of the key pillars on which interventions aimed at enhancing communities’ well being should be built, because without empowerment the effects of community interventions cannot yield any positive results. It is clear that many problems would not have been solved if CWP (which at least has economically empowered the community) was never implemented. Both OW and CWP empowered this community both psychologically and economically.

Lastly, it is clear in this chapter that building people’s capacity and creating opportunities through OW and CWP has helped to build people’s confidence to contribute meaningfully to the process of reconstruction and development.
Introduction

Collective trauma has been with us as long as the existence of mass violence, human rights violations and natural disasters. It has, however, been marginalised from the mainstream traumatic stress field. This was mainly due to the formalisation of the diagnostic category for trauma in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual III (DSMIII) (1980), which attracted a significant increase in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and, thus, advanced the understanding of individual’s reactions to trauma. This scholastic focus on PTSD has, however, meant that the understandings of the collective consequences of trauma have lagged behind within the mainstream traumatic stress field (Somasundaram, 2007).

Within the South African traumatic stress field, there was—in the 1990s—the mushrooming of the traumatic stress field through widespread public education campaigns and training of lay trauma counsellors. In response to this rapidly growing field the universities introduced—in the early 2000s—a post-graduate curriculum on trauma counselling. This four-year degree, even today, however, does not cover collective trauma in its curriculum. There is also currently no tertiary institution that has collective trauma in its curriculum.

This holdup in the development of collective trauma studies has resulted in the traumatic stress field’s limited inputs in the understanding of collective processes such as collective violence. It is, therefore, the contention of this paper that collective trauma is an important factor in understanding the underlying mechanisms and drivers of collective social processes such as collective violence.

This paper aims to enhance the understanding of the collective violence scourge that South Africa has been experiencing in the past few years through unpacking collective trauma’s role in explaining its dynamics. The paper firstly unpacks the construct of collective trauma and then shows how it manifests in the South African context. The paper then draws from various collective violence theorists and the case studies in this report to highlight how collective trauma can be used to understand the collective violence that South Africa has experienced in the past decade. Finally, recommendations for taking this thinking forward are highlighted.

In order to do this, it is important to start first by unpacking the concept of collective trauma.

Understanding the construct of collective trauma

Types of traumatic events: Trauma classification

The term trauma tends to be used to refer to both the event itself and the reaction to the event. The classification within the field, therefore, focuses on both of these (Eagle and Kaminer, 2010). Traumatic events can be classified according to who the perpetrator is, namely, man-made vs. natural or according to the number of events that the
person experiences at the same time, namely, single vs. multiple traumas or according to the length of the traumatic event, for example, prolonged, repeated trauma or once-off trauma. For the purpose of this paper and in order to understand the construct of collective trauma, the classification used will be based on who is affected by the event. This section will, therefore, differentiate between individual, mass and collective trauma.

**Individual trauma** refers to those events whose effects are personal. The reactions to the events are felt mainly by the affected individual. At times there could be indirect victims such as family members who are also affected by the individual’s trauma, but the symptoms are still experienced personally, and do not have a shared effect.

**Mass trauma** refers to an event that occurs to a large number of people at the same time (Sztompka, 1996). The affected people suffer alongside each other; the experience is, however, personal or individualised, for example, earthquakes, floods, et cetera.

We enter the territory of collective trauma when the event is experienced as shared. The effects of collective trauma take ‘tangible social forms’ (Sztompka, 1996) such as lack of social cohesion, dysfunctional social structures, social networks, formal organisations, class division and collective violence. Erikson defines collective trauma as a ‘blow to the basic tissue of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community’ (Erikson, 1994: 21).

Collective trauma is, therefore, possible if collectives can be traumatised just like individuals. The construct of collective trauma is based on a notion that collective, psychological and social processes exist as separate entities. They are not just a sum of the processes of the individual that make up the collective. It suggests that a group can have an identity, a ‘mind’ of its own, a character of its own (Bloom, 1996).

As part of explaining the construct of collective trauma, it is, therefore, important to demonstrate that a collective ‘mind’ or ‘psyche’ does exist and can be traumatised. According to Bloom (1996: 4), there exists a ‘concept of supra individual and independence of the collective mind of a social group’. This is what was called the ‘social mind’ by the German philosopher Hegel (Bloom 1996: 4).

In order to illustrate this, we need to borrow from the concept of ‘group mind’ that is used in group psychology. The term ‘group mind’ refers to a collective consciousness and was first termed by Durkheim (Bloom, 1996). A ‘group mind’ occurs when the will of the individual is dominated by that of the group and refers to a unifying force that makes a group react with a single mind (Bloom, 1996). Group mind affects how groups make decisions and how they react to convert conflict and other traumatic events. Group mind can be triggered by overt conflict or increased perception of danger, which results in an increased affinity to a group and, thus, the development of a group mind.

