

XENOPHOBIA, CRIMINALITY AND VIOLENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP: VIOLENCE AGAINST SOMALI SHOPKEEPERS IN DELFT SOUTH, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Violence against Somali shopkeepers is often cited as evidence of xenophobic attitudes and violence in South Africa. However, as argued in this article, it is not necessarily the case that such violence is driven by anti-foreigner sentiment. Instead, as illustrated in the case of Delft, a poor, mixed-race area in the City of Cape Town, violence against spaza shopkeepers may also be explained in terms of criminal activities and economic competition in the form of 'violent entrepreneurship'. This argument is made drawing on a survey of over 100 spaza shopkeepers, a household survey, police statistics, and interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders living in Delft. The key insight is that despite a recent history of intense economic competition in the spaza market in which foreign shopkeepers have come to dominate, levels of violent crime against foreign shopkeepers, 80 per cent of whom are Somali, are not significantly higher than against South African shopkeepers. In addition, while South African shopkeepers openly resent the Somali advent, most consumers remain indifferent to their presence and certainly prefer the lower prices. While our findings cannot be generalised beyond this case, they do alert us to the importance of locating arguments about xenophobia in the wider context of crime and violence in South Africa, as well as paying close attention to the local particularities that can turn general sentiment into xenophobic action.

Keywords: anti-foreigner sentiment, criminality, Somali shopkeepers, violent entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years there have been violent attacks against immigrant shopkeepers in urban townships and informal settlements throughout South Africa. The violence represents an intensification of hostility rather than new phenomena, as isolated attacks against immigrants in South Africa date back to about 1994 (Bekker et al. 2009: 16; Crush 2008: 44–54). From about 2006, the number of immigrant shopkeepers killed has increased significantly, with Somalis particularly affected. Indeed, according to the Somali Association of South Africa, at least 28 Somali nationals were killed in the province of the Western Cape in 2006, the majority of who were working in *spaza* shops¹ (Bseiso 2006; Ndenze 2006). The violence towards immigrant shopkeepers intensified in 2008, but was overshadowed by the wide-scale xenophobic attacks that swept the country in May and June. These attacks saw 62 people killed, including 21 South Africans, nearly 700 injured, and thousands forced to flee their homes and businesses (Everett 2011: 8). The attacks also drew wide-scale international media coverage and condemnation from the South African government, which was blindsided by these events.

The xenophobic wave of 2008 has been described as a ‘sudden thunderstorm’ reflecting a contingent combination of a particular set of socio-political conditions (Everett 2011: 10–11), including an anti-foreigner set of attitudes described as ‘widespread’ and ‘vitriolic’ (Crush 2008). The role of identities and bigotry in determining the rationale for engaging in violence is strongly emphasised in much of the literature that seeks to explain the reasons for the xenophobic attacks (Crush 2008; IOM 2009; Landau 2009). These studies provide valuable insights at the macro-level and help to highlight the gap between national policy positions (which strongly emphasise the rights of both citizens and immigrants) and grassroots expectations for group-based entitlement and advantages in the provision of state welfare and economic opportunities, as well as expectations of the state to regulate immigration.

While appeals to xenophobia may help to explain the readiness of South Africans to oppose the rights of immigrants, these arguments are insufficient to explain the particular forms of violence and the targeting of specific groups of immigrants like Somali shopkeepers (for a similar arguments see IOM 2009; Nieftagodien 2011; Steinberg 2008). The forms of the violence against shopkeepers, and in particular the micro-context in which the violence occurs on a chronic basis, may be better understood against a background of widespread criminality, including forms of ‘violent entrepreneurship’ linked to economic competition in the informal economy. In this regard many authors have already emphasised the importance of the struggle for resources – real or perceived – including access to low-cost housing, jobs and economic and business opportunities, notably within the informal markets that provide goods and services (see Hadland 2008a and b; IOM 2009). In the Western Cape context, a number of studies (Afrika Unite 2007; Department of the Premier 2007; Knowledge Link Services 2008) highlight the competition between South African (hereafter local)

and immigrant (hereafter foreigner) storekeepers for share of the *spaza* market as a significant contributing factor in the escalation of xenophobic tensions and reasons for some of the incidences of violence towards immigrant groups. Indeed, research done in Delft has confirmed a history of price competition in the *spaza* market in the last five to ten years, which has seen the rise of foreign-run shops, 80 per cent of which are Somali, and the demise of South African shops (Charman, Petersen & Piper 2012).

This article seeks to interrogate these various explanations for violence against shopkeepers by exploring the patterns of violence and perceptions of key role-players in Delft South and Eindhoven (hereafter ‘Delft’), adjacent townships situated on the outskirts of the City of Cape Town (Figure 1). It will be argued that the appeal to xenophobia is insufficient to account for the peculiar features of violent crime against shopkeepers in Delft, and that criminality and even forms of ‘violent entrepreneurship’ are important contributor factors to the dynamics in this site. In making this case the authors begin by reviewing the relevant literature, before outlining the methodology, findings and analysis.

XENOPHOBIA, CRIMINALITY AND VIOLENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A view common in, and about, South Africa is that South Africans – particularly black African South Africans – are xenophobic. By this is meant a hatred or fear of foreigners, derived from the Greek ‘*xenos*’ (foreign) and ‘*phobos*’ (fear) (Crush 2008). Indeed, there is substantial evidence for this view. Hence Crush (*ibid*: 1–2), reflecting on 2006 survey work by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), notes that ‘compared to citizens of other countries worldwide, South Africans are the least open to outsiders and want the greatest restrictions on immigration’ (*ibid*: 1). As evidence of this claim he notes that the ‘proportion of people wanting strict limits or a total prohibition on immigration rose from 65% in 1997 to 78% in 1999’; that nearly ‘50% support or strongly support the deportation of foreign nationals including those living legally in South Africa’; and that ‘nearly three-quarters (74%) support a policy of deporting anyone who is not contributing economically to South Africa’. Notably for our study, ‘South Africans do not want it to be easier for foreign nationals to trade informally with South Africa (59% opposed), to start small businesses in South Africa (61% opposed) or to obtain South African citizenship (68% opposed)’.

