

"We are Gauteng People": Challenging the Politics of Xenophobia in Khutsong, South Africa

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Abstract: This article seeks to shed light on the May 2008 violence against foreign Africans living in South Africa, and the issue of xenophobia more broadly, by examining the case of Khutsong, a poor township on the edge of Johannesburg that did not experience xenophobic attacks. Arguing against prevailing explanations that link xenophobia with poverty and deprivation, this study examines the opposition to xenophobia that developed in Khutsong. It highlights the centrality of a community-based organization, the Merafong Demarcation Forum (MDF), in halting the spread of violence. In its recent struggle against municipal demarcation, the MDF nurtured a collective sense of place that granted primacy to provincial boundaries while downplaying ethnic and national divisions. The article argues for the need to examine local social struggles and their intersections with broader political-economic trends when accounting for the presence or absence of violent xenophobia.

Keywords: xenophobia, South Africa, migration, urban rights, municipal demarcation, social inclusion

Introduction

In May 2008, formal and informal settlements in the poorer parts of large South African cities were wracked by xenophobic violence that left more than 60 people dead and many thousands displaced and homeless (Crush et al 2008; Everett 2009). Many lost all they owned, including the houses and shacks they lived in. The attacks against foreign Africans living in the country deeply shocked the international community and many South Africans themselves.

Several accounts of the events of May 2008 stressed a link between poverty and violence towards foreign migrants, who were seen to be encroaching on locals' already limited resources. Analysts, policy makers, and academics turned their attention to the "hotspots" of the bloodshed, focusing on those areas where foreign nationals were attacked and driven out of the community. Often overlooked in this process were places like Khutsong where violence toward foreigners was absent. That Khutsong—a township on the far outskirts of Greater Johannesburg adjacent to the country's richest gold-mining belt but with high levels of poverty and deprivation—would be a haven of tolerance of non-South African citizens seems to defy our expectations.

Yet probing why xenophobic violence did not occur in Khutsong has the potential to add to our understanding of May 2008, the broader phenomenon of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa, and efforts to prevent its future recurrence. The study thus has implications for South Africa's evolving democracy as migration flows unsettle well accepted and understood parameters of national territory, political authority and identity (Cornelissen 2007; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Gupta and Ferguson 2002). Moreover, the study poses the issue of inclusion in the context of a massive, at times violent, resistance against the state. It therefore responds to Roy's (2009) call to extend critical analysis of social inclusion in specific places.

Khutsong, a township located outside the mining center of Carletonville in Merafong municipality, has seen its share of public violence. From 2005 to 2007, local residents engaged in a pitched cross-border dispute with the central government, which, in late 2005, saw Merafong being incorporated into North West province. Led by local activists in the South African Communist Party (SACP), residents unleashed a wave of protest and revolt. The struggle gained national significance as a major anti-government mobilization in the post-apartheid era (Philp 2009). Commenting on the factors underlying the protests, SACP local chairperson Jomo Mogale said, "We want to fall under Gauteng. There are many problems with service delivery in the North West. In Gauteng we receive attention on time" (News24 20 November 2005). As another Khutsong resident remarked, "[t]he North West is very hungry and poor [and] [t]here are no jobs" (cited in Lekota 2007). One month prior to the April 2009 national elections, the ANC oversaw the return of Merafong to Gauteng.

In this article I examine the struggle over Khutsong's municipal demarcation to consider how this contest with the government created openings for local political leadership and subjectivities that resisted xenophobia. What does this case signify for the possibilities for inclusion in South Africa more broadly? The analysis begins with a discussion of methods, followed by a literature review of the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, particularly material written since 2008. The second part examines Khutsong's history, changing demography and its struggle over demarcation. Against this background, the third part considers potential explanations for the absence of xenophobia in Khutsong. A concluding section reflects on the wider significance of Khutsong's struggle against xenophobia and its implications for inclusion in South African cities.

Methodology

Several accounts of Khutsong's demarcation protests have appeared in the South African news media, but the township has thus far received little scholarly attention.¹ This study relies on media reports to reconstruct the story of the demarcation protests. The analysis also draws on fieldwork conducted in Khutsong in late 2009 and early 2010. Research methods in this study included focused interviews, one-on-one discussions with local leaders and residents, observation of two community planning meetings, two group discussions, and review of documents. Key informants interviewed included leaders of the Merafong Demarcation Forum, the Khutsong Women's Forum, members of the Democratic

Teachers' Union, schoolteachers, and local residents, including South Africans and immigrants of Mozambican, Ethiopian and Somali origin.

Residents interviewed included men and women and represented a range of ages and occupations, though most worked informally. In total, 21 interviews were conducted and two focus group discussions were held in the local Catholic Church and an elementary school. The interviewees were selected through snowball or convenience sampling. Among other questions, the interviewees were asked to discuss their perceptions of the May 2008 violence and how it was avoided in Khutsong. The results are consistent with observations but are not representative of the population at large. Review of census data, academic research, policy documents and municipal development plans complemented the field research.

The author, a white US citizen working in South Africa, pursued the research as part of a broader study on xenophobia and civil society, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. The author worked with a research assistant, Comfort Phokela, a black South African student at the University of Johannesburg whose first language is Tswana, the predominant language in Khutsong. Phokela's familiarity with the setting enabled communication and engagement with residents and leaders. Gaining access to Mozambicans in Khutsong was facilitated by the author's knowledge of Portuguese.

Understanding Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa

Recognition of xenophobia as a social problem in South Africa precedes the May 2008 violence by more than a decade (Croucher 1998; Peberdy 2001).² There is a diverse range of scholarship on xenophobia in South Africa, yet much of the literature examines attitudes and perceptions of immigrants rather than probing underlying causes (Dodson 2010; Neocosmos 2006). Furthermore, little agreement exists on how to meaningfully address violent xenophobia and prevent its future recurrence (Dodson 2010).

Several competing explanations have been given in the literature for the rise of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. Perhaps the most prevalent focuses on economic or material conditions common to areas affected by anti-foreigner violence. In this view, poor South Africans, still mostly black, see foreign Africans as competition for jobs, housing, and other resources and services. These conditions, along with high crime rates that foster violence, serve as factors that translate xenophobic attitudes into violent attacks on foreigners (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). Related to this are gendered dimensions of competition between South Africans and foreigners, in which foreigners are blamed for "stealing local women" (Dodson 2010).