Collective trauma, therefore, refers to a state similar to group mind where the collective is traumatised as an entity, independent from the sum of the traumatised individuals within the group. Collective trauma results into reactions of the collective which transcend individual reactions to the traumatic event. These reactions are usually transmitted by ‘trauma carriers’ who either take on leadership roles or speak on behalf of the group (Sztompka, 1996). These individuals, usually, take the role of representing the collective’s trauma and are not just carrying their own pain. Even if these individuals were to be removed from the group, other individuals are likely to emerge and take on this role if the trauma remains unresolved. The trauma carriers also play a significant role of developing the trauma narrative. The trauma narrative is the theories, hypothesis on who is to blame, who the heroes are and why the trauma has happened. They also create boundaries about who is the in and out group.

**Manifestation of collective trauma**

Just like traumatised individuals depict traumatic stress symptoms, which are outlined mainly in PTSD, traumatised collectives can also show some recognisable collective symptoms (Somasundaram, 2007). Some of
these are similar to individual trauma whilst others are particular to collectives. This body of thought is still new with several authors who have suggested the symptoms of collective trauma but with no official diagnosis yet. The development of the diagnostic criteria for collective trauma is one of the future challenges for the trauma field, especially those in post-conflict countries where collective trauma is common. For the purposes of this chapter, the common symptoms that have been highlighted by the writers in the field will be outlined.

The manifestations of collective trauma include:

1. **Fixation with the traumatic experience:** Unresolved individual and collective trauma shapes our ‘mental models’. Mental models are ‘deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behaviour’. This, therefore, means that a traumatised collective perceives, interprets and reacts to the world based on the collective trauma memories. Communal and family life becomes organised around the denied, suppressed and dissociated memories, feelings, and experiences of the past and is then relived in the present (Bloom, 1996).

2. **Fragmentation or trauma organised social capital:** Destruction of the building blocks of a strong social capital, for example, robust civil society, vibrant youth, and intact family is one of the main consequences of collective trauma events. Social capital is, therefore, organised around the collective trauma. Communal and family life becomes organised around the denied, suppressed and dissociated memories, feelings and experiences of the past, and are then relived in the present (Bloom, 1996). The social capital of the municipalities that experienced collective violence seems to be based on betrayal, rumours, backstabbing and mistrust.

3. **Inaccurate assessment of danger/threat.** Any experience of threat may be a trigger for trauma; collectives either overreact to the threat or underestimate it. In cases of overestimation, collectives are likely to react with violence or heightened emotional response to perceived or real threat. The threat could be physical, emotional or linked to threat of integrity (Bloom, 2006).

4. **Splitting:** Division of groups into in and out group. Things are seen in black and white. Inability to see the whole. There is focus on simple solutions to complex problems (Bloom, 1996). Increased social splitting and loss of integration.

5. **Projection:** Taking out of hated traits of one’s group and ascribing them to the other. This provides justification to inflict violence against the other. Others are seen as ‘bad’ and rage towards them as justified. At times they tend to be dehumanised.

6. **Denial and avoidance** (Bloom 1996)
   - Denial of problems and secrets
   - Deceit and a web of lies
   - Avoidance of responsibility and accountability
   - Addiction. Seen through high levels of alcohol abuse, violence is also an addiction to control
   - Not wanting to face anything that troubles the group. The more the problems are ignored then the bigger they get. For example, xenophobic violence in SA, has been identified as a problem more than a decade ago. Society ignored it and ended up in the xenophobic attacks of 2008
   - Stereotyped response patterns. Failure to recognise that violence isn’t working, that things are getting progressively worse; that history is repeating itself
7. **Automatic repetition/Social Reenactment** (Bloom, 1996; 2006)

When a painful and traumatic event is experienced, the psyche splits off from the consciousness, those parts of the experience that are too unbearable. These unbearable memories are acted out in various ways, including:

- Preoccupation with the past which prevents dealing with the present or preparing for the future.
- History repeats itself even though new problems arise, the old solutions are used and one faces more of the same. In the case study this is reflected clearly in the interaction of the police with the protesters. Most protesters indicated how the police conduct mimicked that which was used during apartheid.
- People and collectives act these unbearable memories out in the present. This is a way of telling a person’s or collective’s story and results in the repetition of similar patterns to the painful past. For example, most of the case studies in the research report indicate how the repertoires of the past kept on coming up during the collective violence incidents. These included the use of the same struggle songs such as *Senzeni, na, senzeni na?* and the use of the same strategies that were used in the past by activists to fight the police, for example, burning of tyres on the streets. Is this collective violence a way for the new generation to reenact the unresolved and unbearably horrific pain of apartheid that this country is still to process?
- One of the key fears of traumatised individuals and groups is to lose control, as this is likely to trigger similar feelings of helplessness that were experienced during the traumatic incident/s. Those strategies or actions that are seen as giving a sense of control tend to be repeated even if they do not work (violence as a key mechanism of control). For example, even though the use of excessive police force seems to feed into violence, the same strategy appears to be used in almost all the cases. Is this obsessive use of excessive force a way to address the helplessness that our government feels when faced by the protesters? Does this helplessness trigger the unbearable traumatic memories of losing control?