Against the claim that these anti-immigrant view may not be xenophobic per se, but rather ‘defensive and protectionist’, Crush (*ibid*: 3) notes that ‘48% of South Africans saw migrants from neighbouring countries as a “criminal threat” ... 29% that they brought disease. Only 24% said there was nothing to fear.’ Further, these views were formed despite only 15 per cent of respondents reporting losing a job to a foreign national, and most having limited or no interaction with foreign nationals (*ibid*: 4). Add to this Harris’ (2001: np) observation that ‘whether documented or undocumented, foreigners

are frequently treated as a homogenous category of “illegal aliens”. Importantly, the negative attitude towards foreigners does not differ much with the nationality of the foreigner, although ‘most unpopular of all are Angolans, Somalis and Nigerians’ (Crush 2008: 4).

It also does not differ much depending on the race, gender, socio-economic status or any other variable of South Africans, although Afrikaans-speaking South Africans are a little higher than other language groups, and DA supporters are slightly more xenophobic than ANC supporters (ibid: 5). Overall, the SAMP rated the average South African as scoring 3.95 on a xenophobia scale, where 0 is very xenophobic and 10 is not xenophobic at all (ibid: 5). Notably, the Afrobarometer (2012) survey of 2011 found that 45 per cent of South African felt foreigners should not be allowed to live in South Africa as they take jobs away from South Africans, that 36 per cent would actively try to prevent foreigners from starting a business in their neighbourhoods, and that 33 per cent would actively try to prevent foreigners from settling in their neighbourhoods. All this appears to confirm Daryl Glaser’s (2009: 53) statement that the May 2008 mobilisation was ‘profoundly democratic, albeit in the majoritarian-popular sense rather than the liberal-constitutionalist one’.

These findings as regards the relative uniformity of national attitudes are important to our study as they sit in tension with the findings of studies into the protagonists of xenophobic violence. Thus, as Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti (2011: 75) point out, the areas in which violence occurred in 2008, measured by local government wards, were not those where Afrikaans-speaking DA supporters lived, but rather those wards which 1) were black; 2) had a high proportion of men; 3) had many language groups; 4) had significant inequality and especially a high proportion of people with an intermediary income alongside poor groups; and 5) a higher proportion of informal settlements. It is also notable that the May 2008 xenophobic wave and the vast majority of incidents since 1994 have been confined to South Africa’s metropolitan cities. What these sets of findings demonstrate is that explaining xenophobic attitudes and violence may well be two very different undertakings. It is reasonably safe to assume that xenophobic attitudes are a necessary condition for xenophobic violence, but clearly they are not sufficient.

Consequently, also important for this study is the literature which locates xenophobia in the context of violence in South Africa. Thus, as Harris (2001) argues, South Africa has a culture of violence in areas inhabited by the black urban poor; violence is used to resolve the most minor of conflicts; violence is associated with alcohol abuse and patriarchal gender relations, and is reinforced by an ineffective justice system. These points are reinforced by a 2009 IOM study which found that xenophobic violence in South Africa – and especially the May 2008 attacks – ‘should not be isolated from a more general history of violence in informal settlements and townships in South Africa’, adding that much of the published literature points to a culture of violence where ‘violence is endorsed and accepted as a socially legitimate means of solving

problems and achieving both “justice” and material goals (e.g. Hamber 1999; Kynoch 2005)’ (2009: 10).

Notably, the IOM study does not conclude that xenophobic violence, and in particular the xenophobic violence of 2008, was produced by a combination of xenophobic violence plus a culture of violence in poor, black urban areas, but rather was ‘organised and led by local groups and individuals in an effort to claim or consolidate the authority and power needed to further their political and economic interests’, and is thus ‘rooted in the micro-politics of the country’s townships and informal settlements’ (ibid: 2). The study argues that ‘only a trusted, competent and committed leadership (to high level officialdom) can make a significant difference in terms of preventing social tensions from turning into xenophobic violence’ (ibid: 3). This appeal to the significance of local politics is echoed on Nieftagoedien’s (2011) account of the construction of political insiders and outsiders through a long history of claiming autochthony in Alexandra township in Johannesburg, the ‘ground zero’ of the 2008 attacks (see also Steinberg 2008).

The range of the above explanatory field stretches from very general attitudes to site-specific dynamics, and a similar range is reflected in attempts to theorise xenophobia in South Africa. A common starting point for many in South Africa, as is the case internationally, is Gurr’s (1970) relative deprivation theory (Fauvelle-Aymar & Segatti 2011), and its links to widening inequality in South Africa (Pillay, D 2008). Others link xenophobia to accounts of nationalism and nation-building, again a common international trend, although there are particular South African versions of this, for example Neocosmos’ (2006, 2011) Fanonian reading of the shift from a popular emancipatory nationalism to a ‘nativist’ state-based nationalism, and the frustration of the poor black majority in ‘uncivil society’ at its political exclusion. Others are decidedly exceptionalist, for example Landau (2011: 2–10) offers a state-driven history of ‘decades of discursive and institutional efforts to control political and physical space’ in cities, such that a distinction is drawn between ‘privileged insiders and demonic outsiders’, the latter being migrants who are constructed as ‘aliens’ and ‘demons’ responsible for all social ills (see also Pillay [2008] on competing constructions of ‘the xenophobe’). Lastly, some like Nieftagoedien (2011) and Steinberg (2008) point to even more specific reasons linked to local power where politics is ‘consumed by struggle for state patronage’ (Steinberg 2008: 1).