The May 2008 attacks occurred in townships and informal settlements—spatially "marginalized" areas marked by poor living conditions, high unemployment, and exposure to crime and violence—which bolstered economic explanations of xenophobia. Early accounts focused on "hotspots" of the May violence, and many found poverty and deprivation to be the root causes. One prominent example is the state-funded Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which conducted focus groups in areas affected by the violence (HSRC 2008).

Several shortcomings with economic explanations of xenophobia have been identified. First, they cannot explain the specific targets of the attacks. As sociologist Michael Neocosmos (2008) asked, if xenophobia is a problem of the poor and destitute, why were poor foreigners the target rather than, for instance, affluent whites?

Second, there is little correlation between poverty and the locations of attacks. The areas with the highest levels of poverty were not the most violent. While it is often assumed that xenophobic violence pervaded South Africa's poorer urban communities in May 2008, many such places were peaceful (Neocosmos 2008; Sharp 2008). Third, statistically representative surveys have been conducted to investigate South Africans' opinion of foreigners, in particular foreign Africans, showing that South Africans across race, class, gender and political leanings are highly intolerant (Afrobarometer 2009, cited in Dodson 2010; Crush et al 2008). As such, there is no "typical 'xenophobe profile'" (Crush and Pendleton 2007:80). This finding problematizes the notion that certain social groups—particularly the poor and vulnerable—are more prone to xenophobic attitudes than others (see Crush and Ramachandran 2009).

Fourth, often overlooked in analysis of the May violence was the fact that a third of the people killed were South Africans, possibly mistaken for foreigners due to their accent or appearance (Landau 2008). Yet, popular anger also turned against South Africans from peripheral areas and ethnic minorities—such as Pedi from northern Limpopo and Shangaan of the Mpumalanga Lowveld—living in urban townships (Everatt 2009; Misago, Landau and Monson 2009; Sharp 2008). The violence thus targeted not only non-nationals but those deemed outsiders in particular urban areas.

A competing explanation shifts the focus to the state and emerging political ideologies in South Africa. As several authors have suggested, South Africa's redefinition of the boundaries of citizenship since the transition to democracy in 1994 has entailed the creation of a new "other": the non-citizen (Croucher 1998; Misago, Landau and Monson 2009; Nyamnjoh 2006; Peberdy 2001). In this view, a xenophobic discourse that emanates from the highest levels of the ANC-led state, rather than attitudes of the poor, was central in the May 2008 attacks and earlier anti-foreigner violence (Neocosmos 2006, 2008; Sharp 2008).

Several authors have argued that neoliberal state policy was a critical factor in sparking the May 2008 violence (Bond, Ngwane and Amisi 2009; Sharp 2008). The state has privileged the interests of the rising black elite and the long-established white elite in favoring protectionist policies that limit the burden immigrants place on a society with its own development imperatives. While not condoning overt violence, the government has tacitly legitimized and enabled the spread of xenophobia in several ways (Desai 2008; Neocosmos 2008).

First, state agencies such as South African Police Services (SAPS) and Home Affairs have been given license to systematically abuse foreigners while the government looked the other way or was in denial (see Desai 2008; Mosselson 2010; Neocosmos 2008).³ Second, in public statements, officials have used inflated estimates of legal and illegal immigrants (Bouillon 1998; Crush 1997). Senior government ministers and officials have used such figures to support claims of overwhelming "floods" of

immigrants entering the country when explaining lagging delivery of RDP housing,⁴ development and social services (Neocosmos 2006; Nyamnjoh 2006). This political rhetoric inculcates xenophobic attitudes within civil society, such as the need to protect the rights and benefits of citizenship against perceived threats of usurpation from non-citizens (Crush et al 2008; Everett 2009; Nyamnjoh 2006).

Third, elected officials have blamed immigrants for crime, rising unemployment, and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases (Human Rights Watch 1998:4). State officials' use of the term "illegal alien"—which is institutionally sanctioned through policy—adds to the frequent conflation of illegality and immigration in the public sphere (Mosselson 2010). The linking of foreigners with illegality is also disseminated in the media, along with stereotyping of African foreigners as dangerous criminals (Dodson 2010; Jacobs and McDonald 2005). This view elides evidence that African immigrants are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators of criminal activity (Danso and McDonald 2001).

A contrasting political explanation for violent xenophobia has been advanced since the events of May 2008. Misago, Landau and Monson (2009) have argued that in townships and informal settlements lacking legitimate and accountable public leadership, "parallel" leadership structures arose that spearheaded the violence. In their view, the presence of such groups was a key factor in explaining why the attacks on immigrants occurred in particular areas and not in others with similar socio-economic conditions. These parallel structures, which included the Community Policing Forum (CPF) and the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) in Alexandra, were willing to exact the violence to gain legitimacy and earn the trust of community members. Drawing on Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998), Mosselson (2010:649) suggested these groups engaged in a political contest to enhance their status as decisive actors in their communities, and non-citizens served as "vehicles through which this contest was fought out". Through collective violence aimed at foreigners, poor black communities exercised a process of "boundary making" to reinforce their claim to rights as South Africans (Mosselson 2010:650).

Others have found that where the local state is weak but progressive social movements are mobilized, the politics of xenophobia can be effectively challenged. For example, Neocosmos (2008) noted that in the shack settlements in Durban where the popular movement Abahlali baseMjondolo has a strong presence, there were no incidences of xenophobic attacks in May 2008 (also see Gibson 2011; Pithouse 2008). This suggests that literal or symbolic violence toward foreigners is not necessary for constructing citizenship and asserting political rights. It is argued here that while xenophobia is deeply rooted in South African society, explaining why some communities resort to xenophobic violence and others do not requires an understanding of local social struggles and how they intersect with broader macro-economic and political forces.

