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'Running Them Out of Time:' Xenophobia, Violence, and Co-Authoring Spatiotemporal Exclusion in South Africa

Jean Pierre Misago ^a and Loren B Landau ^b

^aAfrican Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg South Africa;

^bDepartment of International Development, University of Oxford and African Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand

ABSTRACT

Immigration governance scholars often focus on formal, national regulations and how local implementation and resistance rations access to space and resources. Research into 'xenophobic' exclusion across South Africa suggests recalibrating research along two spatial and temporal dimensions. First, while legal and political discourse often evoke national principles, exclusive speech and action can be highly spatialised and distinctly sub-national. Consequently, people objectively belonging to the same, excludable category (e.g., international migrants; sexual or ethnic minorities) face varied vulnerabilities corresponding to where they work or reside. Moreover, when mobilising nationalistic discourses of exclusion and belonging, sub-national actors customise and emplace them. Such co-authoring infuses them with particularistic interests and language while imposing spatial limits on their legitimacy. This in turn generates a dynamic patchwork of regulatory regimes where local variations may be more practically important than national policy. Second, the effects of co-authored exclusion are spatial, but their foundations may be temporal. South Africa's national political project rests on forms of restorative justice: of building futures for those materially disadvantaged and disenfranchised by Apartheid's racist machinations. For South Africans, making claims to a future in place (i.e., in the country or a given site) are predicated on one's position in this national temporal arc. Even if apartheid disadvantaged millions across *Southern* African, non-citizens are historiographically excluded from these claims. Immigrants are, in effect, run out of time. By eliding shared pasts, officials and citizens deny the possibility of a spatial future shared with non-nationals. These elements help explain the popular legitimacy of anti-immigrant mobilisation and surface the multiple modes of citizenship and exclusion operating across the country. Recognising this, the article ultimately encourages scholars to re-spatialise and temporalise the study of migration governance in ways that also recognise the dialogical dimensions of bordering and emplacement.

CONTACT Loren B Landau  loren.landau@qeh.ox.ac.uk  University of Oxford and the University of the Witwatersrand

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Violence mobilisation against non-citizens and other ‘outsiders’ is an increasingly prominent feature of South Africa’s political landscape (Albertyn 2019; Myeni 2022; Phiri 2021). In 2008, angry citizens set alight Mozambican national Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave in one of Johannesburg’s oldest townships (Tromp 2015). This presaged two weeks of violence that killed more than 60 and displaced at least a hundred thousand at sites across the country. As people fled, instigators burned, looted, or ‘attached’ their shops and houses. After a military operation, the violence lessened, but threats and incidents continued. These peaked again in 2019 when hundreds of trucks were burnt by a breakaway union determined to remove foreign drivers (Khanyile 2019). That same year, conflict with police over street trading in Johannesburg led to scores of foreign-operated shops being looted. People were again chased from homes and businesses by neighbours, police, and city agents (Adebayo 2019). As the COVID pandemic exacerbated economic and political tensions, highly visible mobilisation against outsiders moved from the street to national politics (Bambelele and Marupeng 2021; Bornman 2022; Human Rights Watch 2020a). Amidst ongoing vigilante action and anti-immigrant pronouncements from across the political spectrum, Zimbabwean national Elvis Nyathi was dragged from his home in outside of Johannesburg, beaten, stoned, and set alight in the street on the night of 6 April 2022 (Mohamed 2022).

Immigrants are the primary targets of these attacks, but local leaders and groups also threaten, evict, and attack South African citizens married to foreigners, sympathetic to them, or otherwise deemed ‘outsiders’ (see Misago 2017; Monson 2010; Tewolde 2020). These include, ethnic and sexual minorities, political dissidents, and presumed criminals. Led by political party officials, social media campaigns, and community level organisations, such actions challenge the country’s constitutional commitments to political freedom, racial and ethnic tolerance, property rights, and the rule of law (cf. Davis 2018; Klug 2018). They also raise fundamental issues about the scale and mechanisms of exclusion, bordering, and ‘insurgent citizenship’ amidst socio-political heterogeneity. It is these themes this article explores.