While the concern in this article is not to evaluate directly theories of xenophobia but rather to evaluate the nature of the violence against shopkeepers in one site, the authors will demonstrate that, in at least one respect, relative deprivation theory is of use in understanding the attitudes of South African shopkeepers in Delft, if not necessarily the general public. Made famous by Merton (1938) and Gurr (1970), the key idea of ‘relative deprivation’ is a consciousness of a ‘negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities’ (Schaefer 2008: 26). In this vein Walter Runciman distinguishes egoistic relative deprivation – an unfavourable comparison within a

social group – from fraternal relative deprivation, which is an unfavourable comparison between social groups. Thus, where Van Holdt et al's (2011) characterisation of post-apartheid class conflict in the black community linked to the now differentiated entitlements of citizenship seems a case of the former, the dynamics between South African and Somali shopkeepers could be a case of the latter. Thus not only are Somali shopkeepers out-competing South Africans (Charman, Petersen & Piper 2012), but in light of the survey work cited above, the suggestion is that this economic outcome is often interpreted by South African shopkeepers as illegitimate and they consequently feel unjustly victimised by this competition. If accurate, this would constitute a classic case of Runciman's fraternal relative deprivation.

Notably, however, there is little evidence that links these resentments to the actual killings of shopkeepers in Delft. Instead, to understand these killings, the high level of criminality in the area and the specific phenomenon of 'violent entrepreneurship' may prove more useful. This term, drawn from literature on the economic liberalisation of the former Soviet Union (Volkov 2002), refers to the link between business and crime, and the use of violence against economic opponents in emerging capitalist economies where state power is limited. Such 'violent entrepreneurship' already exists within sectors of informal enterprises in South Africa, notably the taxi industry (Dugard 2001). Thus, the Ntsebeza report (2005) into the taxi industry in the Western Cape described a history of entrepreneurial violence and the use of assassination in 'turf' battles between rival taxi associations. This report shows that the killings were orchestrated, directed by the powerful leadership of taxi associations and undertaken through the financial support (and tacit endorsement) of its members. It also referred to an enforced 'culture of silence' that prevented the police from identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators of these killings. This suggests that one should be open to the possibility of 'violent entrepreneurship' in other sectors of the informal economy in the Western Cape.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research focused on the area of Delft South and a portion of the suburb of Eindhoven, including all households east of the Delft Main Road and south of Hindle Road (see Figure 1). Established as a new housing development in the mid-1990s, Delft has since expanded to a settlement of about 12 000 households and a population of roughly 50 000 persons (Seekings et al. 2010). A historically poor coloured area, today it is a racially diverse community, made up of around 60 per cent 'coloured' and 40 per cent 'black African' (predominantly Xhosa) peoples, whose heterogeneity is reinforced through the diversity of religions and cultural belief systems. Within the population of working age, 61 per cent are either unemployed or under-employed, with most of the 39 per cent who are employed working in semi-skilled jobs within the service and manufacturing sectors (CensusPlus 2007). Unemployment is noticeably higher in Delft South (38%) compared to the portion of Eindhoven (27%), and the monthly income per capita for Delft South is R732 (\$108) and Eindhoven is R1 008 (\$149).

The research entailed both desktop and field research. As part of the desktop research, the researchers sought to identify trends in xenophobic violence in Delft South and evidence of specific targeting through an analysis of media reports. The scan focused on the period 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2010. Other important data sets included area crime statistics, which provided an overview of the pattern of violence within the policing precinct in which Delft South falls.

The field research component consisted of interviews with 107 of the 179 *spaza* shopkeepers in Delft, on their personal experience of crime and violence over the period of the preceding five years. The reason for the lower number (107) is that not all of the 179 *spaza* shopkeepers were available or willing to be interviewed. The five-year time frame was chosen to include experience of the xenophobic attacks of 2008. The researchers wished to differentiate between various forms of violence, following the categories used by the South African Police Service (SAPS), namely: 1) murder, 2) attempted murder, 3) (armed) robbery, 4) theft, 5) assault and 6) other (such as arson). As the majority of the foreign shopkeepers were Somali nationals, the research team included a Somali who works as a journalist/human rights activist and who had, until 2008, run a *spaza* shop in a neighbouring settlement. In addition, the researchers engaged with community and street-level leadership, political leaders and government officials. More than 200 individuals were consulted in the course of the research.

The investigation relied on the informants' recollection of violence, i.e. their memory of direct experiences. This means that the results are subject to the state of people's memory as well as the actual period for which they have been in business. In many instances, the study informants had been running their businesses or working in the business for less than five years – this was especially evident among the foreign-run *spazas* which evidently change ownership every two to three years and whose workforce changes continuously. It is therefore clear that the research findings under-represent the true scale of *spaza* shop violence during the period 2006–2011. This is the main reason why the researchers' analysis in this article must be moderated.

In addition, a household survey was conducted within a transect of the research site in Delft that surveyed the opinion of 50 randomly selected households. The researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with key respondents like local political leaders and community-based organisations, including the Delft South neighbourhood watch (formally known as the Delft Community Police Forum), and a range of others identified through snowball techniques. In order to enquire into the crime situation affecting small business, the researchers conducted interviews with senior police officers of the SAPS at Delft police station.

FINDINGS

In what follows the researchers outline the findings from interviews with shopkeepers, compare these with police statistics, and draw on the qualitative insights from said interviews in the subsequent analysis.