Historic and Demographic Background

Khutsong, a Tswana word for "place of peace", was founded in 1958 as a satellite township to serve the labor needs of the "whites-only" town of Carletonville, a mining center on the West Rand (Johnston and Bernstein 2007). Migrants from

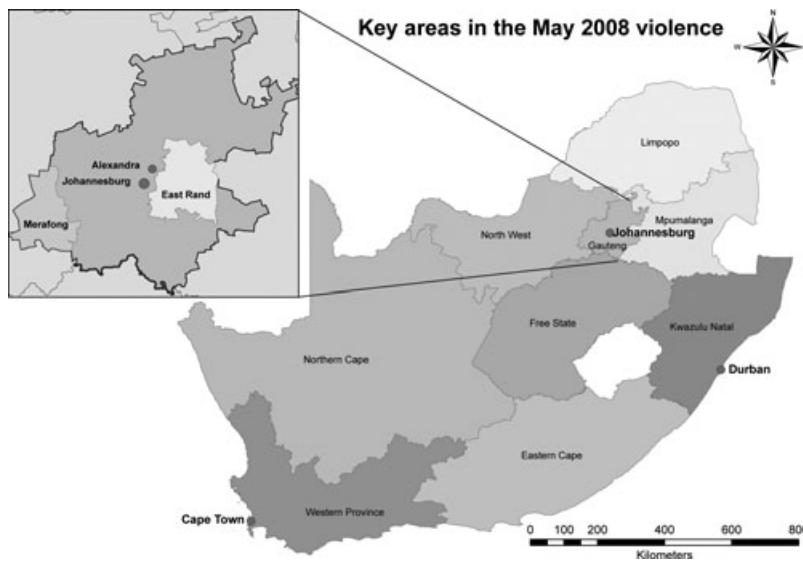


Figure 1: Key areas in the May 2008 violence (source: map prepared by Vincent Masefield, Rhodes University Geography Department)



Figure 2: Merafong City with 2009 Local municipality and provincial boundaries (source: map prepared by Chris Wray, Gauteng City-Region Observatory)

neighboring countries working in mining have a long history in the area, and although exact figures are unavailable, Mozambicans have settled in large numbers in Khutsong since its beginnings (Mistry and Minnaar 2000).

Khutsong forms part of Merafong City Local Municipality, located 64 km southwest of Johannesburg (see Figures 1 and 2). From 1999 to 2005, Merafong was a cross-border municipality that straddled the southwestern corner of Gauteng and

northeast of North West province. As part of local government democratization in the late 1990s, the ANC government appointed a Municipal Demarcation Board in 1999 to draw new jurisdictions for municipal boundaries (Cameron 2006). In several cases, "cross-border municipalities" were demarcated, following the rationale that socio-economically inter-dependent areas that crossed provincial borders should remain intact. However, the ANC found cross-border municipalities to be a failure due to operational difficulties and moved to abolish them in late 2005 (Cameron 2006). Merafong would be consolidated into North West province.

Merafong recorded a population of 210,481 in 2001, increasing to 215,865 in 2007 (Statistics South Africa 2001, 2007). Khutsong had a population of 139,850, or over 60% of the municipality's population, in 2007 (Merafong City Local Municipality 2009). Merafong's economic base is dominated by mining, which contributed 31% of its gross geographic product in 2005, dropping to 28% in 2007. Employment, education levels and living conditions in Khutsong are lower than in Merafong as a whole. In 2001 over 70% of Merafong's population had a household monthly income of R 3200 or less (approximately \$372) (Merafong City Local Municipality 2009). Housing in Khutsong ranges from modest formal housing to self-built shacks in informal settlements. In 2007, a total of 13,061 informal dwelling units were recorded in Merafong, with 11,000 of these (84%) in Khutsong and Khutsong South. Only 326 informal dwellings were found in Carletonville, which had a population of 28,090 (Merafong City Local Municipality 2009).

The mining sector in Merafong has been in decline, reflecting falling international gold prices from 1996 to 2005. However, while Merafong goldmines faced downscaling and closure before 2005, the outlook for mining has since improved (Merafong City Local Municipality 2009:21). Unemployment in Merafong was officially 20.5% in 2007 (Statistics South Africa 2007) but is believed to be higher (Carroll 2006).

Examining Earlier Experiences of Xenophobia in Khutsong

Immigrants have not always enjoyed a peaceful coexistence in Khutsong. Despite a long history of formal mining employment in the area, Mozambicans faced ostracism and abuse by police, authorities, and local residents in the period following 1994.

In the late 1990s, South African researchers documented examples of xenophobia in Khutsong. In a 1998 study by the Institute for Human Rights and Criminal Justice Studies, a range of anti-immigrant symptoms were in evidence in Khutsong, including mockery, extortion, systematic discrimination, and physical assaults (Mistry and Minnaar 2000). The researchers found the vast majority of non-citizens living in the township were Mozambicans. Many described their relationship with local police as "bad" (Mistry and Minnaar 2000:7). In July 2000, a researcher with the Institute, Jabu Dhlamini, conducted focus groups with Mozambicans in Khutsong and found that regardless of legal status, they faced abuse by local authorities, particularly the police. Allegations included cases where following the arrest of foreigners in their homes, police left their front doors open so neighbors

could rifle through and claim their belongings. Sexual abuse of women, especially undocumented women, by police officers was rife. Mozambicans also alleged denial of medical care and inability to report crimes to the police for fear of deportation.

Rising xenophobia in Khutsong paralleled broader macro-economic trends and their intersection with micro-political struggles playing out in the township. During apartheid, foreign miners were insulated from the township population as they mostly lived in mining compounds or hostels. But with the end of influx controls and subsequent downsizing of the mining workforce, many workers left formal employment in the mines to seek informal alternatives in Merafong, Vaal, and Johannesburg townships (Lubkemann 2009). Male labor migration to South African mines had been an institutionalized aspect of Mozambican social life since the early twentieth century (De Vletter 1998; Harries 1994). Following World War II, South Africa rapidly transformed into an industrial society, and manufacturing overtook both mining and agriculture in contribution to national income in the postwar era (Maylam 1990). Increasingly high wages in manufacturing encouraged black South Africans to abandon mine labor in favor of industrial and service jobs, a trend that intensified by the early 1970s (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman 1991; Lubkemann 2009). To compensate, Mozambique became a major source of foreign labor recruitment (De Vletter 1998).