The remaining pages make multiple arguments and contributions stemming from Fabian’s (2006) reflection on the social definition of ‘the other’ as a typological character existing in alternative time. For the anti-outsider activists and allied citizens described below, South Africa’s national project rests on a chronotope – a narrative configuration of time, space, and morality (See HadžiMuhamedov 2018) – pegging perspectives on progress to remedying Apartheid’s historical crimes. In this construction, one’s right to build a future in place (i.e., live in and benefit from the country or community) depends on individuals’ place in addressing Apartheid-era persecutions and deprivations. Although many across Southern Africa suffered under apartheid and struggled to end it, (see Hanlon 1986), contemporary political speech discursively excludes them from claims to

a shared history. Without this historical hook, their right to South African time and space becomes contingent on their utility to a deserving citizenry (cf. Klotz 2016). Yet as temporal and spatial interlopers, their presence is widely seen as delaying progress: slowing restorative justice and true liberation (see Gordon, Wentzel, and Viljoen 2021). This generates an imperative to remove or subdue; to rid communities of undesirable, clock-stopping outsiders. In spatially removing them, they also run them out of national time.

Our interest in exclusion and co-authorship points to a second series of debates surrounding immigrant ‘deportability’ and precarity. Migration scholarship often foregrounds elite driven processes at the political party or national level: laws, campaigns, and bordering. While such accounts may consider the spatial effects of such strategies – on forms of urban inclusion for example – they infrequently recognise the sub-national as a source of exclusive practice or the specific nature of that practice. Even as scholars increasingly recognise the role of categorical exclusion in contouring political community (see Benoit 2020; Emirbayer 2010; Holston 2011; Mainwaring 2016; Sipos 2010), few explicitly consider the dialogical, scale-spanning process behind these spatio-temporal formations (Çağlar 2018 is a rare exception). We speak of ‘co-authoring exclusion’ to capture the interplay of highly localised interests, national discourse, and historically inherited tropes.

In focusing on co-authorship, this piece complements and partially corrects a growing literature on deportability and the securitisation of the migrant figure (cf. De Genova 2013; De Genova and Roy 2020). Many scholars address these concerns with a focus on regional (Anderson 2019) or national strategies to label, exclude, or preclude migrants and migration (see Freemantle and Landau 2020; Micinski 2021; Van Dessel 2021). However, while formal legal and political discourse often evoke nations writ large, exclusive speech and actions can be highly spatialised and distinctly sub-national in origin and orientation. As actors mobilise nationalist discourses of exclusion, they customise and localise them. This co-authoring infuses them with particularistic interests, language, and a geographically delimited range. Much as the localisation of migration studies draws attention to how parochial interests produced varied alliances and outcomes on behalf of migrants (cf. Oomen 2020), we argue that such variations also apply to their exclusion. Consequently, people objectively belonging to the same, excludable category (e.g., international migrants, refugees, sexual or ethnic minorities) face differing vulnerabilities corresponding to residential sites.

Co-authored categories, violence, and temporal formations are now generating and legitimising spatialised regimes that will shape the nature of South Africa’s political transformation. South Africa is unique, but is not distinctive in its uniqueness. All countries are characterised by their contested

historiographical and spatial variations. The surfacing of temporal and sub-national factors should also reshape the analysis of immigrant exclusion and xenophobia elsewhere.

After briefly introducing our data and approach, the article offers a historically embedded account of the South African state's construction of the immigrant outside of national time. It illustrates how citizens' exclusive relationship to a spatialised past becomes a precondition for claiming current and future residential rights. It then shifts scale, outlining how this discourse has been localised through subjective aetiologies and mobilising strategies. Doing so illustrates the spatiality of exclusion and the potential political variations it introduces. The final section speaks of government silencing which naturalises these varied regimes and emplaces them within a national political pastiche.

Understanding Exclusion

This article draws on an eclectic archive of qualitative and quantitative data generated by research on anti-outsider exclusion in South Africa between 2005 and 2022 we have conducted alone, together, or with and alongside other colleagues. This includes, *inter alia*, systematic investigation into the nature, manifestations, causal factors, and implications of xenophobia (See Freemantle and Misago 2014) and assessing the nature and effects of responses by government and civil society (Polzer and Segatti 2011). Trends and contemporary accounts stem from 'Xenowatch', a crowd sourced observatory on xenophobic violence in South Africa we jointly established in 2015.¹ Working with partners across South Africa, it maps confirmed cases of threats and violence and correlates incidents with other socio-economic and political data. In total, we draw on twenty-nine case studies (including the three political sketches used in this paper) from across the country. Each consists of in-depth qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with perpetrators, officials, activists, and those attacked or displaced by threats or actual violence.

