'Kick out the Foreigners'

Understanding the May 2008 violence in the Johannesburg area

BA Thesis Conflict Studies

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Introduction

'During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die' (Collins 1998: 408).

Those were the words of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, former anti-apartheid revolutionary and South Africa's first president, at the opening of his defense in the 1964 trial in which he was charged with opposition to the white government and its apartheid policies of racial, political, and economic discrimination against the nonwhite majority amongst others. Mandela, sentenced to life imprisonment at this trial, was released from prison in 1990 due to fierce international pressure. The very same year saw the end of the 53 years of the brutalizing apartheid (Collins 1998).

Although South Africa constitutes a democracy nowadays, it still lacks the 'free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities' Mandela dreamed of. As such Oxfam (2014: 38) recently coined South Africa, with a Gini coefficient of 0.66, one of the most unequal countries in the world, where 'the two richest people […] have the same wealth as the bottom half of the population.' It is not my aim here to expose the inequality in the country though, but rather to focus on the somewhat problematic (instead of the longed for harmonious) cohabitation of South Africans – particularly when it comes to black South Africans and foreign black Africans. From time to time black South Africans in particular behave hostile and violently towards primarily foreign black Africans. For example, in December 1994, just a few months after the first democratic elections in the country (April 27 1994) social unrest broke out in Alexandra, a township near Johannesburg. Here 'armed youth gangs destroy[ed] foreign-owned property and demand[ed] that foreigners be removed from the area' (Duponchel 2013: 3). In September 1998 a group of black South Africans, having just returned from a meeting where migrants were blamed for the spread of HIV/AIDS and the high level of unemployment and crime, threw one Mozambican and two Senegalese from a moving train. In August 2005 Zimbabwean and Somali refugees were beaten and abused; in February and March 2007 violence and looting erupted after the accidental shooting of a young South African man by a Somali shop owner (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). In 2008 large-scale anti-immigrant violence burst out in Alexandra and spread rapidly throughout the country (Steinberg 2008). Just recently, from January 2015 to April 2015, fierce anti-immigrant violence flamed again in the Johannesburg area, which caused thousands of foreigners to flee (Essa 2015; Moftah 2015; Van Raaij 2015). This is just a selection of the many anti-immigrant incidents that have taken place in South Africa.

In this thesis I focus on the violence that took place in 2008. On May 11 that year the black South Africans' violent attitudes and behavior flared to such an extent in Alexandra that they spread throughout the country within the following fifteen days, causing hundreds of casualties, thousands

of displaced people, and millions of Rand worth of property destroyed (Steenkamp 2009; Duponchel 2013). These 2008 attacks are said to be unprecedented in scope and intensity (Steinberg 2008) and evoked many researchers to examine and unravel the causes, dynamics and impact of these attacks in the country that was coined the "Rainbow Nation" by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. So far, many analyses of the May 2008 violence have treated the violence as a xenophobia-fuelled phenomenon, that is, it would be the *foreignness* of black Africans that instigated the violence. However, the term *xenophobia* is problematic in the South African context, for the word's definition entails 'an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population' (UNESCO, no date). Why then, were primarily black Africans – coming from whatever country north of South Africa – targeted? And why is it that mainly black South Africans were the perpetrators of this violence, whereas other ethnic South African groups distanced themselves from the violence (Duncan 2010; Sichone 2008; Duffield 2008; Harris 2002)? Nevertheless, within the school of thought on xenophobia, two subschools can be distinguished. On the one hand there are scholars and journalists taking on a culturalist perspective, claiming that black South Africans have incorporated the discourse that was dominant during apartheid, which treats blacks as inferior to other races. Therefore, it is argued, black South Africans would attack black African foreigners (Steenkamp 2009; Matsinhe 2011; Valji 2003; Duncan 2010; Stevens 1998; Harris 2002). On the other hand there are proponents of relative deprivation theory, who argue that socio-economic conditions lead to competition amongst the less well-off for scarce resources.