In Khutsong, male Mozambican workers' shift from mine to non-mine forms of labor in the 1990s coincided with broader processes of local socio-economic differentiation as influx control and other apartheid barriers came down. Local residents increasingly felt the presence of Mozambicans as many sought employment and housing in the township (Mistry and Minaar 2000). While some Mozambican men were able to "pass" as South Africans, others became the target of local resentments, particularly for marrying local women (see Dodson 2010). Residence in townships, as opposed to (single-sex) mine compounds, provided far greater opportunities for contact with women and marriage (Lubkemann 2009). The concurrent influx of South African women from rural homelands into urbanized areas increased these opportunities (Posel 1991). Amid the changing material conditions of mine-community relations, Mozambicans faced simmering local resentments that sometimes triggered xenophobia (Mistry and Minnaar 2000).

Responses to the May 2008 Violence in a Mobilized Community

In May 2008, anti-foreigner attacks spread from the Gauteng townships of Alexandra to Diepsloot to working class communities of the East Rand, and then to townships and informal settlements outside Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. Despite the signs and portents, the attacks deeply shocked many South Africans and shook the country's reputation for racial reconciliation (Crush et al 2008; Desai 2008).

Khutsong residents witnessed the disquieting events on the TV news. As the crisis unfolded, the local community leaders invited members of the community to Khutsong Stadium, as they had done repeatedly from 2005 to 2007. "They told us not to be afraid because of what was happening in the townships outside Johannesburg, in Alexandra. They said whatever was happening in Alex would

not happen here," recalled a Mozambican man who has lived in Khutsong for 9 years.

By repudiating xenophobia, community leaders and residents conveyed the idea that their sense of humanity and citizenship does not end at the national borders. The prolonged protests against demarcation, as discussed below, created a sense of unity and common cause in the township. In most cases, immigrants were not viewed as a threat to local interests (Kirshner and Phokela 2010). In late May 2008 community leaders from Khutsong joined the newly formed Coalition against Xenophobia (CAX). Spearheaded by the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), CAX criticized the ANC's restrictive immigration policies and discourse as inciting xenophobia. The Coalition staged a 6000-person anti-xenophobia march in central Johannesburg on 24 May. Civil society leaders from Khutsong signed a "Pledge of Solidarity against Xenophobia", drafted by CAX and endorsed by its 50 member organizations (CAX 2008).

Several recent immigrants said in interviews that they chose to move to Khutsong following May 2008 because they saw it as relatively safe and tolerant. Siyat Ahmed, a Somali shopkeeper, explained in an August 2009 interview: "We came here when the trouble was over and we saw everything was okay, that it was safe. We talked with the elders, and that is when we opened our shop." Rafael Larga, a Mozambican man who operates a fruit stand under a canopy outside his home relocated to Khutsong from Alexandra after May 2008. His father had worked in a goldmine near Carletonville, and "[h]e knew that it was more peaceful here". Rafael noted there are less job opportunities in Khutsong than in Alexandra, where he held relatively well paid jobs in construction. However, he does not plan to return: "I have nothing left there."

The Demarcation of Khutsong⁵

From 2005 through 2007, Khutsong residents mobilized to demand the right to remain in Gauteng in opposition to the government's plans to consolidate Khutsong into North West province. The unrest grew into a sustained mobilization against the state. In October 2006, less than 5% of Khutsong's registered voters cast ballots in the municipal elections. Students and teachers boycotted school and resisted efforts from local councillors to coax them back to the classroom. Protesters burnt tires, looted shops, destroyed property, and barricaded roads in an attempt to make the township ungovernable. Although it sometimes deployed violence, the campaign represented the coming together of citizens' groups to resist what they considered an undemocratic government planning initiative. This section examines the aims and methods of the anti-demarcation campaign, particularly its efforts to break down local divisions between citizens and non-citizens.

In the buildup to the 2006 municipal elections, the ANC government announced Khutsong would be moved from Gauteng to North West province. This was not the first time that Khutsong's administrative status would be plunged into uncertainty. Under apartheid, the National Party and the Bophuthatswana administration—one of the so-called Bantustans—tried unsuccessfully to detach Khutsong from the Transvaal (later Gauteng province) (Johnston and Bernstein 2007). In the 1960s,

geologists linked subterranean dolomite formations to residential property damage in the township. Provincial officials drew up a relocation plan in 2000, but it was never implemented (Johnston and Bernstein 2007).

The proposed transfer of Merafong was part of a broader effort to phase out cross-border municipalities. The rationale was to improve local government efficiency by reducing duplication of functions and boosting inter-governmental coordination (Ndletyana 2007). The Constitution's Twelfth Amendment Act of 2005 gave legislative support for eliminating cross-border municipalities (Ndletyana 2007). The government's credibility, however, was marred by inadequate consultation with the local community (Lekota 2007; Ndletyana 2007).

The ruling ANC appeared to have settled the matter, but it soon issued a series of contradictory statements. In late August 2005, the ANC Minister for Provincial and Local Government, Sidney Mufamadi, indicated that Merafong would be incorporated into North West. Following this pronouncement, the Merafong mayoral committee stated Merafong would stay within Gauteng. In November 2005, the portfolio committees for Local Government of both Gauteng and North West legislatures diverged from the central government by supporting Merafong's inclusion in the West Rand District Municipality of Gauteng. In its recommendation, the committee cited the results of an impact assessment and public hearings on the issue (Gauteng Legislature 2005). But on 5 December, going against the views of its own expert committee, the Gauteng legislature approved a bill allowing Merafong to be transferred to North West (Benjamin 2005; Ndletyana 2007).