We complement our political sketches with personal accounts from thirteen oral histories from domestic and international migrants together with long-term residents. These surface narratives of past and progress to which residents pin their sense of selves and position others. Collected over much of 2016 and 2017 by a team of researchers working across Gauteng Province, these oral histories mix South African citizens and international migrant accounts. We are primarily concerned here with how South Africans position immigrants outside of national time. The quotations cited are not from interview transcripts, but from the published narratives. These include original interview text assembled by interviewers into coherent narratives. These were all reviewed and approved by the speaker. While previously published in

a popular-audience book (see Landau and Pampalone 2018), their implications have not yet been fully subject to the kind of critical review conducted in the following pages.

The Foundations of Temporal Exclusion

The convergence of multiple interests, histories, and institutional configurations has produced a discursive and practical regime where the South African government narratively excludes immigrants from ‘national time’ (cf. McNevin 2020; Yiftachel 2010). Such national time connects rights to future prosperity and residence with shared histories of racialised discrimination, struggle, and material deprivation (cf. Matsipa 2006; Posel 2010). Within this national chronotope, moving forward means rectifying the past by providing economic security for the previously disadvantaged.

In a national narrative that is increasingly consolidating and diffusing throughout the body politic (see Community Organising Working Group, Gauteng 2022), immigrants have become abettors of temporal stagnation. Drawing on a rhetorical archive from South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past, the post-Apartheid government’s words and actions identify and elevate the migrant as highly visible and demonised category responsible for lack of national progress along this arc. Often evoking the liberatory metaphors and imagery of a revolutionary Marxism infused with messianic Christianity (Goodman 2017; Suttner 2012), policy and political speech frames low skilled immigrants as an obstacle to addressing the historical inequities and creating true freedom for a deserving citizenry.

Pronouncements of post-apartheid government officials illustrate this point. Previous Minister of Home Affairs and leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, Mangosuthu Buthelezi stated in 1994: ‘If South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with the millions of ‘aliens’ that are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme.² More recently, a parliamentarian for the ruling African National Congress (ANC), Maggie Maunye, stated:

how long are we going to continue with this as South Africans? Is it not going to affect our resources, the economy of the country? [...] We’ve never enjoyed our freedom as South Africans. We got it in 1994 and we had floods and floods of refugees or undocumented people in the country, and we always want to play as if no there’s nothing like that.³

The narrative framing of migrants as inherently counter-temporal to the national project, as a block to realising the promises of national liberation . . . not only justified, but effectively necessitates performative and coercive exclusion them the country’s sovereign space. As Peberdy (2009, 178) notes, ‘. . . the state’s restrictive and exclusionary immigration policies include all

immigrants – black and white – to protect the new members of the ‘new’ South Africa.’ In recent years, such speech has become increasingly prominent with parties across the spectrum aligning themselves with an agenda causally connecting immigrant expulsion with national progress (see Haffajee 2022). Through such speech and policies flowing from it, the migrant figure is imbricated within the temporal fabric of contemporary governing structures and mythologies even as officials and the public decry their presence (cf. Kotef and Amir 2018).

The rhetorical categorisation and exclusion from national time has abetted an elaborate apparatus of spatial exclusion (Vigneswaran 2019, 2013; Vigneswaran et al. 2010). As with the USA and other countries (see De Genova 2013), the South African variant relies on a highly performative and intentionally imperfect campaign to expel the nation’s alien parasites. For much of the past twenty-five years, the police regularly arrest and detain foreigners based on their physical appearance, inability to speak the right language, or for simply fitting an undocumented-migrant ‘profile’ (Zikalala, Mofokeng, and Motlalekgesi 2021; Peberdy 2009, 178; also Buthelezi 1997). This demands enormous human resources, but offers important symbolic and material pay offs in terms of public credibility and extortion (See Hornberger 2011; Lamb 2021; South African Human Rights Commission 2004; Vigneswaran and Duponchel 2009). Although mandated to respect non-nationals’ rights, police often refuse to recognise work permits or refugee identity cards (Nyamwanza and Dzingirai 2020; Palmary, Rauch, and Simpson 2003). Police often frame even extra-legal forms of harassment and immigration control as central to crime prevention and protecting South Africa futures (see Vigneswaran et al. 2010). Reflecting the power of an anti-immigrant narrative, senior city officials proudly report on their successes as a way of combating social exclusion and helping cities to realise their potential (see Kihato 2013; Ngwenya 2019).