In order to get a better and more detailed insight into the violence, this research draws the attention away from the common notions of the existence of relative deprivation or apartheid's legacy and takes a closer look at the relation between identity and the May 2008 violence on the basis of the *discursive approach* and the *alliance theory*. Both theories argue that identity and ethnicity are socially constructed, but differ in their views on *how* exactly they are constructed and how violence is fostered. In short, the first holds that words and narratives play a role in creating identities and identity differences, and in implementing specific discourses that might evoke and maintain ethnic violence. The seconds holds that civilians should not solely be seen as passive, manipulated actors who incorporate such a discourse without contradiction, but rather as rational individuals pursuing their own agendas (Demmers 2012). Looking to these two theories in particular is important because firstly, many scholars so far have not problematized the assumption that South Africans operate within an apartheid-ish discourse, whereas this is actually questionable. Secondly, various researchers have tended to treat the two main warring parties – black South Africans and black Africans – as homogeneous groups, whose members cherish the same ideas and ideals. Kalyvas (2003), proponent of the alliance theory, emphasizes however that a conflict is a mixture of different motives and different forms of violence. The May 2008 violence should thus entail more actors and more motives than has commonly been assumed.

Therefore, on the basis of the discursive approach it first seeks to identify the dominant South African discourse on foreigners and the factors that underlie and feed this discourse. On the basis of the alliance theory then I aims to break the perpetrator group up into its constituent parts and to expose the different motives of the perpetrators in the conflict. This enables us to unravel the local dynamics in the townships located near Johannesburg that fomented identity differences and violence. Lastly, using both theories this thesis examines how identity is constructed and emphasized in the run up to the May 2008 violence, and how this ultimately instigated the hostilities. Throughout my research I take James Fearon's and David Laitin's (2000: 848) definitions of *identity* and *ethnicity* by the hand, which constitute the following:

> 'Identity here refers to a social category […] Social categories are sets of people given a label (or labels) and distinguished by two main features: (1) rules of membership that decide who is and is not a member of the category; and (2) content, that is, sets of characteristics (such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments, and physical attributes) thought to be typical of members of the category, or behaviors expected or obliged or members in certain situations (roles). […] Ethnic identities are understood to be defined mainly by descent rules of group membership and content typically composed of cultural attributes, such as religion, language, customs and shared historical myths.'

By focusing on the relation between identity and the May 2008 violence this thesis might establish a better and more detailed understanding of the May 2008 violence in the Johannesburg area and provoke further analyses that go beyond blaming relative deprivation or apartheid for the former and current state of affairs in South Africa.[1] The research is socially relevant too, for measures to quell violent attitudes and violent behavior against foreigners and have so far consisted of, amongst others, police- and military intervention in townships, and punishment of perpetrators. These temporary, incidental measures seem to be inadequate, for hostile attitudes persist and violence resurfaces from time to time. Therefore the root causes of these attitudes and violence should be addressed in order to handle the problem itself more adequately in the future.

The first chapter carefully describes the way the May 2008 violence manifested and developed itself throughout its fifteen days of existence in South Africa. The second chapter sets forth the academic debate on the causes and dynamics of the violence, and gives an overview of this debate's shortcomings. Subsequently the third and fourth chapters seek to explain the violence on the basis of the relation between identity and violence. The third chapter aims to do so by unraveling the dominant discourse on black foreigners in South Africa on the basis of the discursive approach. The fourth chapter examines the violence on the basis of the alliance theory. These analyses are followed by a conclusion and discussion that review the major findings of the thesis. As the violence sparked in

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[1] This phrase refers to the situation in South Africa during the May 2008 violence, and to the resurfacing of hostilities against immigrants in Soweto, Johannesburg since January 2015.

the Johannesburg area and has been heaviest in scope there it focuses on the violence that happened there, and not so much on the incidents that happened for example in and around Cape Town. Hence, mainly articles on the situation in the Johannesburg area are used, although articles on other parts of South Africa are taken into consideration as well. The research is solely based on literature; some articles used, however, draw their information from ethnographic research. An important source for this thesis is Johnny Steinberg's (2008) ethnographic research in the Johannesburg area, which was conducted in the immediate aftermath of the May 2008 violence.