Khutsong residents' opposition to the administrative transfer was rooted in several interconnected factors. First, they viewed the province to which they were being relocated as rural, poorly resourced, and less developed than Gauteng. In contrast, Gauteng—South Africa's wealthiest province and home to its financial and industrial hub, Johannesburg—was seen as providing better access to social services. In particular, the hope of new housing projects dimmed once Khutsong was transferred to North West. Second, many residents had economic ties and identified with Gauteng. Activist Mapotha Nkutha explained that far more of Khutsong's workers commute to jobs in Gauteng than North West. The North West provincial capital of Mafikeng is physically distant from Khutsong, and transport links are limited.⁶ Third, the demarcation would ignore local mineworkers' historic contribution to Gauteng's economy. Jomo Mogale stated, "The people who built up Gauteng through their labor on the mines must be recognized as part of the province."⁷

Khutsong residents staged peaceful protests leading up to the National Council of Provinces' (NCOP) demarcation decision in December 2005. Activists in the Young Communist League (YCL) and the local branch of the South African Communist Party (SACP) spearheaded the protests. They did not yield the desired official explanation of the demarcation policy and public input in the process (Johnston and Bernstein 2007).

At this stage, the SACP and YCL activists formed the Merafong Demarcation Forum (MDF), a democratic organization that galvanized protest actions. Jomo Mogale, a schoolteacher, was elected by MDF members to chair the Forum. Its members included church leaders, business owners, taxi drivers' associations, and representatives of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) and the

National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), two of the largest in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the ANC-affiliated trade union federation. The Forum also included party activists aligned with Pan African Congress (PAC) and United Democratic Movement (UDM).

The conflict intensified as the NCOP announced its demarcation plan. On 2 November, MDF activists organized a stay-away, and protestors barricaded major intersections of the township with burning tires, wrecked cars and tree branches. Some protestors reportedly stoned vehicles attempting to leave the township. Local schools followed the stay away, and matriculation exams were cancelled (*Sunday Times* 13 November 2005) while 27 youths were arrested for looting shops (*Independent On-Line* 3 November 2005). The next day, residents set the municipal building on fire, looted shops, barricaded roads, and dismantled public phone booths. The MDF convened a meeting of roughly 3000 people in the stadium, and 30 youths were arrested for looting (Ndaba and Maphumulo 2005).

The protests continued unabated for the next week. A crowd petrol-bombed several councilors' houses, prompting the local police to send reinforcements, and 14 councilors fled to the safety of a nearby mine compound (Ndaba 2005). MDF leaders met with Mufamadi but failed to resolve the worsening conflict (Johnston and Bernstein 2007). The MDF organized a protest march, and a group of youths burned tires alongside it. Police used rubber bullets to disperse crowds while thousands gathered in the stadium. One week later, residents convened in the stadium and marched to the police station to deliver a memorandum to local police and councilors (Ndaba and Maphumulo 2005).⁸

Over the next 2 years, the protests grew into a tenacious movement of resistance. While occasionally flaring into violence, the campaign nurtured political consciousness through direct action. According to Mogale, organizers held a mass meeting every Sunday for over a year. A group of women organized the Khutsong Women's Forum as a branch of the MDF, and students were active in calling for the release of arrested youth.⁹ Residents were in open rebellion of the ruling coalition with estimates of at least 6000 taking part in protests (Thomson 2006). Protestors burnt ANC membership cards and T-shirts with then-President Mbeki's picture, vandalized shops and schools, and torched municipal vehicles. They also destroyed the public library and damaged the stadium and community hall (Ndaba and Maphumulo 2005).

To underscore their dissent, the MDF organized a boycott of the March 2006 local government elections. A mere 232 of nearly 30,000 registered voters cast ballots, and 12 of these were spoiled (*Independent On-Line* 1 March, 2006).¹⁰ Khutsong's 10 local councilors decamped to mine houses to avoid ongoing threats of violence (Carroll 2006). Following the boycotted elections, the MDF changed tack and invited a human rights-oriented legal team, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), to challenge the constitutional amendment on municipal demarcation in South Africa's Constitutional Court. The LHR sought to show that the government neglected its constitutional obligation of public involvement in Merafong's re-demarcation process. In so doing, LHR used the Matatiele court case—in which residents of Matatiele opposed transfer from Kwa-Zulu Natal to the Eastern Cape—as precedent (Lekota 2007). Despite these efforts, LHR director Rudolph Jansen said, "The solution

in Khutsong is not a legal one but a political one" (cited in Lekota 2007). The Court's ruling dismissed the application, stating it was a political matter to be addressed by elected officials. This decision took the initiative away from LHR, a more traditional non-governmental organization, and returned it to the MDF-led mobilization.

At the heart of Khutsong's civil unrest was the government's exclusion of the community from decision-making processes that affected their living environment. Khutsong residents believed that concealed high-level deals occurred while their concerns were ignored. Neither local nor central government used existing channels to explain the policy to residents or seek their input, thereby seeming to govern by decree. As Mogale commented to me in September 2009, this was a "serious blunder". Exacerbating tensions were rumored offers to Merafong's mayor of appointment as provincial official (MEC) in North West (Johnston and Bernstein 2007:40).

The government's top-down and seemingly arbitrary decisions animated the protests, while creating broad local support. MDF activists stepped into the breach left by local government to consult with and organize residents. It did more than mobilize protests; rather the MDF acted as a mediating institution that sought to channel local concerns to the state. When it found these avenues blocked, the MDF used direct action and civil disobedience, engaging in "rebellious citizenship" (Roy 2009). At the height of the struggle, the MDF attracted crowds of some 20,000 residents to Khutsong's stadium (Philp 2009).

Such mediating institutions, however, are often fraught with their own exclusions (Roy 2009). While the MDF maintained a democratic culture during the protests, there is evidence of disagreement over the use of violent tactics and vandalism (Thomson 2006). Moreover, while many immigrants in Khutsong participated in the campaign, some did not, perhaps because they felt disempowered. This suggests uncertainty over whether the MDF served all residents. These tensions intensified following Khutsong's official return to Gauteng in March 2009.

Explaining the Opposition to Xenophobia in Khutsong

Material Demands, Service Delivery and Geographic Scale

A possible explanation for the limited xenophobia in Khutsong lies in the articulating of material demands in the anti-demarcation struggle. Residents' anger targeted the government rather than the presence of foreign migrants. The protests in Khutsong have been described in the press as a "service delivery protest" (Philp 2009). Its leaders disagreed, stating the campaign was really about a "lack of respect" and failed government accountability (Lekota 2007). Nevertheless, concerns about poor service delivery in North West contributed to the widespread opposition to the demarcation.