The distribution of *spaza* violence

Of the 107 *spaza* shops surveyed, five recorded incidents where the shopkeeper had been murdered in the past five years. The record of violence from the survey is probably not exhaustive and indeed is more than likely under-estimated, as most foreign-owned shops have been under the same ownership for less than five years. Similarly, the qualitative information from detailed interviews with 107 shopkeepers (43 South Africans and 64 foreigners) probably under-represents the true scale of violence, as informants tended to recall more recent events, rather than distant ones. The research findings nevertheless provide a reliable comparison *between* the two groups as regards the main typologies of crime and violence that have affected *spaza* shops in Delft South. The findings are summarised in Table 1 and Figure 2. The researchers also considered the spatial distribution of the incidence of robbery amongst all 107 *spaza* shops in Delft South. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

	Murder	Attempted murder	Assault	Robbery	Theft	Harassment
South Africans incident count	1	4	5	10	16	8
South African % of cohort	2%	9%	12%	23%	37%	19%
Foreigner incident count	3	3	2	25	10	17
Foreigners % of cohort	5%	5%	3%	39%	16%	27%

Table 1: Reported incidents of crime and violence by 107 *spaza* shop informants

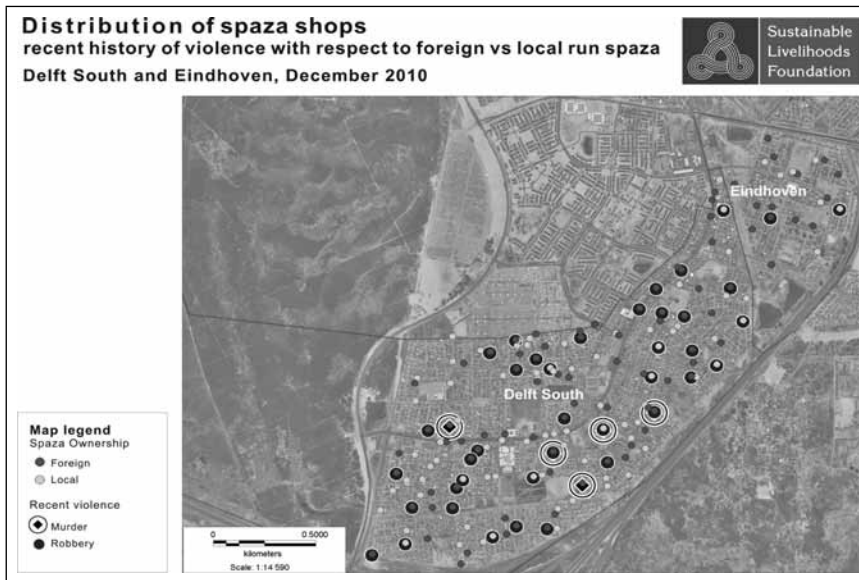


Figure 1: History of violence at *spaza* shops in Delft

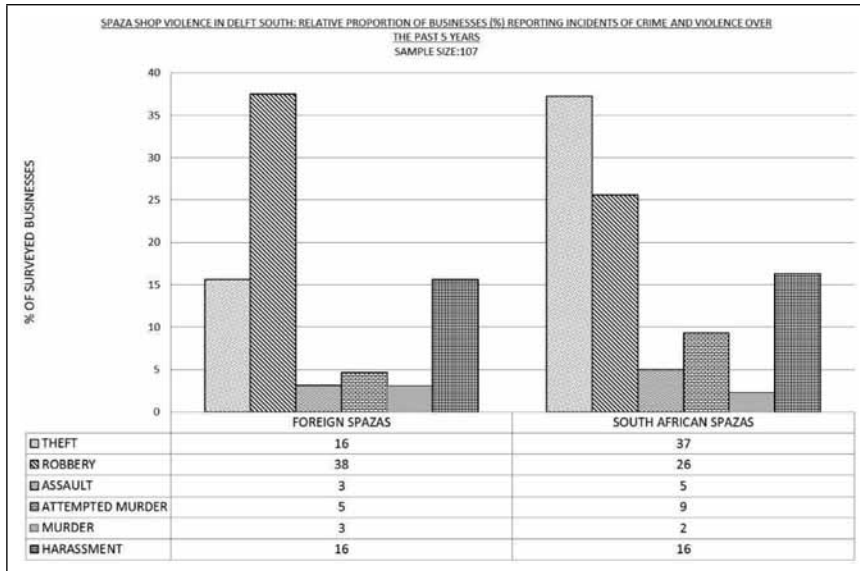


Figure 2: Violence and crime in Delft *spaza* shops, local vs. foreign

ANALYSIS

What do the data reflect about *spaza* violence in Delft South? Three possibilities, or some combination thereof, present themselves. The first is that *spaza* violence is indeed driven by xenophobia against Somalis. The second is that violence is part of a wider criminality, perhaps – and this is the third point – linked to violent entrepreneurship, that is, directly linked to economic competition between shopkeepers. In what follows the researchers will argue that according to the evidence, some combination of criminality and economic competition seems to explain the violence. This conclusion does not deny the fact that some level of popular prejudice against Somalis exists, but rather that it does not explain the violent attacks against Somali shopkeepers in Delft over the past five years.

Xenophobia

A number of insights are immediately obvious from the data listed in Table 1 and Figures 1 & 2. First, it is clear that crime does not affect foreign shopkeepers uniquely but also affects South African shopkeepers. Further, in the categories of assault, attempted murder, murder and harassment, the levels are remarkably similar (Figure 2). The main difference emerges in the related categories of theft and armed robbery, where South African are more than twice as likely as foreigners to be victims of theft (37% to 16%), and foreigners are significantly more likely to be victims of armed robbery than South Africans (37% to 26%). The difference centres on whether a weapon is used in the robbery.

The interviews revealed that a possible reason for this difference may lie in the fact that, unlike South Africans, foreign shopkeepers reside in their retail space at night to prevent theft. This means that any attempted theft will almost always turn into an armed confrontation. This could account for the greater occurrence of armed robbery in foreigners' stores. Notably, Figure 1 shows that the majority of both South African and foreigner-run shops have not experienced violent crime, and the shopkeeper interviews revealed that some shops have been repeatedly targeted. In short, then, the claim that violence is linked to xenophobic prejudice is not well substantiated by the survey data.

