

Article

The spatial politics of xenophobia: everyday practices of Congolese migrants in Johannesburg

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Abstract

The scale and brutality of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa elicited among domestic and international onlookers a sense of horror and shock. These attacks were prefigured by multiple instances of xenophobic violence throughout the country in the preceding years. This paper argues that it is necessary to understand some of the forces underlying these attacks through the situated practices of migrants. This article focuses on some of the everyday practices of migrants in South African cities surrounding access to housing as well as more general experiences of violence, exclusion, and mobility within the city. Focusing on migrant perceptions of safety within the city, volatility of housing conditions, the racialisation of space through resurgent forms of cultural racism, state surveillance through identity documentation and policing, and the role of Pentecostal churches in renegotiating belonging in the city, this paper offers some first steps toward developing an analysis of xenophobia attentive to everyday practice and points to potential areas for future research. This paper asks what sorts of challenges the foregoing analysis presents to existing analyses of African cities, in particular the work of AbdouMaliq Simone.

Introduction

The scale and brutality of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa elicited among domestic and international onlookers a sense of horror and shock. The attacks began on May 11, 2008 in Alexandra, and spread quickly to other provinces, leaving 62 murdered (21 of whom were South African), hundreds more injured and tens of thousands displaced. Violent attacks on

'foreigners' have flared up multiple times since then, most recently in the December 2009 attack on Zimbabweans in Polokwane and the displacement of thousands of Zimbabweans the month before in the rural farming area of De Doorns, Western Cape. Taking account of the fact that the May 2008 attacks were prefigured by multiple instances of xenophobic violence throughout the country in the preceding years, this paper makes the case that it is necessary to understand some of the forces underlying the May 2008 attacks through the situated practices of migrants. This article focuses on some of the everyday practices of migrants in South African cities surrounding access to housing as well as more general experiences of violence, exclusion, and mobility within the city. While this paper is based on a limited amount of fieldwork conducted between June and August 2007, it offers some first steps toward developing an analysis of xenophobia beginning from everyday practice and points to potential areas for future research.

This article draws on fieldwork from a research project conducted at the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) at the University of the Witwatersrand which focused on how migrants are experiencing the housing crisis in Johannesburg. Since the fall of apartheid, South African cities have become some of the most important destinations for African war refugees and economic migrants, most prominently from Zimbabwe, Congo, and Somalia. Due to the urban nature of much of this migration and the fact that South Africa's refugee system does not operate through camps, the question of how migrants are accessing housing becomes especially important. The first section of this article focuses on migrant perceptions of safety within the city and volatility of housing conditions. Observation of the everyday practices of Congolese migrants revealed that non-citizens' experiences of violent exclusion meant they were navigating the city in a distinctive manner. The violence and cultural racism to which migrants are subjected, combined with volatile housing conditions, has the effect of continually displacing migrants within the city. This pattern of constant movement produces a general sense of instability and insecurity among migrants within the city and potentially makes claims to resources and political rights extremely tenuous.

Migrants' trajectories within the city point to the production of a new relationship between race and space through the violent racism to which migrants are subjected at the same time as they are forced to remain constantly on the move. Everyday practices presented here speak to a

resurgent cultural racism at work in the targeting of ‘foreigners’, a pattern that is legitimised by official state violence such as policing or practices associated with identity documents (or lack thereof). The second section of this article focuses on identity documentation and policing as two forms of state surveillance which put certain aspects of migrant experiences in conversation with existing analyses of xenophobia based on a distinction between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ attitudes. The argument here is primarily a methodological one which attempts to move the debate away from analyses of xenophobia as ideological manipulation from above and foster future research that asks how popular attitudes must be actively produced through everyday practices. Such practices reveal the ways in which ‘official’ and ‘popular’ exclusions cannot be separated from one another but occur together.

In light of the exclusions migrants face, churches, most often Pentecostal, emerge as some of the most important providers of shelter and resources vital to refugees and migrants. The third section of this article introduces such churches as some of the most significant sites at which space and difference are being produced today. Some initial observations are made here of the role churches are playing in shaping migrant practices in the city. Following this discussion of churches, a fourth section asks what sorts of challenges the foregoing analysis presents for existing analyses of African cities. In particular, migrant experiences of violent exclusion reveal a much more complex negotiation of possibility and constraint than the wide-open, rather utopian city politics found in the work of AbdouMaliq Simone (Simone 2004b).

Migrant trajectories: everyday violence and constant displacement

Migrants’ everyday experiences of violence and racialised xenophobia produce a specific experience of urban space in which some areas of the city are perceived as radically more dangerous than others. The threat of violence lurks behind resurgent forms of cultural racism directed at black ‘foreigners’ which are explained in greater detail in this section. Official state sanction of this type of violence, in particular through the policing of migrants covered in the following section, reinforces and legitimises the boundaries violence erects in the city. These factors produce a specific way in which migrants are navigating the city. Precarious housing conditions compound these other forms of exclusion, forcing migrants to remain

constantly on the move in such a way that limits the possibilities for making one's life.