Chapter 1. Delineation of the May 2008 violence in South Africa

'The mobs started in Beirut informal settlement and then went on a rampage across Alex. They were attacking the foreigners day and night – they wanted to get them all out.'

Frank Rasodi, an Alexandra resident (Human Rights Watch 2008).

In May 2008 South Africa witnessed an in scope and intensity unprecedented level of violence mostly directed against immigrants. For fifteen days foreigners – especially black Africans (from now on referred to as "black Africans" or "foreigners"), but Indian, Pakistani and Chinese too – and South Africans, perceived to look foreign, were systematically attacked at multiple locations throughout the country, primarily in informal settlements known in South Africa as *townships* (Peberdy and Jara 2011). Black South Africans, consisting of Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi and Sotho people, formed the majority of the perpetrators (Steinberg 2008).[2] In the end 62 persons, among which 21 South Africans, had been killed and at least 670 had been wounded. Furthermore an estimated 100,000 had been displaced, and millions of Rand worth of property had been looted, destroyed or appropriated by local residents (Kihato 2013; Duponchel 2013; Misago, Landau and Monson 2009).[3] These attacks have often been referred to as the "May 2008 xenophobic riots" (Steinberg 2008: 1), although this terminology, as discussed in the introduction, is disputable. Let us now take a look at the initiation and dynamics of the hostilities.

The violence is said to have started on Sunday, May 11 2008 in Beirut, a neighborhood in Alexandra – one of the townships near Johannesburg. On this day a meeting was headed here by Jacob Ntuli, leader of the local community group *Umphakathi*, to discuss crime in Alexandra.[4] During the meeting local residents began blaming foreigners for the high crime rate and unemployment, and for stealing houses from native South Africans. Subsequently residents at the meeting decided to evict foreigners from their neighborhoods forcefully, and mustered at 10 PM with guns, whips and *knobkieries* (a traditional club) (Human Rights Watch 2008). With cries of '*Khipha ikwerekwere*' ('kick out the foreigners') and songs composed during the struggle against apartheid, which no longer narrated the white minority rule, but the so-called "job- and house stealing, criminal foreigners" instead (Steinberg 2009: 3), thousands of South African residents of Alexandra attacked, looted or appropriated shacks and shops known to be inhabited or run by foreigners (Human Rights Watch 2008). Black South Africans even attacked their black African neighbors and their friends, and looted or appropriated the latter's properties (Steinberg 2008). The black African foreigners themselves, mainly Zimbabweans, Malawians and Mozambicans, were demanded to leave Alexandra

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[2] In this thesis the words "black South Africans" and "black Africans" are used in order to make a clear distinction between the perpetrator group and the victim group of the May 2008 violence. One must keep in mind that not every black African was a victim in the genocide, just as not every black South African was a perpetrator.

[3] The Rand (R) is the South African currency. R1,- is approximately €0,08.

[4] *Umphakathi* is the Zulu word for "the community". Jacob Ntuli, at the time 67 years old, is a community leader and former security guard in Alexandra (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 55; Bridgland 2008).

immediately. As the excerption above illustrates, the violence, including door-to-door evictions, stone throwing, necklacing, and rape, continued day and night (Human Rights Watch 2008; Evans 2008; Steinberg 2008; Duponchel 2013). In total 3,000 inhabitants fled for safety to the Alexandra police station during the first night of attacks in the township (Human Rights Watch 2008).

