

Title: Socio-Spatial Politics and Xenophobia in South African Townships

South Africa is an economic hub in southern Africa and has witnessed a surge of immigrants from different regions of the world, the bulk coming from war-torn countries and neighboring Zimbabwe. Despite post-apartheid South Africa being a signatory to several international conventions relating to forced migration and refugee protection (Butler, 2001; Handmaker & Parsley, 2001), various forms of xenophobic intolerance and violence have become manifest among some sections of the South African citizenry. Manifestations of xenophobia are not only found in the South African context but are a pervasive issue worldwide. In countries across Europe, right-wing political parties have assumed xenophobic positions (Kopyciok & Silver, 2021; Taras, 2009, 2012; Vrsanka et al., 2017). The South African case is instructive because it allows exploring how manifestations of xenophobia violate human rights and undermine social cohesion, peaceful co-existence, and good governance in what has been called a 'post-conflict' country. Xenophobia has often be interpreted as in part resulting from the disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment of economically marginalized sections of society (Crush, 2001; Crush & Chikanda, 2015; Crush & Pendleton, 2004; Desai & Walsh, 2010; Dodson & Oelofse, 2000; Hickel, 2014; Landau & Monson, 2008; Neocosmos, 2010; Palmary, 2002; Steinberg, 2012; Tevera, 2013; Vale, 2002; von Holdt, 2013). There are clear indications that this also holds true for present-day South Africa, especially the (formally racially segregated) urban 'townships'. Regarding the South African context, this study begins from the additional premises that, firstly, xenophobic attitudes, that often culminate in physical violence, are also a product and manifestation of the institutionalization, habitualization, and instrumentalization of fear of 'the (African) migrant', and secondly, that it needs to be studied with a view to the socio-spatial politics characterizing this country. More particularly, the project analyses why township settlements in South Africa have become a breeding ground for xenophobic violence. The manifestations of and experiences with xenophobia vary across geographical areas so that what applies to one place might not apply to another one. The scholarly and policy importance of studying xenophobic violence in present- day South Africa lies in its recent history and the socio-political fallout resulting from it. The proposed study, therefore, intends to study the social, political, and moral economies of townships in South Africa. I argue that certain forms of xenophobia in these contexts have been institutionalized and instrumentalized, thereby engendering a habitualized type of micro-politics that is both divisive and unifying for township residents. The symbolic and physical instrumentalization and institutionalization of xenophobic violence draws on discourses by township residents, community leaders, politicians and some local media outlets that portray (African) immigrants as undesirable elements of society. The study's basic premise is that people's interrelations in urban social spaces are multifaceted, and that differences in these interrelations must be examined in detail to understand why xenophobic violence is more prevalent in some township areas than in others. At the same time, townships are riddled with power contestations by vastly differing individual, institutional and social group interests. The micro-politics ensuing from this constellation have not been given adequate attention in accounts of xenophobic violence in South Africa (and globally). In this study, I move beyond space as an abstract concept to examine how specific socio-spatially organized political processes are connected to xenophobic violence and the re-imagination of post-xenophobic urbanity.