Neither discursive nor coercive exclusion has effectively prevented migration to South Africa. However, in patterns seen elsewhere, such exclusions have generated networks of smugglers, employers, transport companies, and state actors imbricated in extra-legal syndicates dedicated to moving people across borders and protecting them within the country (Brigden 2016; Getmanski, Wright, and Wright 2019; Hornberger 2019; Musoni 2020; Zack and Landau 2021). Consequently, many immigrants create lives shaped by ongoing efforts to seek opportunities amongst significant economic and physical precarity (Vidal 2014; Wilhelm-Solomon, Kankonde Bukasa, and Núñez 2017). Their continued presence despite these restrictions feeds South Africans fear and frustrations of the ‘demon within’: for many South Africans, foreigners remaining in South Africa means they can not move forward (see Gordon, Wentzel, and Viljoen 2021; Landau 2010).

Co-authoring Sociotemporal Exclusion

The literature on immigration enforcement foregrounds the kind of nationalist rhetoric and practices outlined above while often undervaluing the significance of local discursive variations and action. More recent attention has turned to the 'localisation of migration governance', with attention to municipal governments resisting or zealously enforcing national immigration rules (see, for example, Armenta 2017; Coon 2018). This rescaling is important, but such work typically centres state institutions and public bureaucracies. As state actors are not the only ones fabricating exclusive narratives or enacting forms of exclusion or accommodation, they too must be considered. Even in highly institutionalised spaces, practically excludable categories of people stem not only from official designations, but also through the imbrication of the state authored 'others' with residents' schema, subjectivities, and behaviours. Where state institutions are frail – as they are across much of South Africa and elsewhere in the 'global south' – forms of horizontally enacted exclusion fundamentally shape how categories are lived and popularly understood. Amidst this frailty, the localisation of exclusive categories is characterised by local ingenuity and lasting variability.

Throughout interviews in South Africa, there is strong evidence of citizens incorporating, furthering, and modifying the anti-immigrant rhetoric initially authored by the central state. Lufuno Gogoro, for example, is a Black South African who fought against apartheid. In 2011, he helped create the Greater Gauteng Business Forum, an organisation explicitly dedicated to protecting and promoting Black South African enterprise. The forum has regularly called for immigrants to be prevented from entering the country and, more specifically, owning or running businesses.

people are unemployed and these others are just coming to take over *Spaza* shops everywhere and buying the locals out. It was becoming a problem and nobody was saying anything it became a situation where the Zulus started to say, 'This is our land and everyone else can just go We were asking the foreigners to leave, to stop the violence and put South Africans first (Ndlovu 2018).

His text reveals a schema in which immigrant as threatening South Africa's future is so naturalised, that the only solution to protect them and South Africans is for them to leave.

Ntombi Theys, a lifelong resident of Alexandra Township outside of Johannesburg, reflects a similar sentiment: 'They made us feel like our human rights were meaningless you know? If the Constitution says a man must be given a dignified wage and then a foreigner comes and says he will do it for less than what does that right mean at all?' She continues:

Our people are frustrated because there was this better life they were promised and instead the government keeps letting in foreign people, letting them have the jobs and the houses that we have all been waiting for . . . They're taking the money they make and

sending it back home, while meanwhile there are South Africans all around them who are starving, who can't find a single job that will take them. It's a burden for us. It's not an easy thing. It's just not (Brown 2018).