This claim should not be read as denying the existence of various forms of popular prejudice against foreigners in Delft. Indeed, there is a history of conflict and prejudice in the area stretching back to killings in 2006 (Ndenze 2006a). The 'sudden thunderstorm' of xenophobic attacks in May and June 2008 also impacted on Delft. While there were incidents of inter-personal violence, and several informants – both foreigners and locals – spoke of an atmosphere of hostility at the time, the main consequence of 2008 was that the majority of foreign shopkeepers closed their businesses and left the area. (The researchers learnt of only one Somali who did not flee, and who today enjoys great popularity in the community.) The moment the immigrants left, a number of Delft residents opened up *spazas* to fill the gap in the market. Some took advantage of the departure of the foreign shopkeepers to renege on business agreements, and regain control of properties they had sub-let to foreigners. In one such case the individual took over an entire *spaza* shop, claiming that his actions were justified on the basis that the foreigner shopkeeper had sought to swindle him out of ownership through trickery. After the hostility subsided, from about mid-July 2008, many foreigner shopkeepers returned to Delft, and as Table 1 suggests, the violence against foreign shopkeepers had not been exceptionally high.

Despite the 'normalcy' of violence against foreigners in Delft, Somali respondents reported a level of prejudice that sustained the division between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'locals' and 'foreigners'. Thus, some foreign storekeepers reported stone-throwing and 'cursing' as daily occurrences (DS Informant 80/2011). A Somali shopkeeper recalled such a situation in Eindhoven in 2010. While he was asleep (along with his fellow employees) in his shop (a refurbished shipping container), a group of coloured men unsuccessfully attempted to set the building alight with petrol. The informant felt that there could be '*xenophobic intentions behind their behaviour*', though he also recognised that '*this is just the nature of how things are in places like Delft, because people do what they do because they can*' (DS Informant 11/2011).

Evidence gathered directly from the population of Delft at large suggests popular attitudes of ambivalence and indifference towards foreigners which are not inconsistent with the kinds of prejudice suggested by Somali shopkeepers. The researchers examined the results of the household survey for opinions for or against foreign *spaza* shops, and found that just 14 informants (28% of the sample) made explicitly hostile statements, whereas eight (16%) made explicitly positive statements towards Somali

businesses. Most of the negative statements were directed at specific individuals who were considered ill-mannered or rude, rather than generalisations about immigrants per se. The researchers heard allegations, for example, of the persistent sexual harassment of young girls at certain shops, and of cases where employees sought sexual favours in exchange for a packet of biscuits. In all the household interviews, only one informant made an overly xenophobic statement.

Those who spoke in favour of the foreigner-owned *spaza* shops said that they appreciated the impact these businesses had on their lives through reducing prices, opening their businesses later than local shops (until ten pm., an hour after the police-imposed 'curfew') and providing a 'good service'. Their resilience in the face of criminality and hostility was also admired: '*They do not just close down/give up after being robbed or killed*' (DS Informant 39/2010). With regard to the question of their contribution to the community, foreigners are thought to give nothing – a point most informants accepted, but did not see as a grievance. Local *spaza* owners give little to their communities too, with one or two notable exceptions. Perhaps most importantly, though, the majority of those interviewed in the household survey appeared indifferent towards the foreign *spaza* owners.

In some contrast to the population at large, there are specific interest groups in Delft that feel strongly for or against Somali *spazas*. Those who support Somalis tend to have a direct material interest in the continued operation of the foreigner *spazas*, such as the residents or homeowners who lease their property to the shopkeepers, entities that receive protection payments (including some political leaders) and the many street-based 'gangsters' who extract a 'cigarette' tax from shopkeepers. This informal economy of protection centres on groups of young men who claim control of the spatial territory in which the business is located and comprise its client base. Their demands are not onerous – a box of cigarettes or even just a single cigarette. In return, these youths provide a 'protection' service that entails keeping an eye out for the business and desisting from committing more onerous crimes against the shopkeeper. Where the shopkeepers refuse their requests, the possibility of robbery escalates and it serves as a constant reminder of the reality that these individuals have the power to make good on their threats.

One group that remains consistently opposed to Somali shopkeepers is, not surprisingly, South African shopkeepers. In a focus group discussion with South African shopkeepers, informants spoke of how the pressure of competition became noticeable as the number of foreigner *spazas* grew in 2007 and the early months of 2008. The foreign businessmen typically acquired their *spazas* by purchasing existing shops directly from the local shopkeeper or by taking over the lease agreement from the homeowner. These entrepreneurs were willing to pay between R20 000 and R30 000 (\$2,985–\$4,477) to acquire these businesses, in some cases using their wealth to persuade homeowners to prematurely end their lease agreement with the existing shopkeepers. Informants reported that most of the investors were once shopkeepers themselves who had expanded

their businesses by placing relatives/clansmen (newly arrived in the country) in the stores and employing them at below-minimum wages (earning about R1 000/\$149 per month). While recognising their business achievements, South African shopkeepers felt that most foreigners were flouting their visa conditions and had no right to conduct business – a view held in ignorance of the rights under the law that refugees enjoy, and of the fact that the vast majority of Somalis are refugees.

The relationship between South African shopkeepers and foreigners in Delft is tense and has worsened over time. The researchers heard of cases where initial links between foreign and local entrepreneurs, who once partnered in business, had soured as conflicts arose over money, property and clientele. There is evidence of partnerships between neighbouring *spaza* shops, whereby foreign shopkeepers have invited a local shopkeeper to join their procurement system, so enabling the local *spaza* owner to acquire goods at the same price as their foreign competitors, but these relationships are in the tiny minority. The majority of foreigner *spaza* shops are either owned by wealthy individuals who operate multiple stores, or more commonly by groups of Somali investors, who have little need or inclination to make concessions towards competing South African businesses. A South African shopkeeper described the business practices of the three Somali-run business that now surround her store as ‘ruthless’. Notably, none of the South African *spaza* owners who came to the focus group in December 2010 felt their shops would survive the current economic climate of price wars or the encroachment onto ‘their’ trading space.

