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► **To cite this version:**

Élise Palomares, Catherine Quiminal. Migration in South Africa: tensions and post-apartheid inter-ethnic compromises in a central district of Johannesburg. Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart; Aurelia Wa Kabwe Segatti. The challenge of the threshold. Border closures and migration movements in Africa., Lexington Books, pp.121-140, 2012, 978-0-7391-6510-2. hal-01298771

HAL Id: hal-01298771

<https://hal.science/hal-01298771>

Submitted on 7 Apr 2016

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Abstract

This chapter is set against the backdrop of the multiple forms of violence committed against foreigners in South African cities that underwent a sudden systematisation in townships and informal camps in 2008. The chapter focuses specifically on the increasing demographic diversity of a central district of Johannesburg, formerly a white preserve. The recent urban compromise reached between the local authorities, foreign Africans and native South Africans originally from rural areas and the old Bantustans has proved fragile. The compromise governing urban coexistence has been frequently challenged by discourses and practices positing the radical alterity of foreign migrants. While for some migrants there is significant evidence of inclusion, other migrants have been treated less favorably. Such treatment may involve never gaining recognition as an immigrant, forever remaining at the threshold, waiting indefinitely for a passage to the West, being subject to escheat or being forced to return to the country of origin.

Migration in South Africa: tensions and post-apartheid inter-ethnic compromises in a central district of Johannesburg

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After the fall of the apartheid regime, the new South African government was faced with a range of significant political, economic and social issues. The difficulties facing the new government have included the challenges of building a nation-state, of developing a political community that transcends racial and class divisions, of fostering an imaginary unity overriding distinctions of color, and of repairing the sense of fragmentation felt among black Africans constrained by restrictive ethnic identities in Bantustans or black neighborhoods.

The targets set by the new authorities represent complex and significant challenges: to avoid inter-ethnic and Black-White conflicts and to redress the injustices of the apartheid era. Expectations have been high, and the difficulties that have needed to be overcome significant. Housing, education, healthcare and employment are among the most pressing issues requiring urgent attention. In 2002, the official unemployment rate was 30.5%. The official rate in 2010 stands at 35% [25% according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)], a trend further accentuated by the significant shortage of managers and executives, caused (not least) by the emigration of a significant proportion of South Africa's white population (Brookes and Hinks, 2004).

The question that arises is the specific direction taken by the new state in the field of migration policy. In view of the ever-increasing pressure of migration, the level of hospitality shown toward African immigrants in a state well known for enforcing a coercive policy¹ in the area of migration has become a burning issue. As a relatively rich country and as the homeland of Nelson Mandela, hero of the anti-apartheid campaign, South Africa has developed an image of a country that is likely to fulfill the (all too often disappointed) expectations of migrants. Yet to what extent have the expectations of migrants been fulfilled? And to what extent have migrant projects in South Africa found the spatial conditions of their success? The South African state has developed a legal framework aimed at eradicating racial discriminations while enforcing a highly selective migration policy based on coercion. At the same time, modern South Africa has inherited a highly racialized view of the world, the self and the other (Franchi, 2004). In view of these two key considerations, the question that arises is just what kind of integration can possibly be achieved. More specifically, we need to examine the forms of compromise governing urban coexistence in the central districts of Johannesburg that have developed between native residents and migrants from other parts of Africa who find themselves in limbo, awaiting a new start, potential deportation or permanent settlement. These are the major research questions addressed in this chapter. The analysis will draw upon fieldwork in Yeoville – specifically the local market and the social interactions fostered by the trade activities conducted in and around the market. While the question of hospitality or rejection is closely linked to the issues of migration (Crush and McDonald 2000; Wa Kabwe 2004) and urban policies (Crankshaw and White 1995; Gervais-Lambony et al. 1999; Mabin 1999; Tomlinson 1999), this chapter does not claim to provide an exhaustive analysis of these policies. Instead it privileges an *in situ* approach 'from below', emphasizing relational issues and the interactions between the various actors operating in public urban spaces. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this epistemological approach has seldom been adopted by scholars working on post-apartheid South Africa (with the exception

¹ See A. Wa Kabwe (2004). The 2005 Home Affairs annual report states that the number of deportees stood at 209,988.

of Bénéit 2006; Vidal 2009, Landau 2006, Morris 1999 and Wa Kabwe 2009). Because of the specific focus on inter-ethnic relations and social dynamics, the scope of the enquiry needs to be rigorously defined in relation to the object of research. The chapter will begin by presenting the method used to carry out the research, which will also serve to account for the choice of Yeoville as the specific focus of inquiry. The geographical area chosen to conduct fieldwork has a high immigrant population of residents and/or traders. It is also an area where recent urban policies have been enforced and where the legislative mechanisms implemented by the state and designed to promote, restrict or prevent immigration have been put to the test of practice.

Secondly, data drawn from field investigations will be used to analyze the daily interactions observed between foreigners and various institutions at local and national levels. Finally, the chapter will examine the nature of the inter-ethnic relations fostered by trade activities conducted in and around the Yeoville market.

