Living on the Fringes of Life and Death: Somali Migrants, Risky Entrepreneurship and Xenophobia in Cape Town

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Abstract

Since the 2008 attacks on African migrants, xenophobic violence has become a form of social agency for responding to increasing unemployment, destitution and crime in South Africa. Africans living and operating businesses in urban and peri-urban areas are now objects of different forms of social violence, as they are repeatedly blamed for unfulfilled political promises by the ANC-led government. One of most victimised African migrant communities is the Somali community, whose business activities in cities and townships are perceived as undesirable threats to locals' sources of livelihood. This article uses qualitative data collected from 30 Somali migrants in Bellville and Khayelitsha, Cape Town to examine how Somalis' co-existence with South Africans and their business tactics in Cape Town intersect to influence xenophobic violence. It explores the relationship between risky entrepreneurship and xenophobia, and the threats that this relationship poses to Somali lives. Finally, it analyses South Africans' strategies to force Somalis out of townships and how Somalis' existential resistance to these strategies positions them on the fringes of life and death.

Keywords: African diaspora, displacement, risky entrepreneurship, xenophobia.

> *"Everybody just arrives in our townships and rural areas and set up business without licences and permits. We are going to bring this to an end! And those who are operating illegally must now know" (President Cyril Ramaphosa – Election Campaign 2019).*

Introduction

Recent narratives about xenophobia in South Africa focus on the porousness of South African borders and "a subtle invasion of South African territory" by illegal aliens from other African countries (Vigneswaran, 2007: 144; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2002). As transnational migrants continue to challenge forms

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of citizenship, belonging and statecraft in South Africa, political populism now constructs this imaginary territorial invasion by Africans as a potential threat to South Africa's national security and sovereignty. This is because migration, legal or illegal, has been repeatedly blamed for high levels of poverty, joblessness and crime as well as poor service delivery in South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2007; Pineteh, 2018). In Cape Town townships and elsewhere, locals have repeatedly attributed these social pathologies to the proliferation of Somali businesses and the resultant contestation over business spaces. Despite the success of South African businesses in townships, the expansion of Somali businesses in these areas has led to unhealthy business rivalry between locals and Somalis. Here, we see both parties employing different tactics to eliminate competitors and to remain at the centre of business activities. For example, South Africans are now resorting to autochthony tropes of citizenship to express their "exclusive entitlements to space, property and state resources", especially during xenophobic attacks (Pineteh, 2018: 5; Dassah, 2015). The evocation of autochthonous citizenship disregards the fact that "transnational migration has led to new forms of citizenship and belonging that can no longer be ignored by states and their citizens" (Pineteh, 2018: 5). Nevertheless, Somali migrants continue to live on the fringes of life and death as they do business in townships, especially as calls for non-citizens to be expelled continue to dominate conversations about state transformation in post-apartheid South Africa (Charman and Piper, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2007; Pineteh, 2018; Thompson, 2016).

In 2015, as part of the African Humanities Program (AHP) of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), I conducted a narrative study of the xenophobic experiences of Somali migrants in Cape Town. This article emerges out of, and uses empirical evidence gleaned during this broader study. It uses qualitative data to examine how Somalis' co-existence with South Africans and their business tactics in Cape Town intersect to influence xenophobic violence. It explores the relationship between risky entrepreneurship and xenophobia and the threats that this relationship poses to Somali lives. The article argues that as South Africans continue to deploy different strategies such as violent attacks, burning and looting of shops, and killings to force Somalis out of townships, Somalis will always devise new ways to resist the attacks and to continue doing business in these townships. In

finding novel ways to resist and circumvent xenophobic attacks, Somalis find themselves living on the fringes of life and death.

To tease out the relationship between xenophobia and risky entrepreneurship, this article firstly provides a brief literature overview of transnationalism, African migrants and xenophobia in South Africa, and it describes the Somali community in Cape Town. Secondly, it explains the data collection methods and discusses how Somali business strategies and their responses to xenophobia position them on the fringes of life and death in Cape Town.