**Collective trauma manifestations in South Africa**

William Beinart (1992) and Kynoch (2008) outline some of the political and collective violence experienced by South Africa in the past century as:

1. Colonial ascendency
2. State-sanctioned violence
3. Police brutality
4. Coerced labour
5. Trauma displacements
6. Militarists of the struggle or ‘armed struggle’
7. Media footage of violence

All these violent experiences could have contributed to collective trauma in South Africa. There are, however, two types of collective traumas that this paper identifies as contributing to the current scourge of collective violence in South Africa. These are the traumatic past of apartheid and the paradox of the new democracy.

**The collective trauma of apartheid**

It is common knowledge that apartheid was a crime against humanity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) showed examples of some of the most horrifying experiences of apartheid. There are, however, still millions of South Africans that have not processed this painful experience, and apartheid seems to still remain as one of the most prominent, collective traumas for this country.

Apartheid included amongst other things decades of violent, dehumanising and brutal politics. These politics were also influenced by a social capital that relied heavily on comradeship, loyalty and preparedness to ‘gives one’s life for the greater good’. Struggle songs played a key role in mobilising masses and creating an electrifying
environment of heightened collective emotions where activists were prepared to die for the struggle. This social capital was, however, also filled with high levels of distrust and backstabbing as the apartheid government planted, izimpumzi or whistle blowers, amongst the ‘comrades’.

The politics also involved a state, which reacted to the struggle by blaming and labelling the activists as criminals and terrorists and through creating a violent and brutal police machinery to deal with these ‘criminals and activists’. Torture and the disappearances of loved ones were a common occurrence in apartheid South Africa, resulting in a country full of hurt and psychologically brutalised individuals, families, communities and society.

These extremely painful and emotive memories appear to still linger and raise their ugly head during incidents such as the community protests and xenophobic attacks. The symptoms of these collective trauma memories may be seen at a national level and include fixation with the trauma of apartheid, reenactment of the traumatic memories, culture of denial, avoidance and splitting in dealing with the countries problems and challenges.

One sees this through South African’s highly emotive reactions to issues that are related to race and racism. This could range anything from emotive and usually racially divided debates on whether to consider race in analysing the matric pass rate to road rage, which tends to intensify if the other person is of a different race.

At a political level identities related to the collective trauma of apartheid are highly charged with the current government strongly identifying themselves as activists and liberators. Any suggestions that this current government may be employing some apartheid government tendencies are harshly rejected. Those who suggest this are labelled as anti-revolutionaries.

The ANC appears to still rely heavily on loyalist politics, where backstabbing and disloyalty is frowned upon. Those seen as disloyal are labelled as ‘criminals’ or seen as part of the ‘third force’, an explanation that was widely used to explain problems and divisions amongst activist in the past. Instead of listening to the concerns and finding ways of solving the problems, energies and resources are spent on apprehending the criminals and identifying the ‘third force’. These problems, unfortunately, keep on growing. This is shown in the way that government is dealing with the grievances of the protesters. Instead of responding to these grievances the main focus seems to be on dealing with the instigators of the violent crime who are perceived as aggrieved ANC people who are using the collective violence to settle scores or regain their power. Even though there might be an element of truth in this concern, the case studies, however, indicate that the protesters had genuine concerns that have not been addressed over many years. The instigators are given power and are able to mobilise people because of these unaddressed grievances.

As a society, South Africa, appears to still react to any triggers or reminders of apartheid through very strong defences such as splitting—for example, calling the protesters criminals who must be removed from society. We also do this with crime where we tend to split between, perpetrators—those who need harsh or even brutal police action—and victims—who are vulnerable, weak, and need to be protected. We do this even though research shows that in reality the perpetrator and the victims have the same face, namely, young men from poor communities (Bruce, 2009).