Congolese interviewed for this study articulate their experiences of violence and xenophobia through descriptions of varying levels of comfort around the city. Though popularly conceived of as some of the most dangerous places in Johannesburg, many Congolese list the inner-city neighborhoods of Berea and Hillbrow as relatively safe areas to them. The large numbers of non-South African migrants dwelling in these areas made migrants feel safer than in townships such as Soweto, which are perceived as ethnically and linguistically homogenous spaces (though there are in fact significant numbers of foreign nationals, such as Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans and long-time Mozambican residents, living in the townships). Alain, a Congolese refugee who has lived in Johannesburg for five years with his family, explains how he and his family would never think of living in a township 'because you don't even know their languages, they can take everything you have with you. If you resist a little bit, then you die.'

The ethno-linguistic targeting of migrants for such violence was highly visible in the May 2008 attacks. A *Mail and Guardian* article following the attacks, entitled 'The 21st century pencil test', describes mobs pulling people out of shopping queues and demanding they name certain body parts and other phrases in isiZulu to determine their nationality (*Mail and Guardian*, May 24, 2008). In their Introduction to *Go Home or Die Here*, Worby, Hassim, and Kupe analyse such tests as a version of the Old Testament technique of the 'shibboleth,' in which pronunciation of certain words is used to diagnose the 'truth' of difference (Worby et al 2008:16). Such tests recall those used by apartheid officials to classify people as black or white, such as the 'pencil test,' in which the degree to which a pencil sticks in one's hair is taken to measure one's blackness. The forms of racism targeted at foreign nationals speak to the ways in which race has become re-inscribed in the city post-apartheid in ways that build on apartheid racial technologies, yet depart in important ways by targeting populations of refugees that have by and large only been in the country following the fall of apartheid.

Though these forms of racism are articulated against 'foreigners,' it is extremely important to acknowledge that many South African citizens have fallen victim to the sort of violence that follows this type of racial targeting. Through their metaphor of the 'rainbow nation' becoming an onion, Worby et al present the view of black African migrants as the fragile outer skin of the nation, beneath which lie the Tsonga, Shangaan, Venda, and Pedi,

‘people with a firmer claim to inclusion, but on the periphery of the political heartland and therefore of dubious loyalty to the national project’ (Worby et al 2008: 16). In his book *Insiders and Outsiders: citizenship and xenophobia in contemporary Southern Africa*, Francis Nyamnjoh lists the arrests of people for being ‘too black’ or having a ‘foreign name,’ or, in one case, ‘walking like a Mozambican’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 51). Racial and linguistic targeting also results in the ‘mistake’ of arresting South African nationals – up to 20 per cent ‘who often have to spend several days in detention attempting to convince officials of their legitimate status as “black” citizens’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 51). Indeed, one third of those who lost their lives in the 2008 attacks were South African. This ‘mistake’ of targeting South African citizens speaks to the instability of such forms of racism – that they may be leveled at different targets and articulated in different forms at different moments. These sorts of ‘mistakes’ also reveal the *social production* of race through everyday practices such as reading marks of non-belonging off the body. Worby, Hassim, and Kupe also link the targeting of citizens to the anxiety of foreigners posing as nationals who must be exposed through dangerous, proto-genocidal technologies. Attention to the practices which socially produce race and space denaturalises these processes and provides the opportunity to interrupt existing practices to produce new understandings of social difference.

These forms of violence and cultural racism mean that where one can *be* in the city and how one moves about is radically circumscribed by how one’s body is marked by foreignness. Darker skin becomes uncritically equated with greater criminal tendencies; a foreign-sounding accent or name the mark of non-belonging. These forms of cultural racism exist alongside racial technologies that emerge out of apartheid-era forms of racial classification and subjugation. The threat of violence places migrants beyond the pale and produces new boundaries in the city. As in Alain’s case, violence hems him in. It inscribes boundaries around the places where he and his family feel comfortable and where they perceive their lives to be at risk. However, there is also a way in which violence produces a condition of constant movement. Many migrants interviewed for this study described their experiences living in the city through tales of continually moving from one temporary housing situation to another. Take, for example, Jean, a Congolese Asylum Seeker who arrived in Johannesburg in November of 2005. When he first arrived, he was able to obtain R300 per month for three months from the Catholic humanitarian organisation Jesuit Refugee Services, toward rent for himself

and his wife. Since this was insufficient to rent on their own and Jean was unable to work, they shared a two bedroom flat in Ponte Tower with nine adults and five children. Jean and his wife stayed in Ponte for six months, then moved to another highrise apartment building in Berea, where they shared a one bedroom apartment with 11-12 others, mostly Congolese, but also some South Africans. They were evicted from this building approximately one year later and Jean and his wife were, the last time I spoke with them in August 2007, living in a makeshift room in the common area of a church in Troyeville.