The South African police intervened to quell the violence and arrested fifty people that night. This, however, to no avail: the attacks continued in Alexandra for four more days. Besides, by May 16 the violence had spread to other towns, townships and neighborhoods near Johannesburg and in between Johannesburg and Pretoria (Human Rights Watch 2008). On May 18 2008 Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a 35 year old Mozambican, was burned alive at a taxi rank in Ramaphosa, an informal settlement north of Johannesburg. The mob that had set the very man on fire laughed, along with bystanders, as the man rocked in agony (Dixon 2008; Steinberg 2008). The event elicited wide national and international disbelief and indignation: Desmond Tutu plead the attackers to 'stop the violence now', just as South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki called for an end to the criminal acts (Dixon 2008). Norman Duncan (2010: 258) highlights that '[i]n the public memory, it was this cruel and gruesome event, more than any other, which marked the unfurling of frightening wave of xenophobic violence that was to engulf the South African landscape for several weeks thereafter.' By May 19 violent mobs had targeted foreigners in central Johannesburg, and from May 20 to May 22 the violence surfaced in the provinces of Mpumalanga, Free State, Kwazulu Natal, North-West, Eastern Cape and Western Cape too (Duponchel 2013). In the end only two provinces of the country proved to be resistant to the violence.

Ultimately on May 21 Thabo Mbeki, the then president of South Africa, decided to send the army into the townships in order to stop the violence, and by May 26 the violence had been declared under control (Duponchel 2013). As mentioned, already hundreds of persons had either been killed, wounded or abused and thousands had been displaced by then, and millions of Rand worth of property had been looted, destroyed or appropriated. To wit: 342 shops were looted, 213 were burnt down, and thousands of houses had been taken away from foreigners in any way. As of today some victims have settled in other areas of South Africa where their lives are not at risk; a couple of thousand have decided to return to their countries of origin – for them returning to their South African homes is just not an option (Steenkamp 2009; Duponchel 2013).

Chapter 2. Academic debate

In academia as well as in the media there has been a lot of attention for May 2008 violence in South Africa. Many authors and scientists have sought to unravel the causes, dynamics and impact of these attacks. This chapter discusses the theories that are most dominant within the academic debate on the violence, and their shortcomings.

2.1 Relative deprivation, apartheid's legacy and xenophobia

The academic debate on the violence in South Africa seems to be centered around two core theories: socio-economic conditions and relative deprivation on the one hand, and apartheid's legacy on the other. Both are thought to foster xenophobia amongst the black South Africans. As to the first theory, it has often been agreed upon (Duncan 2010; Steenkamp 2009; Steinberg 2008) that the big socio-economic inequality in the South African society makes South African poor feel relatively deprived – they experience a gap between what they expect to get and what they actually get. This discrepancy is said to lead to frustration, which then eventually evolves into aggression (Gurr 2011). Additionally, research shows that black South Africans and black Africans are competing over scarce resources (Steenkamp 2009), and that foreigners are blamed for unemployment, crime, the patronization of local women, and the spread of HIV/AIDS (Matsinhe 2011). The combination of this relative deprivation and competition then, would result in violent attitudes and violent behavior towards black Africans. However, Nahla Valji (2003) emphasizes that the presence of large numbers of migrants is not new to South Africa, as migrants were brought in during apartheid to work in the mining sector. As a result, since the turn of the century 40 to 80 percent of laborers in gold mines have been non-South Africans. These theories on socio-economic conditions and relative deprivation therefore seem unable to adequately explain why in May 2008 large-scale anti-immigrant violence broke out in a country that had welcomed immigrants for at least sixty years then. So in 2008 different (or additional) factors must have been present in South Africa which triggered black South Africans to resort to violence. In the words of Ingo Schröder and Bettina Schmidt (2001: 4): '[W]hile conflicts are caused by structural conditions […] wars do not automatically result from them. Wars are made.'