Transnationalism, Somali Entrepreneurship and Xenophobia in South Africa

To understand the exilic experiences of African migrants and the complex patterns of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa, I frame this article around conceptions of transnationalism. Here, I position particularly Somali experiences as "interactions between agents, transnational networks, structures of opportunity and constraints, and the production and circulation of power as seen through discourses of difference" (Smith and Bailey, 2004: 358). These conceptions of transnationalism help us to understand the "geographies of migrant life and livelihood", and how migrants' sense of belonging transcends territorial boundaries (Thompson, 2015: 121). Like other African transnational migrants, Somalis social existence in South Africa is constantly influenced by different agents including state institutions, political figures and local citizens on the one hand, and by their own strong networks on the other. These networks include close-knit relationships in South Africa and Somalia as well as with other Somali communities around the world (Jones, 2010; Pineteh, 2018; Vertovec, 2004). These networks provide different support structures for old and new Somali migrants and for business ventures. This has contributed significantly to Somali business expansion in Cape Town, which forges interactions with different agents in South Africa resulting in the display and interplay of different power dynamics and forms of resistance. For Carling (2008:1453), this display of power and resistance stems from the "multi-faceted nature of the relationship, with migrants and non-migrants experiencing vulnerability and ascendancy at different times and in different contexts". During xenophobic violence, this multi-faceted

relationship plays out in the form of reactions and counter-reactions as locals try to reclaim business spaces in townships. Here, incendiary narratives, particularly from locals, have been subverted by counter-narratives that recognize Somalis' rights to belong and acknowledge the contributions of Somali businesses to South Africa's economic growth (see Gastrow and Amit, 2013; Pineteh, 2018). Because locals' attempts to get rid of perceived non-citizens or outsiders in resource-constrained communities are countered by narratives of inclusivity, "violence becomes a form of agency" in these communities (Von Holdt and Alexander, 2012: 106). Therefore, any form of violence or protest action against Somali businesses in townships places Somali migrants on the fringes of life and death. In this context, I use the concept of transnationalism to mean "the daily lives, activities and social relationships of migrants" and how they intersect with those of non-migrants to influence xenophobic violence (Schiller et al., 1992: 5).

I frame this article around transnationalism, not only because Somalis' activities and transnational networks or cross-border business transactions have contributed to their business dominance in South Africa (Carling, 2008; Schiller et al., 1992), but also because "transnational activities flourish in highly concentrated communities, especially those that have been subjected to a hostile reception by the host society's authorities and citizenry" (Portes, 2003: 880). Here, I try to argue that the growth of Somali business clusters in areas such as Bellville and Khayelitsha in Cape Town and the ensuing multi-faceted transnational activities respond to the alienation of African migrants in South Africa. Conversely, these business clusters and growing transnational activities drive xenophobia because they are imagined as migrants' attempts to usurp spaces that naturally belong to autochthons (Gastrow and Amit, 2013; Pineteh, 2018). In this light, as xenophobic violence threatens the lives of Somali migrants, their "transnational cultural activities and civic associations offer a source of solace against external hostility, and protect personal dignities…" (Portes, 2003: 880).

Drawing on these tenets of transnationalism, studies on African transnational migrants have focused on their sources of livelihood, imagined threats to the social wellbeing of citizens and xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa (see for example Klotz, 2016; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2018). The upsurge in these studies is attributed to the incendiary narratives about illegal migration and

recurrent attacks of particularly African migrants in major South African cities and townships since 2008. The culture of xenophobia in the new South Africa is also inflamed by preoccupations with "autochthonous forms of citizenship which often neglect Africa's social formations of mobility and inclusiveness" (Boas and Dunn, 2013:12; Geschiere, 2009). In the context of South Africa, many of these studies explain how the notion of 'origin' is constantly used by those who claim to be daughters and sons of the soil to reject the judiciary rights of African migrants to belong. Here, increasing political rhetoric of autochthonous citizenship engenders the construction of "a state nationalism that is exclusionary and discriminatory", especially in a South Africa with widening inequality gaps and competition over scarce resources (Lecours and Moreno, 2010: 128). These counter-democratic practices blame the miseries of South Africans on porous borders and the influx of African migrants. Studies such as those by Pineteh (2017), Landau (2011) and Hassim et al. (2008) have therefore argued that xenophobic tendencies are influenced partly by perceptions that migrants, especially those from the African continent, are illegal parasites, criminals and undeserving beneficiaries.