Jean's is a common housing history of constant displacement and movement from one precarious and overcrowded housing situation to another. Data from a Forced Migration Studies Programme survey of seven inner city neighborhoods and almost 900 individuals indicated that the mean for all respondents for number of residential moves since coming to Johannesburg was seven and a half times. The study also found that nearly one third of respondents planned to move again within the next six months and only 13.1 per cent of respondents expected to be living in the same place within the next two years (Landau 2006). As this survey comprised roughly half foreign African migrants, half South African nationals, it speaks to the shared experience of movement between migrants from other parts of Africa and South Africans, many of whom are recent migrants from rural areas. For South African rural-urban migrants and foreign African migrants alike, overcrowded living conditions and unstable subletting agreements mean that housing arrangements are often volatile. However, foreign migrants' inability to obtain a recognised identity document and targeting for xenophobic violence does make their experiences of movement distinct from those of South African rural-urban migrants in some important respects. Colloquial evidence also suggests some landlords are charging much higher rents to foreign migrants precisely because the options even for those who can pay are so limited. This adds further pressure to overcrowded dwellings and move frequency.

Though available statistics are unfortunately not disaggregated by gender, women's experiences of movement are surely quite different than men's and shot through with gendered forms of violence. The vast majority of documented refugees in South Africa are men, raising the question of whether and how women remain undocumented and how their experiences of violence, movement, and access to resources differ from those of men. Most migrants interviewed for this study were men and those women

interviewed had joined their husbands several years after the husband had fled the Congo. This raises the question of how spatially extensive family structures implicit in contemporary forms of migration build on entrenched histories of apartheid labour migration.

The processes which necessitate migrants' constant movement are themselves shot through with violence. These include: eviction, overcrowding, and insecurity within the living space itself necessitating spending more time on Johannesburg's unforgiving streets. Though much evidence discussed here is specifically concerned with volatile housing conditions, migrants' descriptions of everyday life show that it is not just housing but multiple facets of urban life which must remain on the move. The position many rural-urban and foreign African migrants find themselves in of being constantly on the move has the potential to make any claims to resources or political rights extremely tenuous. To cite an example concerned with the derelict housing conditions to which many residents are subjected in the inner-city, organising against eviction or for service upgrading in such buildings is likely to prove difficult if residents do not dwell in one place but are constantly moving. The difficulty of organising to improve living conditions in the inner-city feeds into the stigma of Johannesburg's 'bad buildings' in areas such as Hillbrow and Berea. Popular attitudes toward segregated areas of Johannesburg's inner-city with high proportions of foreign inhabitants conflate such buildings with notions of migrant criminality. The continual displacement of migrants within the city means that areas of the inner-city are being racialised in new ways, both through the violence and xenophobia behind such displacement and through the understandings produced around areas of the city with high numbers of migrants. While race and space have of course always worked through one another in South Africa, the necessity for migrants and refugees to remain constantly on the move to survive constitutes a particular everyday practice inscribing new forms of racism onto the city.

Multiple families interviewed about their housing conditions equated having a stable place to live with the ability to 'have a life'. The dislocation of having to constantly move one's housing dislocates and limits life itself. There is a creeping sadness – a sense of loss even, to the limits movement imposes on what is possible in the city. A Congolese man staying in a church hall with his wife who had previously been evicted from a Berea highrise and was then homeless described housing as about stability, respectability, and the ability to protect oneself. Access to accommodation was, for him, linked

to feeling secure and having a place to be safe and stable. In reference to the necessity of sharing living space among many people, a woman who arrived in Johannesburg from Congo five years ago to reunite with her husband described how 'It's not good for health and sanity to live like this'. Another Congolese man who has lived in the city for ten years now and runs a training centre that also provides temporary shelter to refugees spoke of how 'the right to housing is a fundamental right that can define the starting point for ... all kinds of life projects'. The particular ways in which migrants and refugees traverse the city, which are immediately bound up with housing conditions and violence, have implications for all other aspects of life. The ethnography presented here speaks to housing as the basis for multiple other possibilities in the city. This includes both a subjective sense of belonging as well as material conditions of vulnerability.