Since the late 1990s, an upsurge of community-based protests around poor service delivery and commodification of basic services has affected South African cities. These protests have erupted in townships and informal settlements across the country, primarily targeting local councilors (Sinwell et al 2009; Gibson 2011). In the affected areas, the protests have heightened tensions and delegitimized local

political leadership (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). The HSRC's (2008) report found a link between the service delivery protests and xenophobic violence. The report stated, "The nature of the resistance to foreign migrants stems mainly from local economic and public resource competition" (HSRC 2008:5–6). It noted "the spatial manner in which foreign migrants have settled in South Africa, ie integrated within existing and largely depressed communities" (5–6). The report added that working age men who are struggling to find employment feel "most directly threatened by the migration of large numbers of 'working men' from other parts of the continent" (5–6).

Khutsong offers no exception to these local dynamics. As in other protests over services, "service delivery" is conceptualized as access to public resources, and the implications these have for livelihoods, democracy and development (Ruiters 2006; also see Watts 2004). An important difference in the Khutsong case relates to the indirect way in which protestors demanded improved services. While it may be interpreted as a service delivery protest, the movement's more immediate goal was to rejoin Gauteng, the province with which most residents identified. Evidencing the importance of spatial scale in struggles for social justice (see Cox 1998; MacLeod and Goodwin 1999), while most service delivery protests targeted local governments and councilors, the Khutsong rebellion widened the arena to the central government. This was the only sphere of the state that could enact protestors' demands for reincorporation into Gauteng. Given these conditions, local residents tended not to view foreign migrants as unwanted competitors.

Civic Leadership in Khutsong's Mobilization

The influence of a representative and well educated civic leadership offers another potential explanation for the limited xenophobia in Khutsong. Local elected officials—the municipal mayor and 10 local councilors—were largely absent in Khutsong's civic upheaval. Instead, a group of ordinary citizens provided alternative leadership, and they framed the demarcation issue and shaped the response. Jomo Mogale, a 50-year-old high-school history teacher and former councilor, Paul Ncwane, a former football star, and Siphiwe Nkutha, a 26-year-old activist were key figures in organizing the protests (Philp 2009). Nkutha, the YCL local secretary and one of the MDF founders, said the Forum didn't really lead; rather community members took up the fight alongside it. Mogale called it "a practical demonstration of democracy."¹¹

According to its leaders, the MDF acted morally in organizing against xenophobia. Nkutha explained to me that the MDF sought to "set an example to the country" by rejecting xenophobia.¹² To achieve this, it encouraged solidarity and tolerance among township residents. The Forum communicated this message effectively to local residents in mass meetings and in smaller strategy sessions. The mass meetings meant that leadership faced pressure to be accountable to activists and ordinary residents, who they interacted with on a daily basis. In addition, the campaign offered an entry point for local political participation for many residents, including non-citizens. In a group discussion at Xlangabeza School in August 2009, an elementary schoolteacher noted, "The idea of separation was not there. We

engaged with foreigners, and they supported us." As Mogale similarly told me, "Our democracy should not only be representative, it should be participatory."

This moral stance was supported by pan-Africanist ideology. Mogale explained in an interview on 2 September 2009 that the MDF passed a community resolution to never harm foreigners.

"We said 'these are our brothers and sisters.' We told people that blaming foreigners was morally wrong. After all, we owe Africans a debt of gratitude as repayment for their sacrifices during the anti-apartheid struggle and for their contribution to building our mining industry. It helps that I am a history teacher. [President] Zuma stayed in Mozambique during the liberation struggle, and [SACP leader and anti-apartheid activist assassinated in 1993] Chris Hani was in Zimbabwe. We made these examples to show people we have a history with neighboring countries in the struggle."

Senior officials, including former president Mbeki, have invoked similar pan-African rhetoric but generally have not connected it to action (see Landau 2006:128–9). Building on this appeal for solidarity, ordinary residents explained in interviews that accepting immigrants stemmed not only from individual morality, but from a sense of commitment to the local community. MDF leaders called residents into the stadium using loudspeakers from an old *bakkie* (pickup), and they stressed the importance of defending immigrants' rights as a civic duty. As one Tswana-speaking resident said, "The leaders told us that foreigners are also residents of Khutsong."¹³

Alongside these moral concerns, however, activist leaders also had tactical reasons for not scapegoating foreigners in the community. In a pragmatic sense, Mogale, Nkutha and other leaders believed xenophobia would cause the movement to lose focus. Furthermore, recent immigrants might not have felt a stake in the boundary dispute as prior residents did. As the protests spread, however, protection might have been offered in exchange for public support of the campaign (cf Park 2009). One respondent noted that by marching alongside protestors, he believed that looters were less likely to target his shop. Leaders realized that gaining immigrants' buy-in increased the movement's ranks and its political leverage to negotiate with the government.¹⁴

This experience contrasts with Misago, Landau and Monson's (2009:38) finding that in areas where anti-foreigner violence occurred in May 2008, "there was an absence of official, institutionalized leadership" and parallel structures emerged to "fill gaps". The authors added "In affected areas, these structures completely appropriate the authority that should belong to local government ..." While the MDF similarly filled a void of local authority, its leaders were elected rather than self-appointed, as was often the case in areas affected by the May 2008 violence (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009:38). Yet, the MDF's commitment to non-violence appears contradictory—on the one hand, they used violent tactics in the demarcation struggle but repudiated violence toward outsiders. This complex response indicates a strategic dimension of not victimizing immigrants in Khutsong.

The Significance of Locality, Boundaries and Belonging

A third explanation for the limited xenophobia in Khutsong lies in the way the movement encouraged a collective sense of place around which opposition to the government's plans could build. Although the struggle in Khutsong emphasized one

type of border—that of province—activists deliberately downplayed other borders based on nationality and ethnicity. This notion of inclusion was created within a community-based protest coalition, which strove for cohesion to increase political leverage against the state. In this regard, activists practiced what planning theorists have referred to as “network power”, defined as “power that grows as it is shared and is not a zero-sum game” (Innes 2004:13; Irazábal 2009). Rather than viewing immigrants as competition, their participation strengthened a shared cause.