As locals reimagined the post-apartheid state as belonging to autochthons only and continue to lay claims to public spaces and state resources, some of the studies on xenophobia seek to understand and theorize the uneasy relationship between immigrant entrepreneurship and xenophobia (Charman and Piper, 2012; Charman et al., 2012; Grant and Thompson, 2015). They explore the business rivalry between migrants and locals, highlighting the "complex milieus in which immigrant business practices and xenophobia mutually shape each other" (Grant and Thompson, 2015: 244). At the centre of this business rivalry between Africans and locals are Somalis and other migrants from the Horn of Africa because they have penetrated and set up businesses in some of the most hostile urban and peri-urban areas in South Africa. These studies therefore argued that operating businesses in these spaces positions Somalis and other migrants as prime targets during xenophobic violence (see Charman and Piper, 2012; Grant and Thompson, 2015; Pineteh, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Despite the significantly high numbers of Somali murders and equally significant capital losses in the form of goods and cash during violent attacks on foreign businesses, we are yet to

see a decline in Somali businesses in those volatile spaces (Jinnah, 2010; Piper and Yu, 2016; Thompson, 2016).

Somali Community in Cape Town

The Somali population in Cape Town has increased exponentially over the years, and this population includes predominantly asylum seekers and refugees. It is, however, difficult to determine the exact number because of inaccurate and often obfuscating South African Department of Home Affairs (SADHA) data on asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa (Landau, 2010; Pineteh, 2018). The increase is matched diametrically by an upsurge in Somali business activities in different sectors of Cape Town. This is because earlier Somali migrants have grown into "self-employed immigrant entrepreneurs" and have created business opportunities and provided assistance in the form of start-up capital to new arrivals (Grant and Thompson, 2015: 260). This community has the foresight to spot business opportunities, and they are ready to risk everything including being "willing to run the risk of robbery" (Charman and Piper, 2012: 96). Their rapid expansion in business and appropriation of business spaces in peri-urban and urban areas has been likened to some kind of fetishism or black magic, and locals have tended to associate their "economic misfortunes like poverty, joblessness, and the consequent inability to marry…" to a spiritual spell cast on them by successful foreign business owners (Hickel, 2014:108). This street-level discourse hardly explains the success of Somali businesses in Cape Town. This paper further argues that the success of Somali entrepreneurism lies in their ability to see business opportunities in every situation they encounter in life.

Moreover, the xenophobic experiences of Somali migrants in Cape Town cannot be disassociated from the collective tribulations of African migrants in post-apartheid South Africa. Somalis are part of a community which Landau (2011:1) describes as demons, "whose presence came to be seen as an existential threat to South Africa's collective transformation and renaissance". The collective violence against Africans has been justified by locals as restless attempts to "exorcise the demons", "the enemy", "an amorphously delimited group of outsiders that is inherently threatening, often indistinguishable from others, and effectively impossible to spatially exclude" (Landau, 2011: 2). So, just like other Africans in South Africa, the image of the foreigner "makes them

markedly vulnerable to constant victimization, harassment and violence" (Crush et al., 2015: 52).

Unlike many other African migrants, Somali migrants in South Africa are escapees of the never-ending civil wars and piratic activities in Somalia. These wars continue to disperse families and displace millions of Somali nationals. As political refugees, they come to South Africa with horrific images of a dysfunctional homeland. They are autochthons who have been deprived of citizenship, excluded and alienated in a place called home (Crush et al., 2015; Geschiere, 2009; Landau, 2011). In South Africa, what is strikingly unique about Somali migrants is their spirit of resilience and resistance to different forms of social violence. To date, they are arguably one of the most affected communities with regard to xenophobia, partly because of their extreme courage to implant themselves and operate businesses in spaces dreaded by other migrants (see Crush et al., 2015; Harris, 2002; Landau 2011; Pineteh, 2018). Today, when you read about Somali migrants, the dominant narrative is that of "violent entrepreneurship" or "the spaza shop violence" (Charman and Piper, 2012: 83). This narrative sheds light on the "construction of political insiders and outsiders through a long history of claiming autochthony" in volatile South African townships such as Alexandra, Delft, Joe Slovo and Philippi (Charman and Piper, 2012: 85).