Identity documentation and the politics of policing

This section focuses on migrant experiences surrounding the identity document. Exclusions associated with the difficulty of obtaining a widely recognised form of documentation are in practice closely linked to encounters with the police. The fact that both policing and identity documentation are state forms of surveillance puts these pieces of migrant experiences in conversation with existing analyses of xenophobia which rely on a distinction between 'official' and 'popular' discourses of xenophobia. Neocosmos (2006) in particular provides a valuable explanation of the relationship between contemporary and historical forms of migration; however, his analysis relies on an understanding of ideological manipulation from above which cannot explain the precise ways in which popular attitudes must be actively produced through historically-informed, situated practices. Moreover, migrants' experiences surrounding the ID and policing speak to the ways in which 'official' and 'popular' exclusions are never neatly separated from one another but in practice occur together.

While this article has pointed to some shared experiences of exclusion and vulnerability between foreign and rural-urban South African migrants, many foreign migrants interviewed for this study identified their lack of an identity document as one factor distinguishing their experiences from those of rural-urban South African migrants. Nearly all migrants interviewed named their lack of access to a widely recognised identity document as one of the most severe difficulties they faced in everyday life. Large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees are unable to gain access to Refugee and

Asylum Seekers Permits¹ and even for those who do, police officers, landlords, and bank administrators alike are often unwilling to accept this form of identity documentation. This lack of recognition can be fuelled at times by xenophobic sentiments and at others by genuine ignorance of what such identity cards mean. One Congolese asylum seeker who in fact had a valid Asylum Seeker's Permit explained that 'If they demand to see your ID first then you are done already', conveying the exclusions attached to legitimate Refugee and Asylum Seekers Permits.

Multiple forms of violence surround the identity document. The moment at which the police officer demands to see the migrant's ID, who he has targeted visually ('you're too dark to be "from here"') or aurally (a 'funny' accent, a different language), can be followed by physical brutality. It is important to recognise that not all police officers are brutalising migrants; indeed, some have specifically intervened to prevent this sort of violence from occurring. At the same time, there is a way in which policing can represent a form of state violence which legitimises other forms of violence. In his *Mail and Guardian* article immediately following the 2008 attacks, 'The foreigner in the mirror', Hein Marais draws attention to the way in which police conduct has lent xenophobic sentiments and violence 'a veneer of legitimacy' (*Mail and Guardian*, May 25, 2008). Marais emphasises how police treatment of foreigners has only been amplified in the 2008 attacks, drawing attention to the way in which official state action reworks and reinforces the types of cultural racism I describe above, such as the equation of darker skin or foreign-seeming features with criminal intent. 'The pillaging that has accompanied the most recent attacks is an amplified echo of the extortion and shakedowns many foreigners experience at the hands of the South African authorities, including the police', Marais argues. Loren Landau has also drawn attention to South African news reports of police targeting foreigners as 'mobile ATMS' in a way that officially sanctions the generalised violence migrants experience (Landau 2006). The January 2008 police raid of the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, during which hundreds of mostly Zimbabwean migrants (generally not officially recognised as refugees) were brutalised and arrested for being 'illegal' persons, is precisely the sort of treatment Marais argues has produced understandings of foreigners as legitimate targets of brutality without recourse. It also speaks to the significant fact that police have become primary managers of refugees in everyday life, something Hannah Arendt warned of as contributing to the rise of totalitarianism in interwar Europe (Arendt 1951:365).

Marais makes the important point that police autonomy over and abuse of refugees is not so much constituted by independence of the police from other government agencies but rather contributes to the development of a de facto official government policy of xenophobia. Arendt's warning points to the dangers of handing the management of stateless people to the police, which is arguably underway in this moment. In everyday life, refugees have more contact with police, often being subjected to harassment and the demand to prove documentation, than most other government authorities. This is only one aspect of a much larger process of criminalisation of refugees and other migrants, which includes their detainment at highly militarised facilities such as the Lindela Holding Facility, the largest detention centre for undocumented migrants in South Africa, located 30 kilometers west of Johannesburg. Importantly, Lindela is a privately run facility, established in 1996 through a partnership between the Department of Home Affairs and the Dyambu Trust (an organisation established by the ANC Women's League) and has been widely criticised for corruption, abuse of detainees, and gross overcrowding of facilities.

Foreign migrants' everyday experiences of violence recall Hannah Arendt's reflections on stateless people as 'those who lived outside the pale of the law' and those over whom the police are given absolute authority (Arendt 1951: 277). The condition of rightlessness precedes, for Arendt, the condition of impending death. The violence of everyday life for the migrant strikes at what it is to be human, and who is allowed to live or made to die. Legal documentation – 'the ID', is absolutely central to these matters. This was made clear in the November 2007 case of the 23-year-old Zimbabwean man who died of starvation sleeping in a cardboard box outside of the Cape Town Home Affairs Refugee Centre attempting to get a work permit, or the more recent forced removal of 'xenophobia refugees' from the Glenanda camp (a temporary refugee shelter south of Johannesburg established in the wake of the May 2008 violence) to Lindela for deportation for refusing to register for temporary identity cards with Home Affairs.