The defences of avoidance and denial is seen in the country’s reaction to issues such as violent crime. Despite increasing evidence that social inequality is one of the key drivers of violence, the country continues to pump money and energy into policing rather than into reducing inequality. It would seem that our society has become detached, numbed and closed off to the suffering around it. This is evident in the country’s exponential growth in inequality. The country has neighbourhoods with houses worth millions of rands standing next to neighbourhoods with absolute poverty (Sandton and Alexandra).
Collective trauma and the paradoxical new democracy

It appears as if in an attempt to ‘move forward’ and ‘forget’ these unbearable and painful memories of apartheid, in this new dispensation, the country has idealised national unity, a ‘better life for all’ and an empowerment or enrichment of ‘black people’. Though a sizeable number of black people, the so-called ‘black diamonds’ appear to be achieving this idealised ‘better life’, the reality, however, is that the social change of democracy is a paradox. It appears progressive and beneficial to some whilst it seems traumatic to others, especially to those who are increasingly excluded and marginalised at all levels.

The case studies in this research report seem to suggest that the development of democratic local government has been marred by the unresolved trauma of apartheid. This is seen in the local politics of betrayal, backstabbing and mistrust relating to tenders, job acquisitions and positions amongst councillors. Local government also seems to fail in listening and responding to the concerns of the aggrieved community members. Is this failure to hear the genuine concerns of the community, perhaps an indication of the collective trauma of apartheid which makes the ANC leadership to be more sensitive to betrayal and back stabbing from political entrepreneurs than to the community needs? Is this heightened and emotive reaction to political entrepreneurs an indication of just how alive and unresolved the trauma of apartheid is within the ANC?

This ‘failure’ of municipalities is striking on top of an idealised democracy that everyone expected to and was promised to benefit from. Access to the benefits of this democracy is, therefore, seen as an entitlement and a right that people fought for. The increased socio-economic exclusion, the perceived failure of local government to deliver services and prolonged lack of response to the concerns of citizens is perhaps contributing to another layer of collective trauma, which I call the ‘collective trauma of the paradoxical new democracy’. This collective trauma includes an emerging elite, as pointed out in the study on Kungcatsha, which is involved in highly contentious and competitive politics of betrayal, mistrust and backstabbing in order to continue accessing the limited and highly contested economic and political power.

This collective trauma also includes an increasing majority of South Africans who are feeling excluded and marginalised from the mainstream political and economic arenas. This group, which once had high hopes of the ANC and tried, as reported in the case studies, to engage peacefully with the ANC, is reported to be getting increasingly discouraged and impatient with the failures of this new democracy. As one of the informants in Azania puts it, this is the emerging of a ‘new revolution’. Sadly this revolution seems to be linked to a mental model where violence is the only language that is heard. This collective trauma appears to still be community bound but the community protests are spreading fast and may indicate a potential for another societal trauma. The combination of the yet unresolved trauma of apartheid and this possibly emerging trauma of the paradoxical new democracy is likely to deepen the already existing fault lines in our democracy.

This section has attempted to show that South Africa is indeed dealing with the collective trauma of apartheid and that the country may be heading toward another layer of collective trauma of the paradoxical democracy. The next section will highlight using collective violence theory, how this understanding of collective trauma assists in the understanding the scourge of collective violence that the country is currently experiencing.

Understanding collective violence

WHO’s definition

In the 2002 report of the World Health Organisation (WHO) collective violence is defined as: ‘The instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group—whether the group is transitory or has a more permanent identity—against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives’ (Krug et al., 2002: 215). The forms of collective violence that WHO outlines include ‘political violence such as war and terrorism that occur within or between states; state-sponsored violence such as genocide, repression and torture; and organised violent crime such as banditry and gang warfare’. The usefulness of this
definition is an understanding that collective violence is used for a purpose (‘instrumental use of violence’) and that it goes further to name the purposes (‘political, economic, and social’). This definition, however, does not help to explain the different variations of collective violence. It groups them under one definition as if the mechanisms and processes that drive them are the same. It is, however, unlikely that collective violence such as genocide and apartheid could be driven by the same mechanisms as the collective violence of community protests and xenophobic violence that South Africa is currently facing.

**Tilly’s definition**

Charles Tilly’s explanation of collective violence is useful in that it highlights the variations in collective violence. Just like WHO, Tilly acknowledges that collective violence occurs in order to accomplish a purpose, what he calls ‘claims’. He further differentiates between identity and non-identity based claims. According to Tilly people are more likely to be prepared to die for identity based claims. This differentiation begins to differentiate categories of collective violence. Tilly further classifies various forms of collective violence based on two variables (salience and coordination). He identifies collective violence in six types: broken negotiations, scattered attacks, violent ritualism, coordinated destructions, opportunism, and brawls (Tilly, 2003: 14, 15). For example, genocides and apartheid would be grouped under high coordination and high salience (violent rituals and coordinated destruction respectively), whilst community protests could be seen as having medium to high salience but low coordination, and, therefore, considered as opportunistic collective violence. Tilly’s conceptualisation of collective violence is useful in explaining the variations in collective violence, in terms of intensity, form and incidence (Tilly, 2003). He, however, does not assist in the understanding of the drivers of collective violence such as behaviour, motives, ideas and feelings.