Studying the Stranger in the Yeoville neighborhood transformation project

From the perspective of African migrants, the relative prosperity of South Africa, along with the consolidation of a democratic regime headed by the ANC, is a significant source of hope – namely the hope of finding a land of refuge and welcome. In addition, the employment crisis, the suspension of economic immigration, the recent financial and economic crisis and the rise of racism in Europe have incited migrants to explore new possibilities and new destinations. Because it now stands as a country of reference seen by many Africans as combining modernity and black power (Bouillon et al. 1999), South Africa has seen a significant influx of migrants from well beyond its traditional orbit (Zimbabwe, Mozambique), particularly countries in Central and West Africa. Johannesburg has become one of the key urban areas targeted by migrants, resulting in migration trends that have been extensively researched since the early 2000s (Bouillon et al. 1999; Morris 1999; Simone 1999; Amisi and Ballard, 2005). However, as noted by Landau & Gindrey:

Gauteng Province is a major destination for domestic and international migrants. The province is a primary destination for international migrants (...) [in 2001] it hosted 46% of South Africa's population born outside South Africa (...). Despite perceptions of a 'human tsunami' of international migrants headed towards the city of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality the percentage of foreign born was only 7.9% of the total population (Landau & Gindrey 2008, 10-11).

Following the repeal of the Group Areas Act and Influx control in the mid 1980s, two key trends have developed in central areas and districts. Central areas have been affected by white flight (i.e. significant outflows of white inhabitants and traders) and marked by increasing demographic diversity (South Africans and foreign Africans of various origins) (Guillaume 1997; Morris 1999; Tomlinson et al. 2003).

In 1994, the new political authorities made significant efforts to improve housing and living conditions in townships. Black access to neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by white South Africans was actively encouraged and promoted. In some areas of Johannesburg

city centre abandoned by white residents (including Yeoville, Hillbrow and Berea), the influx of African migrants resulted in a dramatic transformation of the dynamics subtending the appropriation of central districts and spaces. The access of foreign-born black migrants to city centers has created an unprecedented challenge for local authorities throughout South Africa. The spaces accessed by new migrant populations have ranged from liminality (for the most destitute) to hospitality (for the most respectable). The field study conducted as part of this research focused on Yeoville, a relatively secure neighborhood heavily populated by migrants and the focus of a policy of immigrant ‘integration’. Yeoville is a suburb of Johannesburg and one of the first areas close to the old central business district of Johannesburg to develop as a ‘grey’ area².

Yeoville is located in a district that has been governed by the ANC since 1994. The 2001 national census estimated the population of Yeoville to be around 30,000. The area has become a major focus of urban and social transformation, a process that is part of a wider project aimed at renovating South-African urban centers. The local authorities³ have been keen to turn the characteristic structure of urban areas inherited from the apartheid era into inclusive spaces and to create the new contours of a redefined African urbanism. The model of South African urban development is designed to embody a liberal perspective encapsulated in the slogan adopted by Johannesburg – ‘A World-Class African City’.

Three key structures have shaped the renovation of Johannesburg, and in particular the renovation of Rokeby-Raleigh Street, the main thoroughfare and a major focus of recent urban development projects. The three structures have developed relatively similar visions of the place of migrants. The Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF) is a community platform aimed at bringing together local community organizations. The YSF liaises with the public authorities, particularly the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA)⁴, the body in charge of demolition, construction, renovation and public lighting (among other duties). The official mission of the Central Johannesburg Partnership (CJP), a para-state organization founded on a public/private partnership scheme, is to ensure the social and political supervision of current urban transformation projects.

The ‘African’ municipal covered market in Yeoville was created in 1999 with a view to reducing street trading, though it was unable to prevent a new wave of street traders setting up camp soon after the creation of the market. Yeoville market is located in the main street (the backbone of the area) and is home to a wide range of trading activities: street traders, shops, supermarkets, barbers and hairdressers, and bars and restaurants (owned or managed

² According to Guillaume (1997), the term was used to refer to areas where the color divide no longer applied and where black artists and executives and whites co-habited, particularly Lithuanian Jews who had immigrated to South Africa in the 1930s, some of whom joined militant anti-apartheid movements, such as Joe Slovo, a member of the Communist Party and the ANC.

³ The chapter is largely based on interviews conducted with Seeipati More, Development Manager, Johannesburg Development Agency, 05/04/2010; with Maurice Smithers, chair of the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum, in Yeoville on 08/12/2010; with Lebo Mashego, Improvement District Manager of the Central Johannesburg Project (CJP) in the premises of the CJP, CDB, 90 Market Street, 08/24/2007; with Nhanhla Makhoba, member of the Marketing and Communication department of the Metropolitan Trading Company, 08/31/2007; with Nomaswazi Mohlala, Ward 67 ANC Councillor, Yeoville, 08/23/2006; and notes and documents collected during the Inner City Summit held on 05/05/2007.

⁴ The JDA is a limited liability company operating as an agency of the City of Johannesburg. The official purpose of the JDA is to stimulate and support territorial economic development throughout the metropolitan area.

by migrants or South Africans). On the opposite sidewalk, foreign traders run market stalls selling fresh produce. The trading spaces are many and varied, and include small carts and stands in front of houses or on terraces (telephone services, hairdressers, fruit and vegetable produce) and even large-scale (though never luxurious) shops.

After a number of areas with a high concentration of immigrants were eliminated for safety reasons, it was concluded that the municipal market provided a favorable empirical entry point for investigating the impact of public policies on the dynamics of inter-class and inter-ethnic co-existence in a work environment and in public urban spaces. The market provided the means of understanding the highly complex dynamics of the transformation of 'racial' relations⁵ in the 'new South Africa'.