The identity document is then a window into the forms of violence, instability, and racialised xenophobia migrants experience in South African cities. The difficulty of obtaining a Refugee or Asylum Seeker's Permit in itself speaks to some of the institutionalised and official forms of exclusion that shape migrants' experiences. But equally important is the lack of recognition of these documents by people such as landlords who are in a position to exclude migrants from housing, described by interviewees as the

foundation of many other opportunities. While some of this seems to be a genuine ignorance of what these forms of documentation are, there is also a way in which the Refugee and Asylum Seeker's Permit itself contains a stigma of difference.

This article's discussion of policing and official forms of documentation raises the question of what the relationship is between official forms of exclusion directly perpetuated by the state and violence perpetuated by individuals not acting in any official state capacity. This distinction between 'official' and 'everyday' forms of exclusion is at work in some of the most influential explanations of xenophobia in South Africa today. Michael Neocosmos provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of the xenophobia underpinning the recent attacks. In *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': explaining xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa: citizenship and nationalism, identity and politics* (2006), Neocosmos makes an argument linking contemporary xenophobia to interpellation and citizenship discourses under apartheid. Here he examines the emergence of a hegemonic state politics during liberation in which citizenship became politically passive and reduced to indigeneity. Neocosmos draws attention to the dominant ideology of the popular urban movement and ANC in exile, which not only failed to develop rural-urban linkages but saw migrant labour as solely in service of apartheid capitalism, failing to account for the complexity of labour migration and the benefits some 'peasant-workers' drew from the system. The hegemonic discourse of nationalism in the liberation period of the 1990s 'was one which equated democracy with the exclusion of foreigners from citizenship rights and which reduced the latter to indigeneity' (Neocosmos 2006: 83).

What is extremely useful about Neocosmos' explanation is that it treats older histories of labour migration and contemporary migration from other parts of Africa in relation to one another. Neocosmos makes the valuable contribution of emphasising the translocal social relation of migration, stretching beyond the nation-state, as a crucial dimension to nationalism and xenophobia. However, migrants' everyday experiences of xenophobia presented here are at odds with Neocosmos' understanding of nationalism as ideological manipulation from above, an explanation he continues in his more recent writings following the May 2008 pogroms. Here he focuses mainly on official state and media discourses of xenophobia and draws attention to how the evidence from everyday South Africans (ie non-state agencies) was far more contradictory (Neocosmos 2008). While official

discourse is surely important in understanding the sort of violence and resurgent nationalism that has gripped certain parts of the country, this explanation does not reveal the everyday practices through which top-down hegemonic politics filters into popular consciousness to shape xenophobia in multiple spheres of society. Evidence presented here around identity documentation reveals the complex relationship between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ forms of exclusion. In the case of policing in particular, popular and official discourses and practices are intricately bound up in one another in the interaction between the migrant and the police officer. Here it does not seem as useful to make a distinction between the popular and the official so much as to recognise the ways in which all of these forms of xenophobia are produced through situated social relations. While Neocosmos is right to point to the hegemony of a discourse of fear and xenophobia, he does not attend to the active production of nationalism and xenophobia through situated social practices.

This article begins to show how attention to migrants’ situated experiences surrounding housing, documentation, policing, and more generalised forms of violence is a window into the production of the dangerous forms of xenophobia which have exploded over the past several years. Additional research, working toward a full analysis of such everyday practices, might be modeled after Ari Sitas’s (1990) writings on Zulu ‘ethnic nationalism’ and working class culture. Here he argues against a notion of nationalism as ideological interpellation from above and attends to the concrete everyday social formations, as well as historical experiences in relation to dispossession, through which black nationalism in Natal took hold during the last days of apartheid (Sitas 1990, also see Hart 2007). Though a full analysis in this respect would require a great deal more research than what has been conducted for this article, migrants’ everyday experiences of violence and unstable housing conditions presented above are some of the ordinary negotiations through which nationalism and xenophobia are produced. This article’s analysis of how migrants are forced to remain constantly on the move within the city to survive is an example of a structure produced through such everyday practices which has significant implications for multiple other aspects of livelihood in the city.

The power of an analysis closely attentive to everyday practice is that it has the potential to reveal points of tension and slippage, where the processes of racial and spatial production may be interrupted and reformulated. While this paper only begins the project of developing a full

analysis of xenophobia out of migrants' everyday practices, it has pointed to particular social practices which are of great importance to the production of xenophobia: policing, racialisation through the 'reading' of certain markings of difference, official forms of identity documentation and interpretations thereof, and housing access. In the following section, I point to churches, mostly Pentecostal, as one of the most important sites at which migrants are making their lives in light of so many other exclusions.