**Mattaini’s definition**

Mattaini and Strickland (2002) address these drivers by discussing the antecedent, structural and postcedent behaviours and conditions associated with collective violence. Mattaini’s model of collective violence provides a useful framework for highlighting the role of collective trauma in collective violence. This model will be briefly outlined and an illustration made on how collective trauma brings a new light in understanding the antecedents, structural conditions and postcedents of collective violence in the South African context.

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**Figure 1: The contingency matrix by Mark A. Mattaini in Mattaini & Strickland (2002)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Structural Conditions</th>
<th>Postcedents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Antecedents</td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>Ineffective Consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and Models</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Ancilliary Factors</td>
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Antecedents

Antecedents are, according to behavioural theorists, those behaviours that precede collective violence. These are seen as the key drivers of collective violence. Understanding the dynamics that drive these behaviours is key to effective prevention and intervention strategies for collective violence. They are also seen as being useful in providing localised and contextual factors which can be used for policy development and programming (Mattaini and Strickland, 2002). They further divide the antecedents into motivating factors, occasion, and rules and models. In countries that are still dealing with unresolved collective trauma such as South Africa the understanding of how this trauma drives these antecedents is crucial.

Occasions

According to Mattaini and Strickland (2002), factors that provide an occasion for acting in collective violence include orders or encouragements from the leaders whether explicit or implicit. The positive consequences for perpetrators of collective violence include the recognition and reinforcement that they receive from the leaders if they respond to these occasions.

Mattaini and Strickland (2002) highlight that the motive of the leader and that of the perpetrators are not the same. The leaders tend to focus on long-term consequences whereas the perpetrators are driven by short-term goals. This concept if very useful as it begins to differentiate between several groups, by highlighting the differences in the motives of leaders and that of perpetrators. In the research case studies, there is an indication of differences in the goals of the protest organisers and those of the protesters. The organisers seem to be motivated by a need to restore the economic power that they may have lost through losing tenders or through their political positions being threatened. On the other hand, the protesters seem to be motivated amongst other things by need for jobs and service delivery. Interestingly the protesters in this research are well aware of this discrepancy and still go ahead with the protest, hoping that the municipal leaders would hear their grievances. However, as pointed out in this paper, the municipal and ANC leaders are more drawn to the motives of the organisers. As highlighted above, this could be linked to the collective trauma of apartheid which makes current leaders highly sensitive to indications of betrayal. Part of the interventions here could be to bring this awareness to local leaders and to explore ways of listening beyond the ‘collective trauma triggers’. The other intervention could be to indicate to aggrieved community members how the unresolved collective trauma of apartheid is likely to cloud the municipal leader’s judgment, and ability to hear their concerns, if the community members join the organisers who have ‘ulterior motives’.

The importance of differentiating between ‘instigators’ and perpetrators of collective violence is emphasised further by Mandel (2002). Mandel highlights that instigators are catalyst of violence. They do this by appealing to a mass audience and offering hope usually during times of crisis when many are ‘searching for meaning and a sense of belonging in their lives’ (Mandel, 2002: 2). This hope usually provides a common vision, which often relies on ‘hatred, distrust and justification of violence’ (Mandel, 2002: 2).

He further highlights that instigators tend to have cross-spectrum power, that is, low-grade power which depends on physical force or threat of violence; medium-grade power which relies on economic power and high-grade power which is based on access to and control of information and knowledge (Mandel, 2002). This is highlighted in one of the case studies where one of the instigators leaks information about the mismanagement of 30 million rands, which becomes a catalyst for violence.

Mandel (2002) further suggests that high but unstable self-esteem is one of the psychological drivers of instigating collective violence whilst high stable self-esteem and low self-esteem are not. This is important in the context of the collective trauma of apartheid. As highlighted in the collective trauma section, apartheid was a humiliating and degrading system. It was designed to make black people feel inferior. Struggles with inferiority complex may, therefore, be expected as the byproduct of apartheid. This inferiority complex can be addressed
through, amongst other things, developing an inner and stable sense of self-worth by counteracting and challenging the internalised negative messages of blackness. If this internal work is not done, an unstable self-esteem, which relies on external wealth and acknowledgement, is likely to develop. The profiles of the ‘new elite’ in this study do not inform us about the psychological work done by these elites to address possible inferiority complex from apartheid; however, they point to a group whose self-esteem is reliant on their external worth. Is it possible that as a country we are, through emphasising external wealth that is not coupled by building self-esteem, grooming possible instigators of collective violence? Part of the strategies to address this is to ensure that psychological and internal self-esteem building is elevated to the same level as alleviating poverty and ensuring black empowerment.