The other theory seeks to explain the violence on the basis of apartheid's legacy. It has been argued that South Africans, irrespective of their skin color, have come to internalize aspects of 'the insidious racist messages of the old colonial and apartheid orders of the abjectly "inferior" black Other and the "superiority" of whites' (Duncan 2010: 265). In other words, South Africans are said to perceive blacks as the inferior race and whites as the dominant one; in essence they are blamed of being racist (Stevens 1998). On a similar note Morris' *isolation theory* holds that 'the brutal environment created by apartheid with its enormous emphasis on boundary maintenance has also impacted on people's ability to be tolerant of difference' (Harris 2002: 172). Duncan (2010: 265) highlights that these theories' explanations for the violence against black Africans assume that 'blacks according to the racist scripts of the old order are deserving of such violence.' The problem with these theories is that

they completely ignore the ethnic composition of the perpetrator group (predominantly black South Africans); the thousands of South Africans (of different ethnicities) that protested against this violence; the tens of thousands of immigrants peacefully living together with native South Africans; and the pretty common intermarriage in the country (Duffield 2008; Duponchel 2013).

2.2 Critique and shortcomings

The flaw in the assumptions and theories mentioned above, is that academics and journalists take the in academia and media dominant discourses on the violence, that is, relative deprivation and apartheid's legacy and them fostering xenophobia amongst black South Africans, for granted. Stathis Kalyvas (2003: 477) highlights that this simplified labelling of conflicts alters the complexity and thorough understanding of a conflict, as conflicts 'usually entail a perplexing combination of identities and actions.' By looking through a specific lens (for example through the lens of xenophobia) when analyzing the violence, one risks failing to grasp the violence's complexity. Moreover, one might be inclined to solely focus on incidents that fit within the specific lens' discourse. Indeed we see that many researchers focus mainly on black South Africans' attacks against black Africans (both are portrayed as homogenous groups), but fail to look at the relations between the various ethnic South African groups themselves, which in fact appear to be amendable. This is illustrated by the following testimony of a foreigner who was interviewed by Cindy Warner and Gillian Finchilescu (2003: 41) on his experiences of anti-immigrant violence in South Africa:

> 'Because I'm foreign, when I see one guy Xhosa, ja, he talk shit about coloureds. I see this in my neighbourhood. When I talk with Xhosa people, "Oh! Coloured people is like this." Coloured people, "Oh, Xhosa? Is like this".'

So negative attitudes between South African ethnic groups themselves are present as well. By focusing solely on the black South Africans' hostility towards foreigners however, hostility can be thought of to be directed against foreigners only – and can thus be interpreted as xenophobic. In that sense the idea that the May 2008 was fed by xenophobia is some sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Secondly, Kalyvas (2003: 476) underscores that individuals 'take advantage of the war to settle local or private conflicts often bearing little or no relation to the causes of the war or the goals of the belligerents.' Thus, not every black South African attacks because of relative deprivation or apartheid's legacy, but rather for his or her own lucre. Thirdly, Gurr (2011) sets forth that relative deprivation alone never leads to violent outbursts, but that people have to be talked into violence. This is a process in which discourses on the "Other" play a large role.

It might be clear that there are a lot more factors at stake in the May 2008 violence. Yet relative deprivation, apartheid's legacy and subsequently xenophobia, notwithstanding the fact that they do not explain all aspects of the violence – such as its timing and intensity, or the victimization of

primarily black Africans – and their lack of critical analysis of the relation between identity and violence, are too often accepted as the prima facie reasons for hostility against foreigners. In order to develop a better understanding of the May 2008 violence in the Johannesburg area this research overcomes the common assumptions mentioned above by taking a closer look at the relation between identity and the May 2008 on the basis of the discursive approach and the alliance theory.

Chapter 3. Narrating reality

As set forth in the previous chapter, achieving a better understanding of the May 2008 violence could be fostered by identifying the dominant discourse on African foreigners within the South African society. This chapter does so on the basis of the discursive approach. First let us identify what discourses and the discursive approach entail.