'I am a true shepherd in the African way, providing not only spiritual guidance but also bread' – Congolese pastor of a Johannesburg Pentecostal church

During the course of conversation with migrants regarding their constant movement from one housing situation to another, the church, most often Pentecostal, emerged as one of the most common sites through which individuals and families passed in search of shelter. The church was the focal point of the January 2008 police brutalisation of hundreds of Zimbabwean migrants and churches have figured as both sites of refuge and violence in the May 2008 attacks. Pentecostal churches in particular are key points through which migrants are moving and at times remaining in place in their search for accommodation and livelihood opportunities. While my research suggests Pentecostal churches are some of the most important sites at which urban space is being reconfigured, a full explanation of these churches as a field of force in the city would require a great deal more research than I have undertaken in this preliminary study. What I am able to provide here are some observations of the types of power being deployed by churches and pastors. More significantly, I ask what this role of churches as primary resource providers means to the politics of belonging. The church is one among many spaces that are critical to building an understanding of the everyday practices that produce migrants' spatial and racial experiences of the city.

In addition to housing, livelihood opportunities also presented themselves through the church. One Hillbrow pastor advertised a day labourer-type of company he ran in which men from his congregation, mostly Zimbabwean, could be hired by the day for jobs such as painting, light construction, and gardening. Churches also provided directly or referred members to job skills training, English language courses and a multitude of other support groups and resources. Multiple churches encountered during the course of the research constructed dormitories or rooms with partition board in church

common spaces. Others converted store rooms into temporary lodging spaces for migrants and contributed each month directly to migrants' rent or to rented rooms specifically marked for the lodging of church members. Though these forms of accommodation were spoken about in interviews as 'temporary', it was not uncommon for churches to have people staying in these living situations for between six and 18 months. Importantly, church shelter proved an important place of refuge following eviction or other displacement. Information networks circulating through churches were also cited as valuable resources for finding a group of people with whom to partition a room, a landlord or sublessor willing to lease, or a temporary place to stay upon first arrival in the city.

One approach to understanding these churches is through a Foucaultian analysis of how churches are governing migrant bodies. A South African pastor from a Pentecostal inner city Johannesburg church catering to migrants and South Africans describes his provision of housing: 'For people who are not Christian, we help them accept the words of Christ'. In 'helping' those who are at once in need of shelter and spiritual salvation 'accept the words of Christ', pastors interviewed here are exerting 'a religious type of power', evoking Foucault's notion of 'pastoral power' originating in a pre-Christian East and containing the seeds of what becomes the government of men and women in the West. Describing their will to provide 'not only spiritual guidance but also bread', pastors spoke of their will to do good, mirroring the fundamental beneficence of pastoral power. 'In fact', Foucault notes in his *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, 'the essential objective of pastoral power is the salvation (*salut*) of the flock. Salvation is first of all essentially subsistence. The means of subsistence provided, the food assured, is good pasture' (Foucault 2007: 126-7). As one Congolese pastor of a Johannesburg Pentecostal church described himself, 'I am a true shepherd in the African way, providing not only spiritual guidance but also bread'. Another pastor described the role of the church as:

ministering the whole person – the spirit, the soul, and the body. The church must be relevant to people's physical needs, not just preach to them. One of the greatest things people need besides physical support is a sense of belonging, a sense of feeling at home. If you feel alone and exposed you feel very vulnerable, but when you have a place where you belong it gives you a sense of stability and peace.

The church is thus an extremely important site at which belonging gets negotiated. Provision of physical needs such as food and shelter is central

to the formation of this terrain, but there is also a less tangible desire in some cases for the church to act as a place of (albeit temporary) refuge from the instability of everyday life in the city.

A Foucaultian take on these churches as exerting a form of pastoral power does not get us far enough, however, in understanding the concrete reality of how migrants experience the power churches are exerting. The similarity between these forms of power is provocative, however, and above all raises the question of how the power exerted by pastors such as those quoted above is *productive* of new spatialities in the city. It is significant in terms of migrants' everyday realities of accessing housing that churches have developed intricate committees charged with deciding who is worthy of accessing church-provided housing, with factors such as migrants' prior church membership, religion, interest in conversion, nationality, documentation status, and whether one is single or with family all weighing into a church's decision of who to provide with housing and resources. In an instrumental way, these sorts of criteria narrow the population served by the church to stretch the church's sometimes limited resources farther. In a much more significant way, however, pastors spoke of the will to develop spiritually those they provided with housing. Providing a roof over migrants' heads was integral to pastors' projects of spiritual salvation. Erica Bornstein's (2005) work has also spoken to Pentecostal developmentalism's 'holistic' targeting of spiritual and material poverty. David Maxwell (2006, 1998) illuminates Pentecostal churches' attempts to 're-socialise' their targets for development through teachings of marital fidelity, the rejection of violence and 'tradition' (such as ancestor veneration or spirit possession), and the re-channeling of money away from tobacco and alcohol and toward education, consumer goods, savings and, of course, the church (Maxwell 1998). How successful are these churches, however, in producing a new type of subject? What are the tensions between the ways in which the church imagines itself 'improving' its subjects and the actual experiences of migrants on the ground? How are churches' distinctions between who is evangelised and who is not related to shifting demarcations of who belongs and who does not in the city? These questions are especially important given the prominence of religious welfare organisations in the distribution of resources to refugees.