Strategies

Strategies that focus on the occasions of antecedents tend to target the leaders or instigators. These strategies, however, tend not to be effective as the leaders end up being seen as heroes and, thus, crystallise the collectives’ resolve to continue using collective violence. This is seen in the recent example of the killing of Tatane in Ficksburg by the police which has resulted in the community wanting to continue the ‘fight’ in order to honour his memory. This suggest that the ANC’s planned strategy of hunting down the ‘third force’ and the instigators of collective violence, as pointed out in several of the case studies, is likely to be ineffective. Mattaini and Strickland (2002) suggest that effective strategies should rather focus on addressing the motivating antecedents.

Motivating antecedents

Motivating antecedents are those factors that are powerful in motivating action towards collective violence and are important in initiating and maintaining collective violence (Mattaini and Strickland, 2002). They include those factors that motivate or trigger people towards collective violence. These motivating antecedents are similar to what Tilly calls ‘claim making’. This includes the claims that the perpetrators identify as justification for using violence.

These authors also identify three categories of motivating incidents mainly deprivation, control of aversive events or conditions, and limited recognition. Deprivation may include economic deprivation or the threat of losing something valuable such as livelihood, values, and status. Aversive events and conditions include experiences that people would like to avoid if possible; these may be immediate or historical. Limited recognition includes those factors that give incentives for status and recognition.

The respondents across the eight case studies identified clear factors that motivated them to join the protests. These included municipal corruption and grievances that had not been addressed over a number of years such as lack of jobs, poor service delivery and community demarcation issues. The COSATU leader in Azania reinforces this when saying, ‘That’s why when you look at these protests; many people were young and unemployed. We can’t sustain our own economy’.

These antecedent motivating factors are likely to result in fear, uncertainty, high stress and despair, which, according to Bloom (2006), keep collective nervous systems in overdrive. In the case of trauma, frustrated needs acquire a more urgent and desperate quality, pushing people to try to fulfil them at any cost. Collective trauma also makes it difficult to sit with the anxiety associated with unmet needs and deprivation threats.

The motivating factors for the protestors in this research are likely to have been intensified by several failed attempts in engaging peacefully with municipal leaders through peaceful marches and memos. These failed attempts are likely to have triggered feelings of helplessness and frustration with failing authority figures, feelings that could be linked to experiences of apartheid. If faced with these trauma triggers, the protestors are more likely to reenact these unbearable memories through repeating the violent reactions of the past to such feelings of helplessness and failure by authority figures.
Rules and Models

- **Verbal phenomena:** Utterances and rules about equivalence relations. These may include values, statements or views about other groups such as foreigners or thieves. The equivalence relations are used by instigators of collective violence to link people’s genuine grievance to violent instigating statements. Some examples from the case studies include statements such as ‘an hungry man = angry man’.

- The experience of observing others verbally support violence or participate in it involves a strong modelling for perpetrating collective violence.

The trauma narrative can be easily used to create equivalence relations. Groups with collective trauma can be easily organised around the collective narrative of trauma. Leaders/political entrepreneurs/violent specialists can mobilise these painful, unresolved traumatic memories in creating the highly charged emotional conditions for triggering collective violence, for example, the groups in the case studies reacted with very strong and intense emotions to failures of the police.

‘People would converge in public; the police would fire teargas. It made the people wild.’ Here, the equivalence relationship is: police presence = wild people.

**Strategies**

According to Mattaini and Strickland (2002), intervention strategies that focus on antecedents are more effective in preventing collective violence. This area of work is, however, underdeveloped within the collective violence field. It is only in the past three decades that fields such as behaviour analytic and culture analytic sciences have made dramatic advances in understanding the dynamics of collective violence.

**Structural conditions**

Structural conditions include the availability of the means (weapons), the target (the municipal leader, policemen) and the opportunity (mass meeting) for collective violence.

In the community protests it appears as is if the target is usually the municipal mayor. The police also seem to be important targets during community protests. The conditions that create the means for collective violence could include the availability of weapons. Interestingly in the community protests, the strategies employed such as the burning of government buildings, placing stones on the road so the police cannot cross et cetera are similar to those used under apartheid, what we have called ‘repertoires of the past’. It appears as if in cases of collective trauma, the memories of the trauma are in and of themselves a possible means for collective violence. This seems to indicate that just removing the weapons will not be enough to prevent collective violence in these instances, but one would have to address the collective unresolved traumatic memories themselves.