Within the minds of many, an amorphously delimited group of outsiders has stalled progress. It is – as in NN's account – a group that appears to be doing the diabolic work of others (cf. Dean 2001; Landau 2010). The simultaneous reification and demonisation of the foreigner coupled with the practical impossibility of preventing international migration have unwittingly placed the foreigner at the centre of a street-based national project. With migrants viewed as a demon at loose in the body politic, many citizens long for something akin to an exorcism. It comes as little surprise that calls for heightened border control and restrictions are frequent refrains as politicians echo and amplify street-level discontent (see Bornman 2022; Heleta 2019; Landau 2018).

Importantly, voices calling for the removal of the threatening, immigrant other, are not universal. Violence occurs unevenly across the country and there are sites where South African citizens have accepted, sometimes embraced, and occasionally even defended non-nationals. Anti-immigrant attitudes may be widespread, but violence occurs primarily in circumstances where exclusive discourse is activated and mobilised by actors seeing local influence and authority (see Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti 2011; Hiropoulos 2017; Misago 2019a). This is most evident where the state's capacity to consistently coerce is limited. Under such conditions, rights to space, services, and futures are often defined 'horizontally': by neighbours and local authorities working in and out of official state structures. The consequences are twofold. The first is the naturalisation of exclusion into people's political cosmologies in ways that vary across national space.

The remainder of this section focuses on the local political mobilisation. It argues this is a form of co-authorship in which non-state actors are mobilising and realising the category of excludable alien: of enforcing categorical distinctions on the basis that migrants are 'out of time'. It recognises the central state's role in framing South Africa's political project and introducing broad social categories through law and practice. Yet it treats these not as a gospel, but a rhetorical quiver or toolbox from which local authorities and actors can draw in authoring forms of syncretic authority and citizenship.

One of the most explicit examples of co-authoring excludability came in April 2015, when the now late Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelethini, told a crowd that it was time to, '... get our house in order and clean our land of lice'. This from a 'traditional' leader who commands considerable respect within KwaZulu-Natal province and among the sizeable Zulu speaking community in and around Johannesburg.⁴ He continued: 'We need to remove all itching bedbugs and lay them bare in the sun, they will choose to hide because of the heat of the sun. We request that all foreigners should take their baggage and be

sent back'.⁵ In the following days, violence spilled onto streets in Durban and Johannesburg's as gangs looted and incinerated scores of immigrant-owned shops. Even as he evoked an exclusive, nationalist language, his interests and claims were decidedly sub-national. He was positioning himself not as a leader of South Africa, but asserting his authority over Zulu speakers while seeking to strengthen the power of 'his' people in communities across the country. Such speech reinforces the ideal of a nation-state and foreigners' place outside of national time, but does so by asserting his localised power and elevating the position of Zulu people as independent actors within South African political time and space.

The pattern of mobilising exclusive national rhetoric to establish localised power repeats itself in varied forms throughout South Africa. The three cases of co-authorship described below speak about the consolidation of particular forms of sub-national authority and power founded on the spatially delimited exclusion of the immigrant other. In all cases, immigrants are categorically positioned as inimical to 'progress'. The case studies are distinctive, but serve to illustrate both similarities and commonality in spaces where xenophobic violence occurs across the country.

Mamelodi

Perhaps South Africa's second largest township after Soweto, parts of Mamelodi are now more than fifty years old, stable, and settled.⁶ However, its margins have grown rapidly, outpacing state supplied services and policing. Since politics abhors a vacuum, two groups working together have filled the political and regulatory space. One of these is the South African National Civic Organisation. In some places across South Africa, that organisation works as a kind of voluntary public service body. In others – including Mamelodi – it practices a form of civic gangsterism that often exercises forms of violence in the name of the community and transformation. Working alongside them is the Phomelong Residents Association. This citizen-based initiative is headed by a small group of self-appointed leaders who have established themselves as *the* regulatory body in the area. Those wanting to build, do business, or even transport goods must pay them or be prepared to leave.

Protection rackets are, of course, common worldwide (cf. Richmond 2018). In some cases, they pay off the police to stay away. More often, they force them from the community. With the police gone, they find ways of extracting money and resources from residents and the state to maintain order. This reinforces their position as intermediaries between public institutions and the people. In this case, one of the main tools they use is public protest over the lack of services and other resources.