South African shopkeepers mentioned an initiative led by the Delft Concerned Tuck Shop Owners and supported by the Community Policing Forum (CPF) to impose an ‘exclusion zone’ of 100 metres around each *spaza*. This community-sanctioned ‘law’ would prevent new businesses from opening a shop adjacent to an established store. The initiative has, interestingly, received the support of foreigner shopkeepers who share the concerns of locals about the ‘over-traded’ *spaza* market, thus reflecting the power of business competition over simple identity politics. This strategy seeks to maintain social cohesion through a truce, embodied in a new set of informal rules, rather than to reverse the gains achieved by foreign-run *spazas*. Outside of these formal processes of negotiating a resolution to the tension, disgruntled local storekeepers continue to foster hostility towards foreign shopkeepers, but otherwise most take no action. The focus of their lives is on economic survival, not retribution – at least for now.

Criminality

The case for criminality proceeds mostly from the local police, but also from some community leaders, who attribute much of the crime targeting Somali shopkeepers to opportunistic ‘thugs’ (Kiva 2010) and not xenophobia. One Somali shopkeeper with whom the researchers engaged reported that five days prior to interview his *spaza* had been robbed. He told how *‘a group of mixed coloured and black locals robbed the shop of cash, airtime and cigarettes. Four had knives and one held a gun to my head.’*

They got away with R 3000 (\$447) of cash, R 900 (\$134) airtime and three cartons of cigarettes' (DS Informant 11/2011). He did not bother to report the incident to the police because, in his view, the *'police won't investigate and doesn't want to be disappointed'*. Another informant reported that he had experienced three robberies in the past nine months: first in October 2010, when 'three black guys' took R 4 000 (\$597) in cash; a second time in February 2011, when two black men and one coloured man attacked the cashier, beat him and took his asylum papers as well as R 8000 (\$1194) in cash, airtime and products; and the third in April 2011, when three black men and one coloured man stole R 7 600 (\$1134) in cash and products. He reported to the police that the culprits were local residents, but no arrests were made (DS Informant 56 / 2011).

As evidence for the claim that armed robbery is criminal in intent, the police point out that the modus operandi in most *spaza* robberies is similar. The criminals (usually) operate in racially mixed groups of between four and six young men, mostly in their twenties. This mixed-race composition is possibly significant, given the racial divides between coloured and African residents in Delft. Further, *spaza* shops are usually robbed at night, or during opportune moments such as when deliveries are made. The robbers usually focus on three items: cash, airtime vouchers and cigarettes, as all of these can easily be resold or traded on. No other items are stolen. The police concede that instances where shopkeepers were murdered and no items were stolen this could be xenophobia related, but as suggested below, they could also be moments of 'violent entrepreneurship'. In 2010, the SAPS raided a Somali-owned shop and discovered two unlicensed firearms 'hidden in a giant packet of crisps'. Since this discovery and the arrest of the individuals involved, the SAPS claim to have experienced a decline in the frequency of violent crime targeting foreign shopkeepers.

Perhaps more compelling than the police, however, are the relatively close levels of violence and criminality reported against both Somali and South African shopkeepers (noted in Table 1 and Figure 2). The significance of these figures becomes much more apparent when compared with the crime statistics for Delft South as a whole (see Table 2). In the past five years only five shopkeepers have been murdered out of a total of 131 murders in the area – a figure of less than four per cent. Thus, neither the murder of Somali shopkeepers nor shopkeepers in general constitutes important components of the murder statistics of Delft. Further, when Figure 1 is considered, it appears there is a random spatial distribution to robbery. Thus, while foreign shopkeepers have been targeted more than locals, many South African shops have also been targeted, and many Somali shops have not been targeted at all.

Table 2: SAPS crime statistics, Delft South

Crime category	Periods									
	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011		
Contact crimes (Crimes against the person)										
Murder	2	4	4	20	18	26	37	30		
Total sexual offences	8	10	8	31	42	45	88	74		
Attempted murder	11	5	3	17	18	27	17	32		
Assult with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm	40	25	25	89	113	166	246	252		
Common assult	62	23	22	61	103	187	243	189		
Robbery with aggravating circumstances	23	12	11	30	77	121	122	78		
Common robbery	12	8	5	17	35	50	54	26		
Contact related crime										
Arison	1	2	1	3	5	6	10	5		
Malicious damage to property	26	33	16	52	67	119	136	134		
Property related crime										
Burglary at non-residential premises	3	1	0	0	7	18	21	37		
Burglary at residential premises	41	33	18	82	138	222	268	224		
Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle	6	7	12	24	29	42	30	51		
Theft out of or from motor vehicle	6	8	6	20	35	44	49	68		

Stock-theft	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Crime detected as a result of police action																					
Illegal possession of firearms and ammunition	2	1	3	10	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	36
Drug-related crime	7	14	6	54	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	579
Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs	11	5	1	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	104
Other serious crimes																					
All theft not mentioned elsewhere	34	37	34	143	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	215	234
Commercial crime	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4
Shoplifting	6	1	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	4

Perhaps the more significant insight derived from Table 2 concerns the level of criminality in Delft South. Although, according to the police, the levels of crime in Delft are not the highest in Cape Town, and are of the same order as in most poor areas in the city, they are certainly higher than in most working- or middle-class areas. An Egyptian shopkeeper had this view: Delft *'is a bad area for business, too much shops too much crime, too much alcohol and drugs'* (DS Informant 71/2011). For the police, the main safety and security threats in Delft are drug dealing, the running of shebeens, interpersonal violence (assaults), theft and murder. The research identified about 70 shebeens within the site and a number of 'drug houses'. The police are aware of 15 drug houses within the case-study site, which 'wholesale' drugs to a large number of street-based and small-scale dealers. The sale of drugs, especially cannabis, mandrax and crystal methamphetamines (known as tik), occurs widely and provides the main income stream to young unemployed men who occupy the street both day and night (Beneke 2011; Gokal 2011; Mdunyelwa 2011).