In terms of the feasibility of the field study, the market and its environs were deemed to be open, lively and relatively safe areas that facilitated field observations of relations with the local authorities as well as inter-ethnic relations. The significant level of interaction (whether superficial or dense) justified the use of an ethnographic field study. The area targeted to conduct the field study proved to be easier to investigate than initially predicted. A local Bed and Breakfast purchased and managed by Congolese immigrants since 2006 and located in the heart of Yeoville was used as a base to conduct the field study. The approach adopted to conduct the investigation attracted significant interest among the local population. In addition to daily meetings with sellers and traders, our constant presence in the neighborhood provided an opportunity to observe incidents and events linked to market trading, the family and community management of the Congolese B&B, and the intervention of the local authorities and community mediators, including the inauguration of a local park and its reappropriation by a local school.

The field investigations served as an opportunity to observe and assess the state 'from below' and to examine the impact of public policies based on the specific practices of local actors (i.e. elected representatives, administrators, inhabitants). Field observations played a key role in this respect. Observations of local buildings and the study of (and active participation in) key areas of social gathering involved observing the movement of products, attending public events and witnessing peaceful or conflictual interactions between sellers, but also between sellers and the police and between sellers and buyers. Long and repeated interviews conducted over several stays⁶ with different categories of actors significantly enriched the field observations. Interviewees included illegal street traders, tolerated traders in areas surrounding the market, traders who had been granted a trading space in the covered market, local community organizations, and local and regional authorities in charge of implementing city policies.

Following the work of ethnologists such as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997), the area targeted to conduct the field study was approached as a site in which a network of relations linking different actors is forged and fostered rather than as the territory of a specific

⁵ The attribution of 'racial differences' in the relations between different groups is one of the (hardened and radicalized) modalities of inter-ethnic relations (De Rudder, 1991).

⁶ In total, three research missions lasting approximately one month were conducted in Johannesburg (August 2006, April 2007, and August-September 2007) as part of several research projects funded by the *Fonds de Solidarité Prioritaire* (FSP) ('International migrations, territorial redefinitions and development') and as part of the ANR MITRANS project. An international conference held in Johannesburg provided an opportunity to return to South Africa in 2008.

‘community’. The use of the market as a key entry point enabled a distanced and friendly integration.

Between selective inclusion and xenophobic oppression: the relations between foreigners and institutions

In the local authorities view, the renovation of city centers is a key factor in the fight against racial segregation (an issue that has been redefined as a result of white populations leaving central areas), the fight against urban decay (Crankshaw and White, 1995), and the development of large modern African cities. The prevailing views of foreigners have been governed by the obsession with migration flow control and the challenges of urban management.

The 1991 Aliens Control Act – the foundation of South Africa’s immigration policy throughout the 1990s – was built on suspicion and coercion. Because it was deemed to contradict the new constitution introduced in 1996, the act underwent a radical reform under the aegis of the South African Department of Home Affairs. New legislation was introduced in 2002, with further amendments made in 2004. Beyond the matter of its anti-racist and anti-xenophobic appearance, the new policy, though promising rights and guarantees unheard of in the apartheid era⁷, continued mostly to advocate migration control, large-scale deportations, the protection of national workers, the criminalization of illegal workers and those employing, protecting, or housing illegal workers or those aiding illegal workers to access social services – all offences punishable by up to one year in prison (Government Gazette, Act No. 13, 2002 Immigration Act, as amended in 2004).

The ever-increasing number of categories and statuses assigned to foreigners (17 in total) reflects a double ambition of the state: to curb migration flows and to protect national jobs. The departments in charge of managing migration flows have tended to exercise discretion in their interpretation of migration legislation. By distinguishing between desirable and undesirable migrants, the state has paved the way for xenophobia, reinforced or created stereotypes, and targeted immigrants as the root cause of social issues (particularly insecurity). Migrants viewed favorably tend to be investors and workers valued by the authorities based on the need for qualified labor.

Among migrants forced into illegality, a key distinction is drawn in South Africa between Undesirable Persons (including ‘anyone who is or is likely to become a public charge’) and Prohibited Persons (a category that draws no distinction between migrants suffering from infectious diseases, migrants suspected of terrorist activities and illegal immigrants; see Human Right Watch 1998). The official text refers to the extensible notion of ‘illegal foreigners’, advocating their deportation: ‘Any illegal foreigner shall be deported’.

South African migration legislation has the peculiarity of including affiliation with a racist organization among the criteria for non-admission to South-Africa.

At a local level, the enforcement of recent migration policies (described here in broad outline and closely associated in the case of Yeoville with an urban renovation project) tends

⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of recent developments in South African migration policy, see Wa Kabwe-Segatti (2004).

to be distinctly ambivalent. It combines a hygiene discourse positing the need to ‘clean up’ streets in order to eradicate the filth and disorder caused by street trading activities carried out by migrants with a more positive discourse centering on the key role of African foreigners in the construction of an imaginary ‘Africinity’ widely deemed to be lacking in Johannesburg.

In interviews, the local elected representatives of the ANC, who had been living as refugees for many years in neighboring countries, gave varied and contrasting descriptions of the experience of exile and migration in discussing the question of ‘refugees’ in South Africa. Echoing the official positions adopted by the ANC, local elected representatives tended to defend the idea of a community of circumstance, though one female interviewee drew a key distinction between ‘refugee’ and ‘exile’: ‘I was an exile person. I was not a UNHCR person: you do not go to ask asylum for your own’⁸. At no point did this councillor make any attempt to defend freedom of movement. In her view, ‘false refugees’ driven by economic motivations should be castigated: ‘If people aren’t refugees why should they leave their country?’⁹.