While people in these areas certainly have unmet wants, they are not necessarily prone to protest, especially if it involves taking time away from income earning activities and paying to travel to where they will be visible to officials and the media. To finance these activities, the association offers up foreign owned shops and business as plunder. Like the self-financing armies of old, those who protest were given licence to loot on their return. The association representatives reported that, ‘when protesters feel hungry, they go and get food from shops to eat or take home to cook; and if shops here are closed they go to shops in other locations’. As migrant populations live somewhat outside the law and remain deeply unpopular, citizens come and take food, airtime, houses and the shops themselves with little possibility of facing formal justice. Importantly, this is framed locally not just as theft, but as just: as removing an obstacle to progress in line with an emic sense of right and expectations of transformation. The association then used this violence to attract resources from the municipal government with them as arbiter and mediator. By borrowing the language of transformation and alienage to reinforce particular categories of outsiders, it spatially and temporally excluded them, creating a localised form of rule shrouded in the mantle of national progress.

Jeffsville

Adjacent to a fairly well-established area called Atteridgeville; Jeffsville was founded through what some term a ‘land invasion’: People moving on to unoccupied public and privately owned land and claiming it as their own. In this case, Jeff led the group and eponymously named the settlement. With ready access to Pretoria and other parts of Gauteng Province, it is a desirable location and destination for internal and international migrants. However, it lacks adequate housing for these new arrivals. Residents initially demanded the state provide accommodation, but eventually grew tired of extended waiting (cf. Oldfield and Greyling 2015). As their impatience mounted, Jeff was losing his status. In 2008 (and a number of times since then), Jeff sought to reinforce his position by mobilising against particular groups of foreigners. Working with his supporters, he evicted them from their residents and claimed the properties in the name of South African residents.

By ‘reallocating’ houses and business occupied by Zimbabweans and others, Jeff buoyed his reputation and local legitimacy. He then profitably sold rights to residence and work back to foreigners, sometimes even negotiating the return of stolen property. According to the Atteridgeville Community Policing Forum chairperson (CPF),⁷ Jeff’s office was charging displaced foreign nationals’ money for return to the area and protection after the 2008 violence. He stated: ‘The organization called GACA (Gauteng Civic Association), they

are community leaders, its Jeff and Themba. After the xenophobic violence, foreigners are paying them money to reintegrate into the community and are also paying protection fees’.

In this way, Jeff at once excluded and included foreigners in the community. He made visible the foreign presence that had been there all along and reinforced their categorical allochthony. Yet through their reintegration as rent payers turned their presence into a resource for progress. Most significantly, he has positioned himself vis a vis the state as a peacemaker. This militates against the need for expensive state engagement, party activities, or police presence. It also established bureaucratic patrons that need him. This is a highly spatialised political logic that extends no more than the few hectares on which Jeffsville sits. It not only modifies what it means to be an excludable foreigner – or more specifically the conditions under which one can stay – but it shapes what the national state can do and how it can act in this space.

Philani

In early 2019, the Delangokubona Business Forum displaced and kidnapped approximately fifty foreigners who had been living in Philani, a newly formed and deprived settlement just outside of eThekweni (formerly Durban). Appropriating the language of progress and redemption embedded in the constitution and political rhetoric – a version of national progress outlined in this article’s early pages – they accused foreigners of blocking community advancement. Indeed, the forum touts itself as championing ‘radical transformation and black economic empowerment’, slogans at the heart of national competitive politics (see Masemola 2021). In this, they activate an exclusive chronotope in ways that overtly challenges state and legal authority within this space. State issued identity documents (e.g., refugee permits) no longer matter. Only nationality and political loyalty offer protection.

As in the other cases, the forum effectively created a multi-faceted protection racket. They used violence to bring about instability to secure resources. In this case, they demanded protection fees from foreign business owners before forcing them out of houses and business for redistribution to locals. As with Jeff, they then extracted money from the state to help build ‘peace’ in their community – to stop the violence so officials would not be embarrassed or, more importantly, would not have to take further action without becoming a locus of demand. One respondent stated about the forum:

These people have destabilised the area because they have their own guns. Those people they can even stop a government contract. If there is a contract they will go and stop the people to do contract, they want percentage of the contract money. And if you operate in that area they need money, otherwise they will disrupt you . . . Then we raised the issue with the police because it had started because they were giving the bank accounts to put

money into. Someone giving an up-to-date bank account, and the police say they are still investigating . . . no one is arrested and because there is no arrest, these things will never stop.