The opportunities for collective violence in almost all the community protests seem to have been the mass meetings that are held mainly in stadiums as part of the protest march. The presence of highly charged, unifying emotions also seem to offer opportunities for collective violence.

**Strategy**

Interventions that focus on structural conditions look at reducing the means for violent acts such as reducing access to weapons. Interventions also tend to focus on reducing those conditions that would create the opportunity for collective violence, for example, through strict control of gatherings. According to Mattaini (2002), dealing with structural conditions is not effective as this is not able to stop motivated people. As pointed out in this paper, the repertoires of the past that are prominent in the protests may indicate that the focus needs to be more on addressing the traumatic memories than just dealing with the structural conditions.
Postcedents

Postcedents include those events that take place after the collective violence has taken place. For Mattaini and Strickland (2002), postcedents include the difference between effective and non-effective consequences for those involved in the violent act.

Effective consequences are said to be those that focus on positive consequences. These can be tangible and immediate or distance and ‘made immediate by verbal processes’, for example, recognition, a promised better life, injury of enemy, et cetera.

The positive consequences work as powerful reinforcers for young people who are looking for recognition. The sense of belonging in a group is also a powerful factor for young people looking for social networking. Those that struggle with feelings of humiliation and low self-esteem, the status that is provided by being in the group, can also be a powerful motivational factor.

Strategy

Most of the postcedent interventions tend to focus on ineffective consequences, which at times exacerbate the violence. These interventions tend to focus on controlling activities such as punishment of the perpetrators, which is likely to result in counter control and, thus, more violence. At times those punished are seen as heroes and have even more loyalty. The recent incident at a community protest in Ficksburg, where increased police attempts to control the crowd through violence, resulted in the murder of a 36-year-old man by the police. This has resulted in increased anger from residents and more determination from them to continue the protests.

Effective interventions could encourage networks that provide alternative power. What attracted a person to violence is that it is seen to work, which could be due to media coverage or attention of politicians. Addressing this could include creating alternative, peaceful, collective action that produces similar results.

In conclusion, Mattaini and Strickland’s model and its focus on the collective violence antecedents give valuable information in understanding the dynamics of collective violence. In conclusion they state that: ‘Behavioural sciences appears to be reaching a stage of development such that it can contribute in addressing crucial social issues like collective violence and other violations of human rights and social justice.’ They continue, saying that, ‘supporting and conducting that science is maybe the most crucial challenge for the present age.’ (Mattaini and Strickland, 2002: 512).

Conclusion

I conclude that this statement also applies to the traumatic stress field. The most crucial challenge for South Africa today is to invest time and money understanding and shifting collective trauma and the many ways in which it rears its ugly head in our country.

The implications and recommendations for using the understanding of collective trauma are highlighted throughout the paper. This could be summarised by pointing out that this paper suggests that our problems have become too big and interconnected for them to be solved through individual interventions (Bloom, 1996; 1997). South Africa can no longer ignore the collective trauma of apartheid. Before ‘moving forward’ we need to face up to and understand the ugly, painful and unbearable memories of our past which if unresolved, will continue to haunt us in the future (Bloom, 1997). Collective Violence seems to be one of the symptoms of this trauma. We also need to urgently deal with what appears to be the emerging of a ‘new’ collective trauma related to the paradox of our democracy.
Recommendations

The collective violence research project challenged many of our assumptions regarding the potential for interventions. Where we had considered that interventions might take the form of conflict mediation, or enhancing negotiation and strategic capacity, or supporting the building of strong community-based organisations with a strategic ability to campaign for social justice and against xenophobia, two of our major findings make such interventions extremely difficult.

Firstly, we found that in most cases community protests peaked and then dissipated, leaving no durable organisation behind. Secondly, in many cases the protest leadership was reabsorbed back into the ANC after the protest had achieved or partially achieved its goals – which at least partly explain the first finding. Where durable independent organisation exists, it is often in informal settlements where the organisation is able to gain control over local resources such as land, the allocation of houses or jobs, or the distribution of penalties and sanctions in informal criminal justice systems. This does not make them strong candidates for campaigning for social justice.

Regarding xenophobic violence, the complex and shifting informal networks that tend to instigate this, and their linkages into formal organisational structures, makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about potential community-based counterparts for strengthening resistance to xenophobia. The picture varies from community to community.

The CSVR will be using the research results to inform further work on developing collective violence prevention programmes in affected communities. Nonetheless, some broad recommendations do flow from our research findings. We divide these into categories – social justice activism, reforming the state, and socio-economic interventions.