This de-emphasis of national divisions might also be interpreted as a reaction against the state and its hardening of territorial boundaries (Cornelissen 2007; Landau 2008). State officials overlooked the place-based identity emerging in Khutsong in the effort to boost administrative rationality, eliminate cross-border municipalities, and redistribute the population within national space. In contrast, township dwellers viewed provincial borders not as a technocratic issue but as decisive for their living conditions. The demarcation was seen a type of displacement from Gauteng through the bureaucratic redrawing of boundaries. This territorial focus served as a basis for residents to assert the legitimacy of their demands. Furthermore, Khutsong’s history of geographical ambivalence and exclusion from Gauteng might have enhanced empathy to others—migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary sojourners—and their struggles in staking a claim to a place.¹⁵

While not always successful, local leaders created alliances within civil society by building a unified identity as residents of the area. This new category of belonging exceeded other divisions, such as citizens and non-citizens. Accordingly, how “we” was defined, what its boundaries were, and who were the “outsiders” differed from sites where foreigners were attacked (Nyamnjoh 2006). The central role of left political parties—particularly the SACP and YCL—in building the MDF and its popular struggle suggests that a collective sense of place was undergirded by historical and contemporary forms of class solidarity. As discussed below, the history of migratory work in the mines and union organizing traditions have strengthened class-based local identities.

Evolving Relations between South Africans and Foreign Nationals in Khutsong

Khutsong’s historical linkages to the West Rand mines likely added further strength to residents’ challenge to xenophobia during and after May 2008. As noted, Khutsong was founded in the 1950s to supply labor to Carletonville and the nearby goldmines. As in other South African mining regions, the mines depended on large numbers of international and domestic migrants (Crush 2001; De Vletter 1998; Harries 1994). The local branch of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), a COSATU affiliate that formed in 1982, has figured prominently in Merafong’s civic life. NUM’s membership is open to mineworkers regardless of nationality, and the union has espoused a nonracial and non-nationalist philosophy (Park 2009). NUM sought to construct solidarity among its members to oppose the powerful mining industry and its attempts to divide workers along ethnic and national lines. The union was highly successful at this, particularly during the apartheid era when “racial

despotism" served as a common enemy (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout 2008:285). Despite recent challenges, the NUM has fostered collective bonds between citizens and non-citizens in the mining workforce (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout 2008:285; Moodie 2009).¹⁶

Given the male-dominated character of labor migration to the West Rand mines, many foreign workers became integrated in Khutsong, often marrying South African women, speaking Tswana or isiZulu, and setting up permanent households. As mentioned earlier, the mining industry has faced restructuring since the 1990s (De Vletter 1998; Moodie 2009). When miners were retrenched, many relocated from mine compounds to townships to seek opportunities in the flourishing informal economy.

Although the majority of foreign migrants in Khutsong are Mozambicans, there has been a recent influx of Ethiopians and Somalis in the township. Many of the newer arrivals work in retail, running small grocery stores located in shacks and operating "tuck shops" in shipping containers.¹⁷ A Somali shopkeeper said there are now six Somali-owned shops in Khutsong. Some residents believe these newcomers undermine local small businesses by undercutting prices and not hiring locals. The recent immigrants are often considered to be less assimilated into local culture than Mozambicans. Nevertheless, several Somali and Ethiopian respondents said they chose to live in Khutsong because it seemed relatively safe and secure.

Siyat Ahmed, a Somali shopkeeper who has lived in Khutsong for 1 year (and in South Africa for 2 years) said in an August 2009 interview that

[p]eople here do not discriminate. They are very friendly, especially the elders. Young boys sometimes when they come back from school throw stones, but that is not a major thing. We feel comfortable and safe here.

Ahmed noted that his shop, which he rents from a black South African, was once a bakery and was damaged in the demarcation protests. He recalled an incident in which a local customer, a teenage male, had bought a bottle of paraffin (kerosene). The customer later brought it back and claimed it was mixed with water:

We told him this was not water but paraffin. But even if it was water we don't manufacture paraffin, we just buy it. We told him to bring it back so that we can refund him then, but he started ... There were four of them and they started breaking things.

The shopkeeper phoned the police, who arrived quickly and the youths dispersed.

When asked about participation in the demarcation campaign, immigrants offered mixed responses. Ahmed admitted he did not clearly understand the issue. "I don't know a lot about this country. South Africa is South Africa for me. I can't see the difference between being part of Gauteng or North West." Others admitted there was a degree of coercion to take part in the protests.

Some immigrants, however, felt sufficiently invested in the demands that they marched alongside other residents. Rafael Larga, a Mozambican who lived in Khutsong for 9 years said, "We did not want to be part of North West. We are Gauteng people." He added, "[w]e marched on our own accord" because it would improve access to services. A teacher at Khutsong's Xlangabeza School expressed to me that foreigners were "united with us against incorporation into North West".

She said both South African and immigrant pupils in her classes were keenly aware of the protests going on around them. Despite this evidence of broad participation, an elderly Xhosa-speaking woman saw foreign migrants as disengaged as they were transitory: "they were just doing their own things. They were not helping us."¹⁸

The discrepancy suggests the need to distinguish between Mozambicans and more recent immigrants to the area, particularly Ethiopians and Somalis. Based on information gleaned from interviews, the former tend to differ from the latter in terms of length of residence, extent of contact with prior residents, and along ethnic, cultural and religious lines. Given their longer residence in the township and close cultural proximity to black South Africans, many Mozambicans have developed personal relationships, a grasp of local politics, and social investments in the community (cf Lubkemann 2009). In addition to the common experience of mining labor and union membership, social contact between Mozambicans and long-term residents in Khutsong occurs within neighborhoods and in local *shebeens*, or informal bars.¹⁹ Social ties and spaces of interaction have likely encouraged Mozambicans to join in the anti-demarcation protests while serving as a deterrent to xenophobia (Crush and Ramachandran 2009). In contrast, many of the newer immigrants lack these spaces of interaction. Many also arrived after the demarcation dispute had largely concluded, and some came after the May 2008 violence.