These actions and reactions have made the forum a powerful local force that demands paid involvement in any state development project in the areas it controls. The state and gangsters collaborate to create a spatialised political order in which rights to residence are contingent on local logics and the temporal exclusion of the non-native becomes a perennial political resource.

In all three sites, local figures have established authority by mobilising both against and, oddly, for migrant populations. On one hand, local actors use them as a resource to channel discontent and provide material resources (payoffs, attached houses, looted goods). The violence and authority associated with these mobilisations then positions leaders to extract resources from the formal state. These take the forms of direct investments, moneys to ‘reintegrate’ displaced migrants, and – most importantly – recognition and political legitimacy. Through this, the formal state both recognises and relies on these leaders to maintain order. South Africans under these spatialised live as syncretic citizens embodying elements of the formal constitutional order with spatially defined systems of rights and resource allocations. This co-authored politics modifies the meaning of exclusion, sometimes extending offers of hospitality to sub-groups of foreign nationals and sometimes excluding unpopular citizen minorities. In all cases, it rests on a shared temporal narrative of progress and realising liberation. Where outsiders can be aligned with that vision they are allowed to stay. Where they cannot, they must be run out of space to enable national progress. In doing so, these actors localise the meaning of the nation and the mechanisms employed to protect it while reinforcing the overall temporal arc of national progress.

Silencing: Interiority, Spatialising Regimes, and ‘Naturalising Exclusion

At this point, we return to the question of the national government and the creation of national space and time. As noted in our opening paragraphs, officials’ responses to the violence described above have varied over years and across departments. While some observers liken state actions/inaction to complicity (see Misago 2019b), it is perhaps more accurate to see the state response as discursive legitimisation through denial. More specifically, it has sought to reframe debates over immigration and violence that draw attention from the violent politics at work, to the reassertion of a unified, national project and a frustrated – but nonetheless deserving – indigenous citizenry.

Much of this rests on a government unwilling to publicly acknowledge that there is something distinctly ‘xenophobic’ or anti-immigrant occurring or officials’ role in the temporal alienation of non-citizens. So, while varied forms of anti-immigrant rhetoric have become increasingly common in South Africa’s electoral politics (Heleta 2019), the government nonetheless denies its culpability in fostering anti-immigrant sentiments and, more importantly, the anti-immigrant actions taken by its citizens. The closest one sees in the official debate is an empirically questionable debate about ‘Afrophobia’.⁸ The argument runs that Black South Africans were so horrendously conditioned by the Apartheid government to hate other Africans that until they shed the material deprivations inherited from that era, they will remain categorically suspicious. By linking the violence to apartheid, the government avoids responsibility for its own actions (or lack thereof), and narratively denies citizen agency. This protects the people’s and politicians’ virtue and frames ongoing violence as part of the continued battle for national liberation. Crime is due to inherited inequality; anti-immigrant attitudes due to racist, anti-African bequests. Rather than a sign of failure, the insecurity reads as justification to keep the course and continue the struggle.

The most common response from government officials to ongoing anti-immigrant violence is a claim that this is just criminality (see Tagwirei 2019). This too seemingly reflects a form of self-condemnation. Yet instead of implicating themselves or the leaders evidently behind the violence, authorities again surface a citizenry needing to evolve and move forward. They then root the violence and criminality as a natural response to deprivation, drug dealing, and unfair business for which migrants are responsible. It is migrants who cross into the country illegally. It is migrants who trade illegally. And by living illegally, they are the ones denying poor citizens equal opportunity to jobs and services. Of moving forward. Indeed, that their presence is a boon to white capital that employs them as a way of undermining ‘black’ citizen power and transformation again demands the government doubles down on its transformation agenda.

Political rhetoric surrounding horizontal forms of anti-immigrant exclusion reinforces the state’s authority to code people as in or out of place and identify, those who can be legitimately violated. It also further defines their true constituency, a deserving black South African citizenry continually victimised by an invading other and white, monopoly capital. The violence may be criminal but it is given an almost liberatory political valence. The presence of a violable yet demonic foreigner has thus become one of the last, legitimising tools of government. This is done in ways that are spatially varied and co-authored with the people who have no official role but shape and come to reflect popular sentiment.