1. Social justice activism

There are a range of short, medium and long-term strategies that social justice activists, NGOs and other sectors of civil society could consider. We need to emphasise that creating sustainable shifts in the prevention of collective violence will require substantial investment in long term strategies as described below.

Rapid response interventions

Three forms of rapid response intervention could reduce the levels of violence in conflict between protesters and the state, and in xenophobic attacks.

1. Rapid response legal interventions to reduce police violence. NGOs and student organisations could develop a rapid response capacity to situations of police violence against community protesters or worker strikes. This would necessitate deploying teams to sites where such violence has occurred, in order to record affidavits from the victims of police violence, which could be used on the one hand to publicise such incidents, and on the other to support legal action against the police. The intention with this strategy
is to raise the cost of police violence, and increase the pressure for police reform. It may be possible that such a strategy could be used in the aftermath of xenophobic attacks as well.

2. Rapid response to defuse and mediate violent conflict. In this case civil society would have to develop the capacity to deploy teams of monitors and mediators to conflict hotspots, with the goal of hammering out agreements on the conduct of protests and policing, intervening to defuse confrontations, and providing an independent ‘observation’ of events. Such a model would draw on the conflict monitoring and mediation experience of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

3. NGOs and other civil society organisations could facilitate establishing ‘early warning systems’ in communities with a high likelihood of xenophobic violence. Teams of prominent community leaders could be established, provided with training in defusing conflict, and with clear lines of communication with local police, political parties and other organisations. Local consensus could be established over the procedures to be followed when tension and the possibility of conflict rises. Such initiatives could draw on the experience of the peace monitors and peace committees of the National Peace Accord of the 1990s.

Medium & long-term: towards building independent community organisation

NGOs and social justice activists could look at ways to support the emergence of independent community organisations over a longer term trajectory. The rapid response strategies described above might facilitate this. The ability to provide organisational training and skills, as well as the kind of strategic and campaigning skills that were forged in the 1980s, would be extremely important for a new generation of activists focusing on community grievances over social services, corruption and consultation. The Treatment Action Campaign, Section 27 and Equal Education provide models for this kind of social justice activism adapted to a democratic social order.

2. Reforming the state

Policing

Our research finds that poor policing of community protests escalates the shift from peaceful protest to violence, and at the same time poor policing creates a vacuum in which xenophobic violence can flourish. In some of our cases the use of local police to monitor protests reduced the likelihood of violence, as police officers and protesters are known to each other. Where the use of specialist units from outside the locality leads to an escalation of violence, this is because such units are not well versed in democratic policing norms.

It is extremely disturbing that apartheid policing repertoires, including the use of violence against peaceful crowds of citizens, and allegations of arbitrary brutality and torture, are reemerging in the post-apartheid state. The re-militarisation of the police exacerbates the situation. We recommend that unambiguous guidelines for maintaining order during public protests in a democracy – namely, that it is the role of the police to protect citizens’ right to protest or demonstrate – be drawn up, and that clear training be provided for those police who are expected to undertake this task. Lessons could be drawn from the public order policing programme.

NGOs, trade unions, research agencies and other organisations in civil society could provide much-needed pressure in this direction. This could also include strengthening the role of oversight bodies such as the police secretariat.

Local government

Local authorities and town/city councils are frequently the target of community protests because of poor performance, corruption and lack of consultation. Addressing these issues should be a key objective of local government reform. Both the ANC and government are paying increasing attention to this level of government and its dysfunctionalities, which creates a fruitful environment for debating and lobbying for broader reforms.
3. Socio-economic interventions: poverty, inequality, trauma

Poverty, inequality and marginalisation underlie much of the collective violence manifested in community protests and xenophobic attacks, providing the basis for a forceful insurgent citizenship directed against the authorities on one hand, and against foreign nationals on the other. The long-term reduction of violence depends on a structural transformation of citizenship which progressively reduces poverty, inequality and marginalisation.

The Bokfontein case provides a promising indication of the kind of resources and policies which are required to begin this task. On the one hand, the provision of public employment and its collective organisation generates stable incomes for households as well as social participation and identity, and restoration of dignity; on the other, the process of explicit community building provided a forum for addressing collective trauma and fashioning new narratives about the community and its future.

Bokfontein suggests, therefore, that a large-scale expansion of a community-based public employment programme such as the CWP, as well as a large-scale programme to surface and address collective trauma in South Africa, may be the necessary conditions to substantially reduce collective violence – as well as other forms of violence – in our country.


The smoke that calls

Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa.

Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence

Karl von Holdt, Maloua Lange, Sipetla Msiapa, Soweto Mppedi, Kindza Nqubeko, Jacob Olumoto and Adelle Kirsten