The case of former refugees in South Africa significantly qualifies the hypothesis of a shared experience of exile. In South Africa, current refugees are deemed not to abide by the same code of conduct. Former refugees even reappropriate themes drawn from common xenophobic discourses emphasizing the dirt and disorder allegedly caused by migrants.

Some migrants tend to reappropriate the experience of exile of ANC elected representatives and to emphasize the need to be properly acknowledged and recognized. One interviewee, a Congolese member of the YSF, explained that a local elected representative attending a conference on the rights of child refugees ‘gave her own account of 20 years of exile. We have good relations with her; she’s understood that the majority of people in her community are foreigners. If she didn’t, her mandate would have no impact’¹⁰.

In contrast to the views of elected representatives and community organizations, the project leader in charge of the ‘revitalization of the city centre’ referred only implicitly to the issue of migrants, adopting instead a more ‘neutral’ economic and market perspective. During a neighborhood visit, he explained that the aim of the project was to ‘transform Yeoville into a marketable identity’. Opposite a branch of a well-known fast food chain, the project leader proudly explained:

Opposite Nando’s, you can see there aren’t any street traders. Now, that wouldn’t have happened if there had been any traders in front of it. People wouldn’t have wanted to set up a Nando’s here because it’s a national chain. You see, people see us as bad people who only want to get rid of street traders and to prevent them from earning a living. But that’s a very narrow-minded view. The whole concept of sustainable development is to provide decent jobs for everyone, with safety nets, decent wages, etc. That’s really what every street trader aspires to! You see here, Nando’s employs at least 10 people directly. And it’s the same for the shop next to

⁸ Interview with Nomaswazi Mohlala, Ward 67 ANC Councillor, Yeoville, 08/23/2006.

⁹ Interview with Nomaswazi Mohlala, Ward 67 ANC Councillor, Yeoville, 08/23/2006.

¹⁰ Interview with Etienne, chair of Congo Heart of Africa, Yeoville, 19/08/2006.

Nando's. If you get rid of three street traders but open a supermarket – that's at least 300 jobs. Plus anyone can apply – job offers are always displayed in the window¹¹ ...

When asked more specifically about migrants's access to these jobs, the interviewee emphasized that they would at any rate be forced to 'leave' the area and that there is therefore no need for any policy specifically targeting migrants. Migrants are viewed differently by the YSF, the local community platform. The official role of the YSF is to serve as a legitimate mediator in negotiations with the public authorities. Yet the dynamics it seeks to create remain fragile. The leaders of the YSF and the chief mediators dealing with the public authorities are a White South African couple previously involved in the fight against apartheid and long-term residents of the neighborhood.

The aim of the leaders of the YSF is to promote the uniqueness of Yeoville as the only 'African district' in the city – for example by developing restaurants ('though without music that's so loud it can be heard in the other local African restaurant', as the interviewee jokingly remarked) to attract tourists and the middle classes while providing an opportunity for 'poor, educated migrants'. In one interview¹², one of the leaders of the YSF, also a provincial government employee, made frequent use of the (by now) familiar rhetoric of selection between good and bad foreigners, drawing a sharp contrast between educated, hard-working, clean and cooperative foreigners on the one hand and drunks, vandals and criminals on the other – thereby implying that the targeted objectives would result in the eviction of 'undesirables' from the neighborhood. Selection is often invoked as a means of fighting against xenophobia, and is premised on the assumption that xenophobia is objectively fostered by deviant acts committed by 'certain' foreigners.

The migrants interviewed in the course of the field study expressed conflicting views of the national government. Interviewees appeared generally to be relatively unconcerned by the global policy implemented by the government. Some interviewees viewed the national government as 'a government for all Africans and committed to the fight against racism', emphasizing that 'you need order in cities'. This view was mostly defended by immigrants with legal status, business owners, and owners of a space in the covered market. For others living in extreme insecurity, power tends to be viewed as corrupt and as incapable of solving the social issues affecting the population, including security. Migrants with a visa tended to view the state as a kindly benefactor providing healthcare and education, and often deplored the illegality in which too many migrants are still kept.

In March 2008, a female Congolese trader stated that she was making plans to leave despite being relatively well settled at the head of her food and beauty product business¹³. She explained that she feared Jacob Zuma would come to power (Mbeki left the presidency

¹¹ Conversation with Lebo Mashego, City Improvement District Manager (Central Johannesburg Project – CPJ), transcribed after a tour of the neighborhood in his company, 08/24/2006.

¹² Interview with Maurice Smithers at his home, Yeoville, 08/12/2006.

¹³ Conversation with 'Mama Esther', a Congolese migrant met on a regular basis since 2006, Yeoville market, March 2008.

in September), predicting that an era of oppression targeting foreigners would begin and insisting that she was making plans to immigrate to China¹⁴.

In legal terms, corruption is one of the chief strategies used by migrants deemed to be undesirable to secure a legal status. Asylum requests are one of the very few forms of legal recourse (if not the only such recourse) available to migrants, along with marriage to a South-African citizen, described by Congolese migrants as 'kosala ngunda' ('acting as refugee' in lingala).