Narratives that allude to Somalis' extreme courage and appropriation of business spaces in South Africa now reverberate in major cities like Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. In fact, there is an increasing formation of Somali ghettoes in these cities with a rich tapestry of Somali culture in the form of community halls, restaurants, mosques with nationalistic symbols such as the Somali flag (Pineteh, 2018). In Cape Town, the Bellville municipality in the northern suburbs is dominated by Somali spaza shops, supermarkets and wholesale businesses, competing favourably with popular South African brands such as Pick 'n Pay, Shoprite, Edgars and Pep (Charman and Piper, 2012; Pineteh, 2018). This business competition has spread with equal success to key townships/peri-urban areas in Cape Town such as Nyanga, Philippi and Khayelitsha, putting Somalis at loggerheads with local business owners. Although the formation of Somali ghettoes at urban and peri-urban intersections of Cape Town symbolizes a renewed sense of belonging and self-inclusion, it is weakened by their vulnerability to xenophobic attacks

(Crush et al., 2015; Landau and Freemantle, 2010). This article was therefore motivated by the intersections of Somalis' risky business tactics, the unhealthy rivalry with local businesses and xenophobia in Cape Town.

Research Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

As previously mentioned, this article is based on qualitative data collected between 2015 and 2016 for a broader project funded by the American Council of Learned Societies through its African Humanities Program. This project sought to understand xenophobic experiences of Somalis residing and operating businesses in Bellville and Khayelitsha in Cape Town. The data was collected through one-on-one interviews with 30 participants – 20 males and 10 females – between the ages of 25 and 45. The interviewees were selected using a snowballing approach, and the interviews were conducted either at their residences or at their business premises. Each interview generally lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and the questions were framed around Somali exilic experiences including the main themes of this article. Participants included five retail shop owners in Bellville, 15 spaza shop owners in Khayelitsha, three shop attendants in Bellville and seven roadside traders, also in Bellville. During the interviews, shop owners and roadside traders claimed that they had been robbed, beaten and had their businesses looted at least once during the xenophobic attacks. For instance, shop owners in Bellville emphasized that they had been victims of random robberies and sporadic lootings because of their location. However, spaza shop owners in the townships pointed out that they had experienced worse forms of xenophobic violence, ranging from looting and burning of shops to stoning and brutal murdering of Somalis. Of the 15 spaza shop owners, five claimed they had been shot at least once or had witnessed the brutal murder of another Somali business owner, and 10 stated that they had been seriously beaten.

The participants in this project were not very fluent in English, so conducting 30- to 60-minute interviews in English was a major challenge. To address this challenge, I recruited, as a research assistant, a postgraduate Somali student at the University of the Western Cape who had research experience and was very familiar with the Somali community. His primary responsibilities included scheduling interview appointments, conducting interviews, interpreting and transcribing data.

Through the research assistant's networks and association with the Somali community, I was able to gain access and conduct the interviews. Before each interview, we explained the purpose of the research and, through a consent form, we requested permission to audio-record all the sessions. This document clearly explained ethical issues including confidentiality and anonymity. For this reason, participants are cited in this article simply as 'participant' and suffix numbers between 1 and 30. The interviews were transcribed and in some cases they were translated from Somali/Arabic into English by the research assistant. Using a thematic content analysis approach, data was categorized into key themes, coded and analyzed accordingly. The analysis revealed intricacies of risky entrepreneurship and social exclusion, and the characteristics of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. They also revealed aspects of business rivalry, Somali business tactics and constellations of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

Analysis and Discussion of Key Findings

As opposition to the ANC-led government intensifies, its politicians now resort to populist renditions rather than substantive evidence of social reforms to lure local votes. These renditions desperately blame the social and economic activities of African migrants for the declining quality of South African lives (Dassah, 2015; Pineteh, 2017; 2018). In this light, the expansion of Somali businesses in South African communities is perceived as a process of dislodgement of local competitors. This immediately frames Somali entrepreneurship as a serious threat to the livelihoods of local South Africans, which must be eliminated (Nyamnjoh, 2006; Thompson, 2015).