An adequate explanation of what this role of churches means to the spatial politics of belonging must also begin from the political-economic. In their work on millennial capitalism, the Comaroffs take the rising tide of Pentecostalism as a reflection of the contradictions experienced within

neoliberal capitalism. Neo-Pentecostal sects aim to make sense of a world spun into crisis by the logics of neoliberal capitalism, especially for those disempowered, emasculated, and disadvantaged by these structures (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 318). As read through the Comaroffs then, Pentecostalism is an automatic sort of reaction to the exclusions constituting the post-apartheid nation – from the exclusions of its own poor, mostly black, citizens from the possibility of a job or a home, to the exclusions of foreigners from life itself. However, it is politically and analytically inadequate to view Pentecostal churches as producing spaces of exclusion and belonging in a way that is predetermined by the structures of millennial capitalism. Rather, beginning with an understanding of churches' power as *productive* of new terrains on which belonging is negotiated, I am suggesting an opening for research showing how churches exert this power – where it may crack and open to something new and where it successfully consolidates and conditions who belongs and who does not.

Rethinking understandings of South African cities

Migrants' experiences of instability and exclusion provide an important critique of influential understandings of African cities which rely on the celebration of fluidity and a utopian politics of what the city may become. Such notions of the city neglect the structures produced through the everyday practices of migrants in relation to official discourses and practices described here, particularly the fact of violence which circumscribes where migrants can be and how they may move about the city. Social improvisation is not so much exciting in this context as implicated in producing new racialisations of space and limitations of the trajectories open to migrants in the city. This section turns to the work of AbdouMaliq Simone as providing an important alternative to economic understandings of African cities, yet at the same time celebrating the openness and infinite possibility of the city in a way that is inadequate to an analysis of the constraints migrants face.

Simone posits the city as 'a laboratory of change, rather than simply the embodiment of accommodation, social engineering or the spatial fix of economic growth' (Simone and Abouhane 2005: 1). His writing is an important counter-narrative to oft-encountered analyses of the city as a 'theater of capitalist accumulation' and to understandings of African cities which reproduce a 'metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 353). Simone's demand for an understanding of African urbanism as something beyond the economic notion of a spatial fix is provocative, and his insistence on everyday practices extremely

valuable. Indeed, these conceptual framings are ones I employed in approaching Congolese migrants' everyday experiences in Johannesburg. In many ways, migrants are the paradigmatic subjects of Simone's work. Attention to the micropractices of everyday life reveals how one's primary resource to survive becomes one's self and the strategic visibility and invisibility migrants must employ with respect to the law and the state. Indeed, Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) refer to the migrant worker as Johannesburg's *flaneur*, its paradoxical 'cultural figure' symbolic of the underneath of the city. Though Mbembe and Nuttall's migrant worker undertakes a different sort of migration than the refugee to which I attend, Mbembe and Nuttall use the migrant worker to symbolise the possibilities for transgressing the spatial order to the racialised city. They share with Simone a privileging of a lack of structure and constraint. I argue here that although Mbembe, Nuttall and Simone foreground migrant experiences as paradigmatic of the urban experience, their analyses actually fail to explain the moment of danger in which many migrants live today. The concrete everyday experiences of migrants speaks to the highly complex, racially and violently structured ways in which migrants are making their lives within the constraints of city life rather than the openness with which the cultural figure of the migrant may act.

Simone's work stands in special relation to my focus on migrants because he has attended to Africa as a space of movement, treating movement in the broad sense of migration, displacement, and accelerated social mobility (Simone 2004a: 118). For Simone, movement is articulated through its opportunism, its ability to act as a 'multifaceted strategy of urban survival' (Simone 2004a: 118). The city itself is analysed through the trope of opportunity for what the city is becoming. Social formations for Simone are 'highly mobile', comprising individuals who are ready to navigate fragmented urban spaces embodying 'the heterogeneity of urban opportunities and ... possibilities for the elaboration of livelihoods' (Simone 2004a: 10). Whereas Simone describes the highly mobile interactions of everyday life in the city through their possibility and opportunity, my research points to some of the very real limits to this possibility and excitement for what the city is becoming. These limitations to what is possible in urban South Africa, growing out of a violent production of space, read at an angle to Simone's notion of a 'flexibly configured landscape' upon which, through improvisation and creativity, people 'derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements' (Simone 2004b: 411). This voluntaristic notion of city