Marriages between male migrants and South African women or (more rarely) between female migrants and South African men ensure a more stable administrative status, and significantly reduce the sense of insecurity and precariousness.

For illegal immigrants, the main issue is to avoid all contact with the authorities and to take full advantage of personal contacts and relations. A female migrant from Cameroun trading on the edge of the market explained that she had joined her husband several months after arriving and that she had been forced to hide for a long period before submitting an asylum request to the Department of Home Affairs. Another example was Mofat, an employee in a local bar in Yeoville: Zimbabwean by nationality, Mofat had no legal documents at the time of the field study and had already been arrested twice since his arrival in 2004. On both occasions, his employer 'got him out of trouble'. Many Zimbabwean migrants are in a similar position, and are often arrested and even deported before eventually returning to South Africa, remaining in a liminal situation both materially and symbolically.

The alleged correlation between crime and the presence of foreigners has become increasingly common among the local police force. Once the purpose of the research had been presented, the chief of the Yeoville police station interviewed in August 2006 began by making a number of general points in a somewhat defensive tone: 'How can we integrate foreigners? There are so many undocumented foreigners here. According to the Migration Act, we have a duty to arrest people who are undocumented'¹⁵. The chief of police went on to explain that the SAPS had recently begun to hold meetings with migrants. Organized by nationality, the aim of the meetings (from the point of view of the SAPS) is to 'improve relations' between police and migrants and above all to encourage migrants to collaborate actively with the police to prevent criminals 'from seeking refuge in criminality'. 'We need to maintain healthy relations, and they must report any illegal activities they witness'¹⁶. The chief justified his xenophobic rhetoric by stating that 'the problem is that in serious cases like murder, if the person is from Zimbabwe, they may return home and never come back'.

The hierarchization of nationalities based on the presumed level of criminality is clearly stated and has become institutionalized through the priorities emphasized in public meetings:

¹⁴ A. Kabwe-Segatti (2008) notes that during the peak of violence in 2008, barrages were erected and migrants' papers destroyed on the grounds that the 'Mbeki papers' were no longer valid and that migrants were required to obtain the new 'Zuma papers'.

¹⁵ Interview with Senior Superintendent Mothaunq, Yeoville Police Station, 08/10/2006.

¹⁶ On the blurred distinction between the role of the police and of civil society in security matters, the exacerbation of differences between neighborhoods and the development of anti-democratic practices, see Bénit-Gbaffou (2007).

Here we have Nigerians, Ethiopians, Zimbabweans, Ghanaians, all of those neighboring countries, Mozambicans. We hold regular meetings with them. It all began with Mozambicans, by distributing pamphlets. As a result they attended meetings in large numbers. The aim is to work hand in hand with them to identify those involved in crime (...). We've also met with Zimbabweans, Ethiopians and soon we'll be meeting with Nigerians¹⁷.

In response to a question about Congolese migrants, the interviewer appeared to attach little importance to the issue, seeking instead to minimize the presence of Congolese migrants despite their visibility in the neighborhood: 'there are some here but not many', adding: 'provided I can secure the cooperation of the people from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, I'll be able to reduce crime'.

The naturalization of the presumed level of danger based on nationality is one of the most salient features of the dominant racist ideology targeting African foreigners. The combined effect of the criminalization of migrants and material and status insecurity has fostered a sense of vulnerability, with migrants becoming key targets of extortion and predation. The most common manifestation of this trend has not been murders (frequent in the 1990s) so much as thefts and physical and verbal threats. Thieves know that they are unlikely to face any sanctions. Police extortion has also become part of the daily predation suffered by migrants. Jules, a Congolese student who arrived in 1993, spoke at length about the issue of police violence: 'Here, there's a lot of crime and most of it comes from the police'¹⁸, before remarking disdainfully: 'Here, cops are clowns'. Jules illustrated his claims by referring to a particularly difficult period lasting from December 28 to December 31: 'They turned up in their big cars, surrounded the entire neighborhood and arrested all the migrants'.

E.P 'Do the police tear up ID papers?'. 'No, they don't always tear them up; it all depends on your attitude. They pick up 7 or 8,000 people and lock everybody up in prison, and you keep saying to them: "But I have ID!". In the end you get to talk to a policeman and you say: "perhaps we can come to an arrangement" and the policeman says: "as long as you know someone who can pay 100 rands [\$13]"'¹⁹.

In conjunction with a highly restrictive migration legislation though officially anti-racist and anti-xenophobic, the attitude of the local authorities, civil authorities and civil society toward the presence of African foreigners in the neighborhood has tended to range from selective acceptance (which generally goes hand in hand with a resolute opposition to xenophobia) to an outright denial of the right of migrants to settle on a long-term basis, and even to an emphasis on radical alterity, along with criminalization, extortion and violence. Migrants often privilege a strategy of avoidance with institutions, tending in some cases toward corruption. Such is the political-institutional framework in which inter-ethnic relations are constructed.

Yeoville: a site of inter-ethnic diversity

¹⁷ Interview with Senior Superintendent Mothaunq, Yeoville Police Station, 08/10/2006.

¹⁸ Interview with Jules, a migrant from the DRC, Sandton City Shopping Center, 08/10/2006.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of raids and police extortion, see Vigneswaran (2007).