Somali Migrants, Risky Entrepreneurship and Xenophobia in Cape Town

This study revealed that the majority of Cape Town-based Somalis rely on different business ventures as their main source of livelihood. In Bellville and Khayelitsha, they operate mainly clothing, homeware and grocery shops, as wholesalers, retail traders, spaza shop owners or street-side petit vendors (Charman and Piper, 2012; Pineteh, 2018). Like in other major South African cities such as Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria, the sprawling of Somali businesses in Cape Town is attributed to the application of different tactics, some of which instigate hostile reactions from South Africans (Gastrow and Amit, 2013; Thompson, 2016). The study also revealed that through close-knit

networks and ghettos, Somalis are able use their financial power to illegally secure business space, intimidate competitors (especially other migrants) and defend themselves against assailants or robbers. They own their own weapons, which "are intended to hold back a South African 'below' that threatens to rise up from the group and throw out Somalis" in any business space (Thompson, 2016: 93). These tactics have enabled them to displace local businesses in spaces that have been owned and controlled by local shop owners for years. Attacks on Somali businesses in Cape Town are therefore construed "as part of a struggle to recapture lost market space or secure market advantage" (Charman and Piper, 2012: 5). According to one participant,

> *This business place is my own because I have an agreement with the landlord and I pay my rent every month. This rent is also helping the landlord. So, no South African can drive me from this place. They are doing the same spaza shop business like us but we are not disturbing them, so they think they can take my business just because this is their country. What they are doing is not the law and I am not going to allow them to take my shop just like that. Let them come, I am waiting for them [sic](Participant 11).*

This interviewee is one of many Somalis who now operate successful spaza shops in Khayelitsha, disrupting a business culture that has existed in South African townships for decades. In fact, the piecemeal selling of household goods in small kiosks has been the source of livelihood for many South African families for decades, and Somalis' accessing and appropriating this business idea is perceived as a threat to a longstanding business tradition that has influenced the identity of local township dwellers (Charman and Piper, 2012; Pineteh, 2018). The sense of an aggressive takeover in the quotation above is an "overt display of power in local communities" which instigates anger and contempt against Somalis in Cape Town townships (Pineteh, 2018: 11; Charman and Piper, 2012; Jinnah, 2010).

Somalis' business tactics are driven on one level by a form of business aggression, which enhances their business success and increases the pressure on local business owners to compete. This increasing pressure to compete with Somali businesses has translated into hostility and criminality in townships. According to one participant:

> *This [sic] people have seen the way we do business and they become angry that we are taking their customers. They say they are tired of us putting shops everywhere in Bellville and their townships and they cannot sell their own stuff because all the people now buy from Somalians. So, they attack us because they think we are taking their business, and thieves come to steal from us almost every day because they think we have a lot of money in our shops (Participant 12).*

This narrative is a replay of locals' vocabulary of entitlement and pejorative images of high crime rates stemming from economic stagnation and rising unemployment (Pineteh, 2018). This is expressed in phrases such as 'taking their customers', 'their townships', 'taking their business' and 'criminals rob us every day…' Moreover, although Somalis who were interviewed are bona fide residents in South Africa, there is an underlying rhetoric of unwanted people or the "convenient metaphor of illegal alien…gaining undeserved advantages" (Murray, 2003: 447) during xenophobic violence. This testimony therefore alludes to locals' attempts to de-legitimize Somalis' judiciary rights to live and work in South Africa, rights accorded to them by SADHA (Crush and Pendleton, 2004; Landau and Freemantle, 2010; Pineteh, 2018).

Despite complaints about Somali spatial appropriation, which are assumed to deprive local South Africans of business opportunities, Somali narratives tended to replay South Africans' obsessive sense of entitlement, which arguably is driven by a culture of dependency imbued in South Africans by political promises. For example:

> *They say we are taking all their business and I feel for them. But for me they are jealous of us and the problem is that this [sic] people are very lazy; they can't do this job. Sometimes they come to the shops of Somalis and they say they want jobs, but if you give them work they won't work. Instead they will be watching your business, and at night they will come and rob the shop. So no one is giving them jobs in their shop again. You see, they don't want to work and they want their government to give them houses, jobs, food, and if they don't get them, they come and attack us. But this shop is not given by the government and I work hard to build my shop – the government did not give me the money (Participant 8).*

As Somali migrants confront different forms of social violence, they tend to narrate their experience of xenophobia through African migrant images of a perceived lazy and dependent South African. Like many other African migrants, Somalis feels they are attacked because they are hardworking, and for them their businesses are symbols of this hard work (Pineteh, 2017; 2018). The narrative points to the xenophobia denialism and African migrant exceptionalism, which reconstruct the attacks on Africans as being in the wrong place at the wrong time (Crush and Pendleton, 2004; Harris, 2002). But as Somali migrants continue to operate businesses in Cape Town, the display of power and control over spaces, as well as Somali resistance to xenophobic violence, continue to endanger their lives.