When local residents talk about "migrants" and "foreigners", they may not refer to Mozambicans, who are in a sense viewed as cultural insiders. Mozambicans also appear to downplay their national identity while emphasizing local allegiance to Khutsong and Gauteng, a stance referred to elsewhere as "tactical cosmopolitanism" (Landau 2006). Nor have Mozambicans organized migrant associations in the township.²⁰ In contrast, the integration of Somalis and Ethiopians is an ongoing challenge, as social interaction with other residents has been limited. As MDF leader Siphiwe Nkutha noted, "The issue of xenophobia is around the Somalis because they did not yet familiarize themselves with the people."

Conclusion

In much of the recent analysis of xenophobia in South Africa, the anti-foreigner discourses of the post-apartheid state and society are found to perpetuate and reproduce the exclusions of apartheid, "scaled up from the intra-national to the international level" (Dodson 2010:12). Mosselson (2010) argued that May 2008 violence was a means of constructing citizenship among those who occupy precarious social, economic, and political positions in the "new" South Africa. Similarly, Misago, Landau and Monson (2009) found that "parallel" organizations in poor urban areas with a weak or non-existent state presence filled a vacuum by exacting violence on foreigners. This strengthened these groups' legitimacy and advanced certain political or personal goals.

Despite prior instances of xenophobia in the 1990s, local leaders and residents in Khutsong stemmed the spread of violent xenophobia during and after May 2008. Khutsong's experience shows that challenging the state can be achieved without resorting to extreme chauvinism and the violent exclusion of outsiders. Local residents rejected the government's initiative of municipal re-demarcation

as undemocratic and harmful to their interests. The top-down model of decision making sparked mistrust in Khutsong that erupted in civil unrest. The MDF, a civil society organization, stepped into the breach to contest the government's plans. Protest leaders framed the issue as one in which the state at all levels ignored local residents' concerns and lacked their consent.

Local civic leaders framed demands without scapegoating foreigners. While making moral appeals, the MDF had important tactical reasons for countering xenophobia. Given the scale of the protests, which were aimed at the central government as well as local councilors, the participation of non-nationals increased leverage and public attention, while broadening the arena of contestation. Tolerance of immigrants was also strengthened by Khutsong's historical linkages to the mining industry, migrant labor, and non-nationalist unionizing traditions. This lent a sense of class solidarity along with local identities around residence in Gauteng that emerged in the demarcation struggle. Drawing on all of these factors, the MDF leaders ensured that amid a struggle over provincial borders, new borders against non-citizens were avoided.

In conclusion, this article has suggested the experience of the demarcation dispute forged patterns of inclusion in Khutsong that enabled activists and residents to challenge xenophobia. The study highlights the importance of examining local social struggles and their intersections with broader political-economic dynamics in explaining the presence of xenophobia in specific places. Rather than blaming the poor for xenophobia (Neocosmos 2008), we must understand it as a deeply rooted phenomenon in South African society and elsewhere, and that it is not merely a reaction to wider political and economic processes but is also shaped by local forms of social struggle.

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Endnotes

¹ Three exceptions are Park's (2009) study of anti-government revolt in Alexandra and Khutsong, Johnston and Bernstein's (2007) report on township civil unrest, and Ndletyana's (2007) study of the 2006 municipal elections in cross-border municipalities.

² *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines xenophobia as a "morbid dislike of foreigners" (Crush and Pendleton 2007).

³ See Neocosmos (2008:588) and Mosselson (2010:646–7) for examples and discussion of the South African police using their state-sanctioned authority to conduct warrantless searches, destroy refugee identification documents and asylum-seekers' papers, avoid intervening to help foreign migrants when attacked by criminals, and encourage members of communities to "uproot" and "round up" "illegal" immigrants.

⁴ The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 provided publicly subsidized housing for historically disadvantaged groups generally in peripheral urban areas and distant from nodes of economic opportunities.

⁵ This section draws heavily from Kirshner and Phokela (2010), a case study for the South African Civil Society and Xenophobia project funded by Atlantic Philanthropies.

- ⁶ Interview with author, 13 August 2009.
- ⁷ Interview with author, 2 September 2009.
- ⁸ Several respondents noted that local police officers sympathized with protestors so the North West government brought in police from other jurisdictions.
- ⁹ Pearl Khanyile, interview with author, 13 August 2009.
- ¹⁰ In comparison, 13,422 voters cast ballots in the 2000 municipal elections, a turnout of 57% (Johnston and Bernstein 2007).
- ¹¹ Interview with author, 2 September 2009.
- ¹² Interview with author, 2 September 2009.
- ¹³ Tswana-speaking woman aged 55, interview with author, 3 September 2009 (translated by Comfort Phokela).
- ¹⁴ There is evidence that Khutsong was not fully immune to xenophobia during the demarcation struggle. One report stated that in 2007, anti-government protests turned violent and several Somali-owned trading stores were looted (IRIN 2008, cited in Park 2009; Seale 2008). This appears to be an isolated incident.
- ¹⁵ In contrast, see Geschiere and Nyaminjoh (2000) on "autochthony" as a form of boundary making, parochialism, and social exclusion amid political liberalization and globalization in an African context. The authors draw strong European parallels, such as the *Front National* in France.
- ¹⁶ These challenges include new forms of competition and upward mobility, downsizing, mine closures, and subcontracting. See Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout (2008).
- ¹⁷ The tuck shops, which dot the landscape of South African townships and informal settlements, typically offer cell phone "airtime" and other everyday items.
- ¹⁸ Xhosa-speaking woman aged 65, interview with author, 20 August 2009 (translated by Comfort Phokela).
- ¹⁹ The Muslim faith of Somalis in Khutsong includes dietary restrictions on meat and alcohol that limit the opportunities for interacting with black South Africans in local pubs and shebeens. While traditional Mozambican food and social practices differ from those of South Africans, they do not form part of a religious code that governs behavior.
- ²⁰ Scholars have found Mozambicans are less likely than other African immigrants (such as Nigerians or Congolese) to form migrant associations or engage in collective action in Johannesburg (Vidal 2010).

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