In an effort to reduce the level of business crime, in 2008 the police recommended a curfew, beginning at seven pm., by which time all *spazas* were required to close. The aim was to discourage the high rate of night-time robbery, as many of the perpetrators took advantage of the dark and the vulnerability of the shop owners once the streets became deserted. The curfew was, from an official perspective, highly effective in reducing crime, but from the perspective of the shopkeepers it impacted negatively on their business. As a result of representations from the community and shopkeepers (both foreign and local), the curfew was subsequently extended to nine pm. Notably, adherence to this curfew varies significantly. The more competitive *spaza* shops – including the majority of foreigner-run stores – remain open until about ten pm., as shopkeepers are willing to run the (increased) risk of robbery and are more amenable to police bribery when confronted for non-adherence to the 'community curfew'.

Shopkeepers who wish to keep their stores open after the nine pm. curfew run the risk of alienating the community and inviting police harassment. Yet evidence suggests that most are willing to take these risks. A Somali shop employee reported that they have more trouble from the police looking for money than the community, which they call 'taxing'. He explained: *'If I don't give them [i.e. the police] money, they close me down and make trouble for the shop.'* He reported that there was even an altercation as a result of a particular incident of police bribery, between a representative of the CPF who stood to defend his interests and a police officer (DS Informant 90/2011).

From the interviews with shopkeepers a recurring refrain was their perception of vulnerability to crime – especially on the part of new immigrants – who are targeted by street-corner 'gangsters'. A member of the Delft CPF stated that foreign-run *spazas* were constantly subjected to demands for small-scale 'protection' payments demanded by groups of young men. The problematic role of these youths was summed up by a Somali employee who regarded the area in which the business was situated (Eindhoven) as *'quite stable except for the youth who hang around and sometimes act out by throwing stones or bricks at the container [i.e. the spaza shop] and each other'* (DS Informant

76/2011). Linked to this, the position and influence of gangs are thought to be changing, with more formalised drug gangs emerging and extending their territorial power.

Violent entrepreneurship

If the above argument is correct, then it seems that criminality offers a better explanation for violent crimes against shopkeepers (both foreign and local) in Delft, than xenophobia. This said, consideration ought to be given to a particular kind of criminality which is linked to economic competition, namely ‘violent entrepreneurship’. As noted above, emerging capitalist economies typically display a close relationship between business and crime, and the use of violence against opponents is common in these contexts, not least due to the relatively limited capacity of the state (Volkov 2002). In South Africa the emergence of the taxi industry is a classic case in point (Dugard 2001; Ntsebeza 2005). While the researchers cannot be sure of the extent to which violent entrepreneurship contributes to violence against shopkeepers in Delft, despite several anecdotes, many examples of it can be shown in the larger study area, to illustrate the patron–client relations many shopkeepers seek out protection against violence. In this financially measurable way, the conclusion can safely be reached that the conditions for such behaviour do exist.

While most of the South African local businesses that could not compete with Somalis responded to their predicament without violence, handing over their shops to foreigners for monthly rents of R1 500–R2 500 (\$223–\$373), it seems clear some local businesspersons resort to violence (and more often the threat of violence) as a matter of course to defend their business interests. In the case of Delft South, one such individual, a shopkeeper who simultaneously operated a shebeen, said to the researchers: ‘*No Somalian [sic] will ever open a shop in this street. If they do, I’ll kill them.*’ As is clear from this example, violent entrepreneurs do not require the smoke-screen of xenophobia to act with violence.

In this regard the first killing of a foreign shopkeeper in Delft is suggestive. In September 2006, Somali shopkeeper Said Rouble Ileeye was murdered, and money, cigarettes, airtime and chocolates were stolen from his shop. At the time the provincial government was reported as investigating ‘claims’ that this killing had been ordered by a rival ‘South African businessman’ (Ndenze 2006a). In a second incident shortly thereafter, shopkeeper Yusuf Abdille was shot and killed in his Mango Street home (Ndenze 2006b). As money was taken, the police attributed the killing to robbery, but the Somali business community – through the voice of the Somali Association – claimed that both incidents were evidence of persistent xenophobic violence. Given the allegations made in the Ileeye case, it is certainly conceivable that these early attacks were intended to intimidate the pioneer foreigner *spaza* shopkeepers, and are thus forms of violent entrepreneurship.

While it is difficult to be certain about the part violent entrepreneurs played in attacks on *spaza* shops in Delft, there is certainly plenty of evidence of violent entrepreneurship in the wider geographical area. In the neighbouring suburb of Leiden where Mustafa,

our informant, had formerly been employed, six Somali employees working in the same shop were ‘gunned down’ between 2006 and 2008. The shop has since closed down and the owner has returned to Somalia. According to a respondent, the ‘*shootings were the result of a dispute between that owner [i.e. Somali] and a local businessman [i.e. South African]*’ (DS Informant 26/2011). In March 2010, three ‘hit-men’ were reportedly hired by a shebeen owner to murder two shopkeepers and burn down a Somali-run shop in Philippi-East, a township close to Delft (Cruywagen 2010). The article cites an unnamed policeman who said the attack was part of a ‘well-organised plan with one common purpose and that is to drive foreign-owned shops out of the townships, kill them and burn their shops so that local-owned businesses in townships can survive’.

Naturally, South Africans shopkeepers do not hold a monopoly on the use of violence and other forms of crime. There is solid evidence that some of the foreign shopkeepers possess weapons, have killed and injured persons to protect their property, and had a role in some robberies.² There are rumours that some attacks against Somali shopkeepers reflect internal conflict within the diaspora community and may be attributed to intra-Somali business rivalry. For example, in Delft the researchers encountered a situation where a group of Somali businessmen had aligned with the community to threaten and attempt to close another Somali-run store. Another case comes from Mfuleni, a township bordering Delft, where Somali shopkeepers have been accused of using violence and intimidation to confront the new threat to their market dominance from a cohort of immigrant Ethiopian shopkeepers (Magazi 2011). These examples necessitate a firm distinction between violence as an aspect of entrepreneurship within the informal economy and violence as a political tool to advance an anti-foreigner agenda.