3.1 The power of words

Anthony Giddens (cited in Demmers 2012) highlights that people are born into societies that are organized along certain rules of social life; people are born into specific discourses, which Teun van Dijk (2001: 355-356) coins 'stories about reality that claim a larger truth.' Sayyid and Zac (1998: 255) underscore that these discourse are mainly created and maintained through words: 'Descriptions of the world are the means by which we socially construct reality.' Departing from this point of view, the discursive approach seeks to identify how reality (discourse) and social boundaries are constructed through narratives. Sayyid and Zac (1998: 261) describe this as follows:

> 'The discursive approach focuses on the way in which communities construct their limits; their relationship to that which they are not or what threatens them; and the narratives which produce the founding past of a community, its identity and its projections of the future.'

The approach thus tries to extract the process of discourse making and identity creation on the basis of analyzing narratives, which can entail amongst others politicians' speeches, media articles, and civilians' opinions. What must be mentioned here is that some groups or institutions behold strong social power and therefore have quite exclusive access to, and control over, specific discourses (Van Dijk 2001). The media is such an institution: it can deliberately emphasize or defocus on specific actions or events, and distort reality in this way. Given the fact that for many people the press 'are the only source of information about events that are not experienced daily', this institution is highly influential in the implementation of a discourse (Van Dijk 2001; Danso and McDonald 2000: 1). Despite language, actions, thoughts, beliefs, logics and rules are said to contribute to the maintenance of a specific discourse too (Sayyid and Zac 1998), but those will mainly be discussed in chapter four.

This chapter seeks to unravel the South African dominant discourse on black African foreigners and how identity and identity boundaries are created in the country. Also it tries to identify how this discourse and identity formation ultimately led to the May 2008 violence. Its analysis is based on Schröder and Schmidt's (2001) framework on the processual character of violent action, which holds that *war* or *violent conflict* is only put into practice after the passing of three stages: conflict, confrontation and legitimation. *Conflict* contains 'the socio-economic contradictions at the base of intergroup competition'; *confrontation* refers to a phase in which relationships between the

different identity groups involved become antagonistic; *legitimation* refers to 'the official sanctioning of violence as the legitimate course of action' through *violent imaginaries* (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 19).

3.2 Subcutaneous feelings

As in South Africa identities and identity differences are emphasized on a daily basis, mostly with regards to physical appearance – words as 'we blacks', 'the coloreds', 'those whites' (Stevens 1998) are omnipresent in conversations, researchers tend to characterize the country as intolerant of differences (Stevens 1998; Morris cited in Duncan 2010). Others state that South Africans are socialized into an apartheid-ish discourse that sees blacks as the inferior race. However, those arguments do not seem to cover the country's situation adequately, for many South Africans live intermingled, with both native South Africans and persons coming from other countries. Given the absence of large-scale violent conflict between different identity groups in the country, it is perhaps the idea that foreigners are stealing jobs and houses, and that they are responsible for high crime rates, that has made black South Africans keen to emphasize the identity differences between themselves and black Africans.

To wit, during multiple ethnographic researches many black South Africans are heard stating that black Africans are responsible for amongst others the stealing of jobs and houses, high crime rates, and the spread of HIV/AIDS in many of South Africa's townships (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009; Steinberg 2008; Harris 2002; Steenkamp 2009; Matsinhe 2009). Those ideas seem to have formed due to the fact that entrepreneurship is the face of immigration in the townships of South Africa. Steinberg (2008) illustrates that many immigrants, once settled in their new hometowns, work as sidewalk barbers, fresh product traders, sculptors and woodcarvers (Steenberg 2008). Moreover, research done by the Centre for Development and Enterprise study has revealed that employers are often recruiting foreigners over black South Africans (2008). A common explanation by foreigners is that, in contrast to black South Africans, foreigners low wages and are (better) educated and skilled. Moreover black South Africans are said to be work-shy (Steinberg 2008: 7). All this is emphasized by a Mozambican residing in South Africa:

> 'We arrived in this country without tools. At first, we accepted any job, even if it paid R40 a day. A South African will not work for that amount, especially not for a white man. As we worked, so we saved. We bought tools. When we started the business, we offered to build for very little money. Business picked up. We charged more. As we gained success, so we bought televisions and stereos and other nice things. The South Africans got angry and wanted to steal our nice things. From their point of view, what they saw was foreigners coming to do the work they refused to do and then buying things they could not afford' (Steinberg 2008: 7).