Denialism has not only led to inaction in terms of adopting a comprehensive and coordinated national level response, but also enabled the localisation of regulation and political authority.⁹ As Monson and Arian

(2011, 46) note, with ‘brutality greeted by impunity, and impunity greeted by indifference’, the lack of accountability in terms of prosecution and restorative justice (i.e. impunity) provides a favourable opportunity structure for violent attacks on foreign nationals. The country’s 2019 *National Action Plan on Racism and Xenophobia* was framed to address these concerns, but it too lacks concrete implementation measures and resources and remains largely a paper tiger (ISS 2021) and has resulted in few efforts to promote accountability (Human Rights Watch 2020b). Official silencing offers the much-needed protection to non-state actors of xenophobic exclusion and helps maintain the status quo. More importantly for the current argument, it enables the consolidation of the alternative modes of governance and locally co-authored discourses of exclusion to solidify.

Conclusions: co-authorship and Spatiotemporal Excludability

Genova (2002, 439) usefully and influentially argues that, ‘migrant ‘illegality’ is lived through a palpable sense of deportability, which is to say, the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state.’ This does not go far enough if for no other reason than it privileges national and spatial cartographies as the bases of exclusion. In South Africa, the threat of visibilisation and subsequent deportation by national authorities undeniably shapes the experiences of people who must seek to ‘pass’ or otherwise minimise risks of arrest. However, by centring state and legal categories, one overlooks other forms of coercive, spatialised exclusion that shape migrants’ experiences and position within political authority systems.

The cases described in the previous pages illustrate how the embodied and subjective, temporalised categories of exclusion are co-authored by sub-state, often informal authority structures. Indeed, during the regular assaults on foreign on businesses and shops, attackers explicitly pronounce the illegitimacy of state documents. This build on Stone’s recognition that urban regimes or governance system (Stone 1989, 1993) often rely on relatively stable, if emergent, collaborations and contests among various social, economic, and political actors. In his words, the ‘the study of urban regimes is . . . a study of who cooperates and how their cooperation is achieved across institutional sectors of community life’ (Stone 1989, 9). As Davis (2011), Tilly (1985), and Scorsese (2002) all illustrate, these often include mafias or mafia like organisations working at multiple scales (see also Ansell and Gash 2009; Richmond 2018). These are the actors engaged in co-authoring categories and exclusion.

Perhaps more fundamentally, this article calls to temporalise discussions of exclusion. While others have recognised the historical specificity of the distinct configurations of ‘illegality’, this is often read as situating discourse and practice within particularly governmental genealogies. To be sure, the specific ‘who’ citizens consider excludable or welcome draws on embedded

knowledges and practice mobilised within specific milieux (cf. McNevin 2020; Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 2010). Again, the account above suggests the need for explicit focus on the rhetorical position of migrants within national space-time. For the state and *some* South African citizens, it is not only contemporaneous threats migrants pose that justify their geographic exclusion. Rather, what motivates and empowers exclusive action is immigrants' potential to rob deserving citizenry of opportunities to claim a future to which only they are entitled.

Notes

1. See www.xenowatch.ac.za
2. National Assembly, 'Minister of Home Affairs: Introductory Speech, Budgetary Appropriation,' August 9, 1994.
3. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/mp-sorry-for-xenophobic-comments-1092524>
4. Traditional leaders in South Africa claim indigenous authority but are in no small part creations of the Apartheid regime. See (Southall 1970; Weeks 2019)
5. Transcript of Speech submitted by Sonke Gender Justice.
6. Mamelodi is a township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Gauteng Province. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), it has a population of approximately 350,000 people.
7. CPFs exist across South Africa as liaisons between the South African Police Service and the communities they ostensibly protect. See http://www.policesecretariat.gov.za/downloads/policies/community_policing.pdf.
8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-49746180>; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1503697>
9. <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-24-dedicated-courts-appointed-to-deal-with-xenophobic-cases>

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ORCID

Jean Pierre Misago  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6964-3926>

Loren B Landau  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0198-4748>

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