What is important in understanding the possibility of violent entrepreneurship is evidence of forms of patron–client relationships that exist between businesses and political leaders in many poor communities – a practice related to the ‘struggle for state patronage’ that Steinberg (2008: 1) cites as being typical of local politics in poor areas of South Africa. A small example of this (noted above) is the ‘cigarette protection racket’ run by gangs of unemployed young men with a capacity for violence. Apart from the demands of street thugs, Delft shopkeepers may be subject to a more formalised process of extortion by organised groups seeking to retain their authority over business developments within Delft. For example, several respondents alleged that the Delft Development Forum leaders extracted payments from investors, such as Chinese entrepreneurs, who somehow managed to preserve the position of their shipping container-based businesses that were situated on public property, in contravention of Cape Town’s spatial planning regulations.

If protection is secured in this way, one of the most important relationships in this regard will be between the foreign shopkeeper and the landlord from whom he (it is almost always a man) rents the shop, as the landlord has a vested interest in maintaining favourable conditions for the business to operate. In the interviews shopkeepers were asked which individuals or organisation they could turn to for support in response to xenophobic attacks, crime and other violence. About half the respondents (both

foreigner and local) felt that there were no external parties on whom they could rely. Amongst those who felt they could call on external support, the majority of coloured South African shopkeepers referred to either their neighbours or the CPF, whereas the majority of black shopkeepers referred to street committee leaders, while the majority of foreign shopkeepers referred to their South African landlord.

Having the support of the landlord obviously helps, but having a powerful landlord, such as a drug dealer, street committee leader or wealthy businessperson clearly makes a difference. A Bangladeshi shopkeeper who rents his shop from a known drug lord and pays more than double the average rent attributed his ability to avoid being a target of crime to the influence of the landlord: *'The owners living here are well-respected. He has three sons who are strong and always around. They have lots of houses and that's why they are strong'* (DS Informant 51/2011). Another shopkeeper, a Somali, revealed how he had moved his business location to form an allegiance with a community leader when the fortunes of his former landlord (a drug dealer) went into rapid decline. He reported:

Until recently the container was located on the other side of the street on land owned by suspected drug dealers. We moved the container to other side of the street to Vusi when they found out about this. At that same time their previous landlords were busted for drug dealing. Vusi is well respected and well known in the area and offers assistance in times of trouble. (DS Informant 59/2011)

This mutualistic relationship between certain shopkeepers and powerful landlords provides a formula for business success and personal survival. As a Somali shopkeeper noted, the *'owner of the building [i.e. their shop] is a community leader with whom they have a good relationship and communication ... this has made a huge difference in the success of the business'* (DS Informant 60/2011). Those shopkeepers renting from the poor and those local *spaza* shop owners with weak connections to street committees and community organisations are probably equally vulnerable to violent crime, including forms of violent entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the occurrence of violence in the *spaza* shop market, and specifically the violent targeting of foreign-run businesses in Delft South and Eindhoven in Cape Town. This subject has hitherto been viewed from the macro perspective as an instance of xenophobic conflict. Unsatisfied with this explanation, the authors explored the nature of *spaza* violence through an in-depth analysis at the street level in Delft South, engaging with the various parties through quantitative and qualitative means. The findings show that violence against *spaza* shopkeepers cannot be explained adequately through a macro-lens using the concept of xenophobia. If this were the case, the differential targeting of foreigner shopkeepers would be expected – especially given the recent history of business competition in Delft. However, the interview data and

police records confirm that levels of crime – especially violent crime – are remarkably similar for both foreign and South African shopkeepers. Consequently, something else must explain the violence.

The answer, the researchers suggest, lies in the more prosaic domain of crime against businesses, and perhaps in the forms of violent business competition described in the international literature as ‘violent entrepreneurship’. Hence, when located against the levels of criminality in Delft more generally, the violence against *spaza* shopkeepers begins to look ‘normal’, in the sense that one would expect shops and shopkeepers to be targets in an area with such high crime levels. Further, there is significant qualitative data that point to the strong possibility of violence being driven by ruthless business people, and the link between business profitability and the protection offered by a powerful landlord. We would suggest that those shopkeepers with weak alliances to community leaders or powerful individuals (such as gangsters and street committee leaders) and those businesses that directly confront the interests of ‘violent entrepreneurs’ (foreign and local) are more vulnerable. While there is no certainty as to the degree of contribution of violent entrepreneurship to *spaza* violence levels, the researchers are confident that it is a contributing factor.

All this is not to deny that xenophobic attitudes exist in Delft. Among current South African shopkeepers and those whose businesses have collapsed there is bitterness and hostility towards the immigrant competitors. Their life experiences have inspired xenophobic attitudes – a finding that can be usefully understood in terms of a xenophobically framed account of fraternal relative deprivation. Yet, their main response has not been violent, but rather to comply with economic defeat and to lease their store to a foreigner, thus settling for the monthly rental income. The depth of xenophobic ‘feelings’ within the Delft South community seems much shallower, with most residents being indifferent to the foreigner-run *spaza* shops. Nevertheless, the potential for another wave of xenophobic violence exists so long as there remains an interest group with what it perceives as legitimate grievances linked to a livelihood under competitive strain. Should this community be able to link to the predominant forms of local power, and successfully present its particular interests as community interests, more widespread xenophobic attacks could yet follow.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge funding from the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (ACCEDE) at the School of Government, University of Western Cape and research support from the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation.

NOTES

- 1 *Spaza* shops are micro-convenience grocery stores, also known as tuck shops; the term ‘*spaza*’ is taken from the isiZulu language, meaning ‘hidden’ and makes reference to the era when apartheid precluded black persons from business opportunities within the township retail sector (Bear 2005).
- 2 Interview with leaders of the Delft CFP, 15 March 2011. One of the murder sites on Figure 1 is where a Somali storekeeper shot a person supposedly committing a crime. The Somali then disappeared to avoid the repercussions from the police and the store was closed down.

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