For Somalis and South Africans alike, Somali business successes are construed as a life of opulence, a gratuitous opportunity offered to Africans by the post-apartheid politics of inclusivity, while locals' conditions of abjection persist (Pineteh, 2017; 2018). Xenophobic attacks on Somalis are scripted implicitly as a narrative of envy and the dystopia of a political agency of better living conditions for all South Africans, which over the years has unfolded into imagined permanent conditions of misery (Landau and Freemantle 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2006). However, the risk to Somali lives also emanates from a strong survivalist culture expressed through business tactics of close networks, kinship and affordable pricing (Jinnah, 2010). These unique business strategies have driven Somalis to volatile business spaces previously owned and controlled by local South Africans. As argued in previous articles (Pineteh, 2017; 2018), operating successful businesses in townships is seen not only as a threat to local livelihoods or as undesirable business competition, but also as illegal access to spaces that belong to indigenes. This participant asserted that,

> *South Africans sleep the whole day, targeting to steal, loot and kill foreigners at night while they get support from their government. That is how they want to earn their living. But Somalis work hard and help each other to become business partners because they don't have government [sic] to rely on. So the difference is Somalis want to work hard and South Africans totally don't want to work but only to rob people. When they rob you, they say we come into their home and do business in their land, so the things belong to them (Participant 13).*

Again, the metaphor of an unwanted parasite and the culture of entitlement are used to justify criminality and attacks on Somalis. Although Somali businesses contribute to local economic growth, their mere presence in townships is perceived as a threat to locals' autochthonous right to spaces, and the attacks as a community agency to protect what is rightfully theirs (Hassim et al., 2008; Neocosmos, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2006). The following quotation points to a narrative shift, which subverts South Africans' claims of an aggressive business takeover by Somali migrants. During the interviews, one participant reiterated that South Africans cannot claim that Somalis have taken their businesses and customers when they do not have any interest in business. He argued that South Africans are just jealous of Somali success, but do not have the character to run successful businesses. He commented:

> *I don't think South African people like business. They want the government to give them everything: education, jobs and houses. I come from a country with no government to give you anything, so you must work for yourself. We can't take their business; we only start our own spaza shops in the township. Before we came here they were already doing the business but it wasn't growing because they have no strategies. They attack our shops because of all the bad things they think that we bring to South Africa. They even say we use muti[1] to do business… (Participant 14).*

This participant is disingenuous about South Africans' entrepreneurial skills because there is research evidence which shows the success of South African spaza shops despite the expansion of Somali businesses (See Gastrow and Amit, 2013; Pineteh, 2018). Here, the victimization of Somalis is simply connected to "their keen sense of business acumen" (Jinnah, 2010: 98). However, the looting of Somali shops and the killing of shop owners is a pretext for a generalized hatred of the other African, constantly imaged "not only as a tramontane intruder who disrupts the status quo, but also a stronger, or one who figuratively pollutes, contaminates and despoils the existing moral order" (Murray, 2003: 448). Although the generalized perception about Africans is a powerful narrative trajectory in Somali reconstruction of

[1] *Muti* is a Zulu word for traditional African medicine. It is commonly used by traditional healers in Southern Africa.

xenophobic experiences, Somali business tactics remain a trigger of violence, whether or not South Africans are business-oriented. For example, the success of Somali spaza shops in Cape Town townships and elsewhere in South Africa is attributed to strong networks and kinships, which give them access to start-up capital for new businesses. Instead of seeking business loans from the banks, they are easily funded by established Somalis. Because they have access to capital and goods, they are able to negotiate favourable prices or offer credit options to local communities, compared to local shop owners who charge relatively high prices.