politics becomes inadequate to an understanding of the spatial politics of belonging as productive of spaces of *limitation*. For Simone, the city is an open field, a zone of excitement and innovation filled with ‘the sense that anything could happen to anyone, that no one has an advantage over everyone else’ (2004b: 419). On the contrary, the city has become violently and racially re-inscribed in such a way as to produce certain advantages for some and disadvantages for others. The violent struggle over belonging we are witnessing in urban South Africa produces spatial boundaries and limits to possibility that demand a re-conceptualisation of Simone’s city as an open field. Attention to the active production of race and space through everyday practices such as migrants’ traversals of the city reveals a terrain of possibility limited by the sorts of violence and housing conditions encountered in this research.

The exclusions of the city constrain precisely how and where migrants can move within urban space. Such constrained trajectories of movement reproduce experiences of fear or violence. One way to conceptualise the relationship between these constraints and urban space is through the notion of the production of space through social practice (see Massey 1994, 2005, Lefebvre 1991). Ideas of the production of space help to conceive of these practices as producing new *spatialities* of exclusion and belonging within the city, which shape political possibilities for change. It is not merely that migrants move through space, but that their practices alter space by reproducing certain practices within space and constraining others. In his (2000) work on the racialisation of space and the spatialisation of race in the context of Swedish racism and xenophobia, Allan Pred provides a highly relevant method of understanding space as a product of social relations. In *Even in Sweden*, Pred inquires into cultural racism and spatial segregation through analysis of how the spatial becomes the racial through everyday practices: ‘The social construction of space becomes one with the social construction of race. The now-segregated becomes the further-racialized. Spatial meanings derived from racialization become racially reinscribed, the confirmation of racial difference’ (Pred 2000: 125). This perspective is crucial to understanding South Africa’s resurgent xenophobia, as it draws attention to the everyday practices through which racial meanings are constructed, and through which space is produced. The previous example given of the way in which the continual displacement of migrants within the city makes organising for better living conditions difficult, which in turn feeds into the stigma of Johannesburg’s ‘bad buildings’ as a conflation of dangerous

people and dangerous space, is an example of the co-production of space and difference. The particular ways in which migrants and refugees are moving about the city *matter*; they are practices that form the construction of racial and spatial meanings.

Conclusion

This paper has provided some first steps toward an understanding of xenophobia in South Africa which begins with the situated practices of migrants and refugees. Experiences of violence and unstable, overcrowded housing conditions produce a pattern among migrants of continual displacement that makes claims to rights and resources very difficult. This pattern of instability and volatility of living arrangements is one of the everyday practices through which space and social difference is produced. This experience is also caught up in a re-working of the relationship between race and space in the post-apartheid city, in which a resurgent cultural racism is directed at those presumed to be foreign African migrants.

The provision of material and spiritual support by Pentecostal churches points to such churches as themselves a site rich for further investigation as to how space and persons are being produced in the post-apartheid city. Arguing on the one hand against voluntaristic notions of South African cities and on the other against understandings of nationalism and xenophobia as ideological manipulation from above, I suggest that a productive way forward for grappling with the spatiality of xenophobia is through greater attention to everyday practices which simultaneously produce space and conceptions of social difference. A great deal more attention to these sorts of situated everyday practices is called for to provide a fully conjunctural, concrete analysis of the terrain of resurgent xenophobia. What this research contributes, however, is a sense of the power of ethnography and ideas of the production of space to illuminate the formation of xenophobia and nationalism through everyday practices. More work in this vein has the great potential to denaturalise the sorts of attitudes underpinning the brutal violence of the continuing attacks and begin to reveal opportunities to intervene where new practices and understandings may be produced.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to all Forced Migration Studies Programme staff, particularly Loren Landau, who made my time with FMSP possible, and Jean Kapoma, whose assistance made these interviews possible. Also thanks to Gillian Hart and two anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions through the writing process.

Note

1. A person with 'refugee status' in theory has most of the same rights as a South African citizen, except the right to vote. Technically, a Refugee Permit gives one the right to work, study, go to clinics and hospitals, and access certain social assistance grants, while in practice this is very far from the case. One of the major obstacles to obtaining refugee status is the extraordinarily long wait seen at one of South Africa's five Refugee Reception Offices (RROs), and the necessity to make a number of visits to complete the lengthy process. Arrest, detainment, and police brutality are very real threats during the period before one has attained refugee status. An Asylum Seeker's Permit is given in this interim period, but it expires within between one and three months, and thus must constantly be renewed during the multi-month process of gaining refugee status.

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