The peak of violence committed against foreigners reached in May 2008 mainly affected townships, as opposed to central districts and areas. Though likely targets of popular xenophobic condemnation, some areas of the city, including the municipal market in Yeoville (known as an ‘African market’), were relatively spared. The conceptual proposals outlined by Grafmeyer (1999) and positing a view of the city as a site of diversity (in the sense of material and social juxtapositions and arrangements) are useful in accounting for the peaceful inter-ethnic relations observed in the course of the field study. The area surrounding Yeoville market is based on a fragile compromise of urban coexistence (Wa Kabwe-Segatti & Palomares, 2009) subtending the legitimacy of migrant presence.

In addition to the daily relations fostered in shared accommodation and urban public spaces, a variety of types of alliances, sharing and cooperation have developed in Yeoville between traders working in the municipal covered market. The voice of the South-African middle classes involved in the renovation project and the fight against xenophobia, in addition to the development of a Congolese micro-society, have also served to foster more peaceful inter-ethnic relations than in townships and informal camps.

According to the Johannesburg section of the African Cities Survey conducted in 2006 by the Forced Migration Studies Programme, the grouping of migrants on ethnic or national grounds in a building or specific areas of a neighborhood is a common trend in Yeoville, also noted by Amisi & Ballard (2005). Some streets are inhabited mostly by Congolese residents, some of whom have set up small stalls in backyards. Yet multinational cohabitation is also common. Ground-level individual houses (a common feature in Yeoville) are sometimes subdivided into rented apartments where migrants of different nationalities cohabit. Such arrangements may even give rise to new job opportunities, as illustrated by the case of a Malawi employee in the Congolese B&B, who had found his current job through his flatmate (a Congolese migrant). They may also result in the joint development of trading activities. A female trader from Zimbabwe living in a multinational house (where she rents a relatively large, dark and cluttered room for 700 rands, i.e. approximately \$100) described the residents of the house in the following terms: ‘There’s a South-African guy, a South-African lady, a Zimbabwean, a South-African who’s with a Zimbabwean woman, and there’s me. It’s not too crowded. We live quite well; we’re like brothers and sisters’²⁰.

While the peaceful picture of multinational cohabitation hardly stands up to the test of fact, it is indicative of an attempt to construct a communitarian myth in Yeoville, echoing the discourse of the local community platform or of some street traders. According to a Zimbabwean tradeswoman, it is accompanied by the promotion of trade exchanges linked to the presence of ‘West Africans’:

You can see Yeoville is a good place. There’s a lot of business going on here. Now there are a lot of people from West Africa. They do a lot of business, they know how to do business, they’ve always been traders, and their countries even do food trade. So that’s what I’ve learnt to do, there’s a lot of trade activity here.²¹

²⁰ Interview with Teresa at her home, Yeoville, 04/23/2007.

²¹ Interview with Teresa at her home, Yeoville, 04/23/2007.

Trade relations in the area are based nevertheless on a strict hierarchy. Different categories of African migrants are unequally recognized and integrated in South-African society, and governed by relations of domination within the same national group, between different national groups and with South Africans.

A distinction needs to be drawn between Congolese migrants, who tend to have a 'high level of education' (according to the African City Survey, 44% of those interviewed held a higher education qualification) and South-Africans and other migrants from within the sub-region (Gindrey, 2010). Congolese migrants occupy a wide range of socially differentiated positions and tend to be involved in the full range of trading activities: from the management of restaurants, nightclubs and B&Bs with clienteles and reputations extending well beyond the immediate vicinity of the neighborhood (some of which are known in the country of origin or as far afield as Paris) to hairdressing salons, internet cafes, freight services, female street traders and female street hairdressers. Migrants settled in other districts or even in other cities, Congolese tourists and young urban dwellers also commonly use leisure and supply services. The small Congolese section of the market, known affectionately as *Gambela* (one of the main markets in Kinshasa), has also shaped the development of Yeoville as a local center of Congolese life. While Senegalese traders are invariably men, trading activities in the Congolese community appear to be an exclusive preserve of women. Young Congolese men tend to be involved in car security activities. A specific division of labor has developed in the manufacture of *pundu*, a product made from manioc leaves imported from Congo in ice chests by young Congolese women, who wash, grind and package the leaves in small bags. The women are helped in their tasks by an older Congolese saleswoman who runs the stall, supplies equipment (buckets and small electric grinders), assists in the production process and sells the produce by the unit. The B&B used as a base was highly representative of a hierarchic organization based on nationality and open to subordinate roles. Whether it be the owner living in Congo, the manager of the B&B (who was married to a South African woman), the Congolese accountant, janitors recently arrived from the RDC, a South-African housekeeper originally from a rural region, a Congolese woman working as a night receptionist or the handyman from Malawi, places in the B&B are distributed along gender, origin, age and migration career.

Through the continued relations with the country of origin and with migrants living in Northern towns and cities, the circulation of information and accumulation of wealth, the area is sometimes used as a springboard for emigrating to the United States, Canada or Europe (with some eventually returning to South Africa) or as an area of long-term settlement, sometimes extended (in the event of success) in other neighborhoods.

One of the janitors living at the B&B was considering migrating to Europe:

Here it's just too hard. I want to go to Europe. My older brother lives in Europe. He earns 1,700 euros [roughly \$2,100] a month! Wages are much higher in Europe. Here I earn 1,200 rands [\$163] and I pay 800 rands [\$110] rent a month. You have to pay 23,000 rands [\$3,100] to get a passport.²²

²² Interview with Jean-Marc, a migrant from the RDC working as a security guard at the B&B, Yeoville Bed and Breakfast, 08/23/2007.