Living on the Fringes of Life and Death: The Somali Case

As political rhetoric and local narratives continue to blame African migrants for the woes of South Africans, townships are seen as the hotspots for all forms of social violence, including service delivery protests and xenophobia (Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2017; 2018). This is because decades after the demise of apartheid, South African townships are still embodiments of human suffering and they epitomise the extent to which the Black-led government has failed to deliver on its political promises of a better life for South Africans. Instead, the government's politics of state transformation has created "a politically entitled but materially deprived citizenry [which has taken] on the obligation to alienate and exclude those standing in its way" (Landau, 2011: 3). These residential spaces "serve to modify, extend, and entrench various forms of spatial control, political authority and sovereignty", even at the expense of human lives (Landau, 2011: 3; Pineteh, 2018). The growing social deprivation, anxieties and gruesome images of social violence show how townships have transformed into risky and volatile spaces, especially to African migrants, whom many local residents perceived as architects of their socio-economic problems. But for Somali migrants in Cape Town, operating businesses in risky spaces is a normal business challenge. One participant asserted:

> *Many people ask us whether we are not afraid to live in the township and open businesses in the townships because there is a lot crime in the township and they are killing foreigners every day. I always tell them business is about taking risk, and if you do not take any risk in business, you are never going to make any money. You can die at any place and any time, and if it is not your time to die, Allah is not going to allow it to happen (Participant 8).*

This participant normalizes the violent attacks on Africans and the looting of their businesses, internalizing the logic that business, risk and social violence are co-dependent variants in any competitiveness business environment (Charman and Piper, 2012; Gastrow, 2013). Although foreigners and their businesses in the townships are the most vulnerable during xenophobic violence, compared to those in urban areas, this participant still perceives access to risky business spaces and resilience to violence as predictors of business success (Pineteh, 2018; Piper and Yu, 2016). This attitude explains why, despite the killing of Somali migrants in Cape Town townships, research studies are yet to show a decline in Somali businesses in these areas.

For Somali business owners, behind the façade of the social violence and threats to the lives of Somalis in Cape Town townships lies a business opportunity. As survivors of years of Al-Shabaab incursions in Somalia and tumultuous journeys to exile, the violence in townships ignites not fear but a sense of déjà vu in many participants interviewed in this study (Pineteh, 2017; Thompson, 2015; 2016). This sense of déjà vu is captured in the following excerpt:

> *Yes, we know that there is crime in the townships the same way that there is crime in the cities. My brothers have shops in Bellville but they still attack them. Before coming to South Africa, I ran away from war in Somalia and they were killing people every day and I ran way. I travelled a long distance through different countries to come here, and I passed through places where there was fighting and killing of people, and I was attacked and arrested. So there is nothing in South Africa that I am afraid of (Participant 11).*

During the interviews, participants pointed out that living on the fringes of life and death in Cape Town townships is a normal way of surviving in crime-ridden post-apartheid South Africa. Although townships pose a major threat to the lives of Somalis, this participant claims xenophobic violence can no longer be localized because threats to the lives of Africans have permeated to all parts of South Africa. In addition, Somalis' experiences of statelessness and political violence at home, crossing turbulent borders and hostile reception during their journeys to exile reduce the violence experienced in South African townships to very familiar exilic experiences (Gastrow, 2013; Pineteh, 2017;

Thompson, 2015). The eruption of violence against Somali migrants who have *penetrated business spaces in the townships is nothing but "an identifiable locus of ungovernance in which experiences of state presence and absence come together as migrants circulate through the neighbourhood across lines of unofficial segregation, provincial boundaries, and national borders" (Thompson, 2016: 92).*

As subaltern South Africans continue to seek answers for their existing material conditions, Somali business successes in Cape Town will remain existential threats to their South African competitors if answers, besides blaming their conditions on the influx of illegal migration are not forthcoming from politicians (Grant and Thompson, 2015; Pineteh, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Tensions and the imminence of violent attacks will continue to simmer in hotspots around the country, further endangering the lives of Somali migrants (Buyer, 2009; Klotz, 2016). However, over and above these visible threats, this study revealed that Somali lives are equally endangered by their reactions to xenophobic violence in the absence of state protection and justice for victims (Gastrow, 2013; Pineteh, 2017). In the following quote, one participant emphasized the need for self-protection against criminality and xenophobia in the Cape Town townships:

> *My shop is five years now in Khayelitsha [sic], and criminals have broken into my shop many times and taken my stuff. They have attacked me and threatened to kill me. There was a time when they came to steal during the evening, a group of five men, and they attacked me with knives, and I fight [sic], and they took some money and stuff and ran. I called the police and they did not come. So now I sleep in my shop and I have my own weapons; I am waiting for them to come again (Participant 17).*

In this quotation, we see an existential character that is ready to take responsibility to protect his life and livelihood in the midst of crime and anti-immigrant violence because Somali victims have been unable to access "justice via formal state institutions" (Gastrow, 2013: 10). Empirical evidence from studies on the state's response in providing judiciary protection to Somali migrants affected by xenophobic violence shows that the response has been sluggish and tokenistic. In a study on Somali businesses in the Western Cape, Gastrow (2013: 10) opines that "there has been very little police and prosecutor success in achieving convictions in respect of the Somali business

robbery victims…" Whilst the lack of police protection can be blamed on several challenges within the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the South African Judiciary System, the quotation shows clearly that Somalis can no longer rely on the SAPS for protection against their assailants. As Somali migrants pursue alternative means of justice and defence such as owning their own guns and "paying youth and gangs for protection", they will continue to live in the margins of life and death (Gastrow, 2013: 11; Pineteh, 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

The most recent (2019) and previous xenophobic attacks on African migrants demonstrate that there is still a need for more scholarly, evidence-based research in migration and the politics of belonging. This type of research plays a critical role in understanding the multi-faceted and often contentious debates about the thorny issue of migration, as South Africa grapples with worsening socio-economic challenges (see Dassah, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Pineteh, 2018). Research on the lived experiences of African migrants therefore provides a practical prism through which we can engage with broader conceptions of transnational migration and the implications for policy formulation (Amit and Kriger, 2014). This article therefore contributes to existing studies on the role of immigrant entrepreneurship and political populism in shaping South Africans' perceptions about African migrants.

In one of my previous publications, I argued that xenophobia has become a new form of political agency driven by a fixation on the dangers of free human mobility, border control and the expulsion of 'outsiders' (Dassah, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Pineteh, 2017; 2018). One of the dominant narratives in South African political discourse today is the porousness of South African borders and clarion calls for the government to control and fix its borders to prevent the entry of African migrants, regardless of the potential economic benefits they may bring. For example, Somali migrants bring entrepreneurial skills from which South African small business owners can learn to become more competitive in the spaza shop business (Charman and Piper, 2012; Gastrow, 2013; Pineteh, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Interestingly, South Africans' calls for better securitization of South African borders show that although globalization is about flexible borders, goods and financial capital seem to be enjoying this flexibility more than human beings. This suggests that

the "open flows of globalization have triggered the construction of new boundaries, the reaffirmation of old ones and the closure of identities" (Boas and Dunn, 2013: 18). South Africa's recent approach to migration poses critical questions about the right to belong, the politics of inclusion and exclusion as well as citizenship in a post-apartheid South Africa that has given foreigners judiciary rights to live and work in the country (Pineteh, 2017; 2018).

As political parties desperately want to hold on to power or scramble for votes during elections, they now resort to populist forms of ethnic nationalism, which blame 'illegal migrants', an amorphous phrase for African migrants, for their worsening social and economic challenges. What we see in South Africa today is a politics of denialism and deflection, where politicians find scapegoats to shift the attention of locals from their failures, particularly during service delivery protests (Landau, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2007). For them, the government should not be held to account for unfulfilled political promises such as jobs, housing, and better living conditions because of illegal immigration. But what does legal or illegal migration mean to South Africans living in poverty? Whose responsibility is it to regulate migration in South Africa? Does this type of populism mean that South Africa will become a pure and flawless nation if all African migrants are exorcised? As this narrative finds its way into townships, tensions and violence simmer as African migrants who do business in these spaces are now seen as usurpers.

During periods of xenophobic violence, African migrants in townships become the most vulnerable, and since the Somali community is one of the African communities that have identified business opportunities in townships, they now live on the margins of life and death, every day. As South Africans continue to deploy different strategies such as violent attacks, burning and looting of shops as well as killings to force Somalis out of 'their townships', Somalis will always devise new ways to resist the attacks and continue living in these townships. In finding ways to resist and circumvent xenophobic attacks from locals, Somalis are likely to continue living at the mercy of local South Africans who are determined to exorcise African migrants from South Africa.

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