A South-African passport provides access to Britain, Ireland or Canada, provided a visa is also obtained (whether legally or illegally). One of the criteria determining the decision to stay or move to the West is the country of residence of the immediate family – i.e. wife or husband and children.

A Congolese micro-society governed by a strict hierarchy has developed on the basis of new forms of solidarity. Migrants of other nationalities (Senegalese, Malian, Nigerian or neighboring countries) have been unable to form similar micro-societies (at least not in Yeoville). The forms of solidarity developed in these communities are more fragile, often transitory and linked to daily opportunities. Relations among these communities are often characterized tensions, rivalries and a degree of contempt (Ludl; Christine, 2009).

The capacity for collective organization and negotiation exhibited by street traders operating near the supermarket is relatively weak. It was initially developed by a middle-class Cameroun migrant, who took full advantage of wider networks founded on a shared Bamileke ethnic identity. In the informal market opposite the municipal market, Blaise and his wife developed relations with their Zimbabwean neighbors marked by a feeling of class superiority developed as a result of their previous social position. Though social hierarchies based on the level of qualification are common, relations tend to involve a degree of cordiality. Collaboration operates at several levels. Blaise works as a ‘representative’ defending the interests of traders and liaising with the owners of the supermarket. Other favors may involve keeping a watchful eye over other traders’ stalls or other small favors.

A subtle hierarchy has developed around the stall between tenants and assistants or temporary replacements (in the formal and informal markets) and is generally governed by tacit understandings between compatriots or between men and women. Lizzie seeks on a daily basis to foster relations with people by circulating among sellers and in the local neighborhood, interacting with female customers and going to the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market to buy fresh produce or resting at home, while her ‘aid’ runs the stall.

In the covered municipal market, alliances and compromises between foreigners and South Africans facilitate the distribution of trading spaces, price negotiations, and relations with management. However, discriminatory practices are not uncommon: during the initial distribution of trading spaces, one of the Senegalese shoe-sellers explained that several foreigners had set up their stalls near the market (to ensure close contact with passers-by) while the South African traders had initially rejected these spaces, preferring instead to set up camp in the covered market. The South African traders eventually demanded – and obtained – the commercially most lucrative spaces.

The covered market managed by the Metropolitan Trading Company (a council body in charge of economic development) frequently publishes a regulations manual in the form of an eight-page booklet given to market traders. Paragraph 6 specifies that ‘[b]y entering the market and occupying a market space, every trader certifies that he or she has the right to carry out trade activities in South Africa’. It is forbidden to sub-let trading spaces, though market traders are allowed to ‘share’ their stall provided they ‘inform the manager and obtain the manager’s permission’. It is standard practice for traders to sub-let their spaces to other sellers or to assist sellers. While in theory the regulations manual emphasizes the role of the manager in overseeing local arrangements, in practice the power relation appears to be to the

disadvantage of the manager, who is not viewed as a threatening figure ever likely to check the documents of migrants working in the market. The protection offered by the market to undocumented migrants requires some qualification, as illustrated by the case of Simon, a young Senegalese migrant who regularly worked on a shoe stall. Having noted his absence, we were informed by one of his compatriots that Simon had been arrested and deported to a detention centre in Lindela three weeks before. The attempt to raise the 1,500 rand [roughly \$200] to cover Simon's lawyer's fees had been unsuccessful.

The municipal market traders' committee, which liaises with market management, is a multinational board chaired by a female South African trader. Many nationalities rub shoulders on the committee, particularly Congolese (Brazza and RDC) and Nigerian members who negotiate with council representatives. Within the market, prices are subject to regular negotiations since the regulation of prices in 1999 introduced as a result of the relative sluggishness of market trading. Before the new measure was introduced, customers tended primarily to buy produce from stalls located along the main street without venturing into the market, and even without getting out of their cars. In 2007, stalls located within the covered market (for example shoe stalls run by Senegalese traders) were leased for roughly 60 rands [approximately \$8] per month, while those located outside the market were let for 100 rands [roughly \$14].

Rental costs tend to be significantly higher for sellers trading opposite the municipal market near the supermarket: similar stalls (produce and stall equipment) are let for 1000 rands [approximately \$140] on the main street and for 600 rands [approximately \$80] on the adjacent street. In such cases, the level of rent is entirely the decision of a private landlord or owner – which does not prevent market stall vendors in the covered market from complaining about the secondary market, deemed to be guilty of unfair competition.

The legitimacy of the presence of African migrants in South Africa remains fragile, creating an urban life under tension, particularly since the urban compromise can never be taken for granted. It is important not to underestimate the frequency of acts of violence committed against foreigners in Yeoville: thefts of market produce, stones thrown at and even shots fired against shops and physical assaults are common acts of violence committed against African immigrants, an issue largely ignored by the local police. In addition to acts of violence, the impact of widespread discourses and practices aimed at de-legitimizing the presence of migrants in Yeoville has created a sense of insecurity. For many migrants, the sense of insecurity means that their professional and migrant situation remains temporary and provisional. Many vendors have little or no life outside work, and never venture out after dark. Where available, migrants take an active part in cultural or religious community activities.

In speaking of the general context of insecurity, migrants often emphasize actions and discourses perceived to be xenophobic or racist and perpetrated by 'black South African'²³ men sometimes referred to as 'Zulus'. As explained by Jean-Didier, a Congolese member of the YSF: 'When they say "crime", the first thing they think of is "foreigner". But they're the first to commit crimes! They say that Nigerians are drug dealers, but there are plenty of

²³ On this issue, see also the groundbreaking paper by Morris (1998).

Nigerian university professors, Nigerian businessmen, Nigerian students...South Africans just don't like us'²⁴.

Migrants often hold stereotypical views of South Africans, vilifying their 'lack of education', their 'brutality' (particularly toward 'their' women), or their 'backwardness', naturalized or (vaguely) related to their collectively suffered historical oppression. Male African migrants interviewed in the course of this research often rejected the widely held assumption that foreigners have tended to compromise the benefits of the struggles of South Africans and that (black) South Africans are those who suffered and not other blacks, who largely reap the benefits of living in South Africa. They also tend to reject discourses stigmatizing their dirtiness, their noisiness, their diseases, the nocturnal disorder they create or even the spectacular increase of criminality they have allegedly generated. Male African migrants tend to describe themselves as educated, as having grown in stature as a result of their migrant experience, and as 'gentle' husbands or companions.

The alleged otherness or alterity of African migrants is based on a double criterion: a linguistic criterion (constantly invoked in describing the need to be viewed as genuine citizens in the case of naturalized foreigners, or in discussing road accidents, when policemen speak to those involved in road conflicts in isiZulu to identify foreigners and to underline the illegitimacy of their demands for justice) and a physical criterion involving racist stereotypes positing South Africans as smaller and more light-skinned than Africans from the rest of the continent, along with all kinds of dress and behavioral indications. 'In fact, people here look at you and say: 'you don't look like a South African, you don't have the right features'²⁵, as one Congolese student stated, touching his face.

In the course of one interview, a street vendor²⁶ from Cameroun gave a detailed account of two traffic incidents that had affected him profoundly and which he deemed to be highly representative of the dangers to which foreigners are subject. By his account, the incident involved the car of a Zimbabwean driver hitting the bumper of one of the shared taxis that criss-cross the city and whose aggressive driving and behavior have become legendary. The taxi driver allegedly stepped out of his car and shot the other driver. The witness insisted on the xenophobic nature of the reaction – a reaction which (by his account) would have been less radical if the other driver had been South African. The witness corroborated his claim by providing an account of an incident in which he himself had been involved while on his way to the fresh produce market at four o'clock in the morning. The interviewee had been slow in changing lanes, which appeared to irritate a taxi driver. At the next red light, the taxi driver got out of his car and began to hurl xenophobic insults at him and to bang the car with his fist. Eventually the taxi passengers also stepped out of the taxi, causing the hostility to rise still further. Blaise believes that he owes his life to two factors. The first is to have had the presence of mind to lock his doors. The second is that one of the travelers recognized him as a very good customer at the fresh produce market, and attempted to defuse the situation by explaining to his compatriots that he knew him and that he was not 'like the others'.

²⁴ Interview with Jean-Didier, chair of Congo Heart of Africa, Yeoville, 08/19/2006.

²⁵ Interview with Jules, a migrant from the RDC, Sandton City Shopping Center, 08/10/2006.

²⁶ Account given during one of the many daily conversations with Blaise and Adèle, two migrants originally from Cameroun and who had recently set up a stall at the market – informal market, Yeoville, August 2007.

A recurrent discourse heard among migrants to account for such behaviors is that black South Africans only recently gained their independence, which may explain why they appear to be so 'backward'. 'It's important to understand that they only gained their independence ten years ago' (1994), as one Senegalese trader insisted, overlooking the specificity of the fight against the apartheid regime.

Conclusion

Because South African managers and executives tend to avoid the disreputable central areas of Johannesburg, the presence of African foreigners in diverse social positions tends to be viewed by local actors as one of the key levers of the planned renovation of Yeoville based on a number of selective conditions converging with a discriminatory migration policy.

In Yeoville, this policy has fostered specific types of inter-ethnic relations characterized by xenophobia and racism. In a relatively complex, heterogeneous and dynamic social fabric (involving formal and informal trading areas, restaurants, leisure spaces, schools, guest houses, mosques and churches), mutual support, cooperation and alliances between migrants of different origins and native populations have become standard practices in work and gender relations and accommodation, and to a lesser extent in local institutions. These relations have resulted in specific social and economic dynamics which, though marginal, remain significant in view of the material and existential needs of a large number of individuals. Urban coexistence is shot through with significant tensions, conflicts, rivalries, discriminations, fear and violence. The mere legitimacy of residents from other African countries to live in the city – a key compromise authorizing the building of peaceful urban coexistence – remains fragile and unequal, and is often challenged by discourses and practices tending toward radical alterity, a process in which institutions have played an ambivalent role.

The material and symbolic combination of peaceful and violent relations observed in the neighborhood produces an 'uncertain inclusion' and an uncertain view of the project of definitive settlement or continued migration. While for some migrants there is significant evidence of inclusion from above, other recent migrants have been treated less favorably. Such treatment may involve never gaining recognition as an immigrant, forever remaining at the threshold, waiting indefinitely for a passage to the West, being subject to escheat or being forced to return to the country of origin.

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