Scholarly research proves that the notion of black foreigners stealing black South Africans' jobs does not appear to be based on personal experience. In interviews conducted by John Crush

(2006: 33) only sixteen percent of the black respondents had lost a job to a foreigner; 33 percent personally knew someone who lost a job to a foreigner; and 34 percent had heard of someone in the community who had lost a job to a foreigner. More or less the same accounts for the theft of houses foreigners are said to be guilty of. Black South Africans argue that they themselves have to wait five to ten years before acquiring a government built house in a township, a so called Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) house, whereas foreigners could acquire such a house within a shorter period of time. Consequently black South Africans accuse foreigners of acquiring those houses through bribing and corrupting government officials (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009).[5] Julian Baskin, CEO of the Alexandra Renewal Project however, counters this claim and exposes that there exists a whole business around those houses:

> 'What an unemployed person needs above all is income. Give an unemployed person a house and she will be tempted to sell it. The banks won't underwrite the sale. It must be cash. So it's cheap. Foreigners in South Africa working or running a business will have cash. It figures that they'll be well represented among secondary buyers of RDP homes' (Steinberg 2008: 7).

Judging from Baskin's argument, foreigners seem to be the rightful owners of those houses. They are said to have the means to buy such a house – probably in contrast to many unemployed, black South Africans. Yet black South Africans portray them as house-stealing criminals.

It should be emphasized here that the media is fairly contributive to implementing or reinforcing this discourse treating black Africans as job stealers and criminals (Duffield 2008). Danso and McDonald (2001), having reviewed the South African English press in the post-apartheid period, conclude that those media channels are largely anti-immigrant, uncritical and sensationalist in reporting on migration issues. As to the uncritical and sensationalist characteristic, problematic statistics and assumptions about cross-border migration are often thoughtlessly reproduced. For example, at the time of the May 2008 violence, the media commonly claimed five million foreigners resided in South Africa, whereas scholarly institutions found the number was closer to two million (constituting only four percent of the total population in South Africa) (Steinberg 2008; Crush 2008).[6] As to the anti-immigrant characteristic, the media often produce demeaning stereotypes of foreigners – especially of black Africans. These include portraying foreigners as criminals – depicting for example Nigerians as drug smugglers and Mozambicans as car thieves or job stealers.

In conclusion it seems that competition over scarce resources such as jobs and houses is one of the causes of the May 2008 violence. According to Schröder and Schmidt (2001: 4) such conflict (competition) does not necessarily lead to violent conflict, for they can be avoided or negotiated. When this is not the case however, it escalates to a state of confrontation.

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[5] Since coming to power the ANC government has built more than two million shacks, known as RDP houses, for the poor. There is a long waiting list for acquiring such a house (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009; Steinberg 2008).
[6] The exact number of foreigners in South Africa is uncertain (Crush 2008).

3.3 Hostile attitudes and identity reification

This stage of confrontation is characterized by a process of "group making": the different identity parties involved in the conflict described above start to form specific collectivities and start to think and act accordingly. As a result the – perhaps initially peaceful – relationship between those identity groups gradually deteriorates and converts into something antagonistic. Consequently 'the possibility of violence is always present and deemed legitimate by the perpetrating party, and […] violent encounters occur on a regular basis' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 4).

Seemingly in the run up to the May 2008 violence, 'the passport to citizenship and entitlement [was] the indigene label which exclude[d] everyone not rooted in South Africa' (Valerie-Claire Duffield 2008: 31). In less abstract terms: South Africans started to differentiate themselves from black Africans by increasingly emphasizing their South African roots or South Africanness. They magnified the anti-apartheid struggle and peoples' physical appearances in particular. The former will be discussed below; as to the latter, black South Africans underscored the difference in crass physical features and language between themselves and black Africans. This seems to clearly outweigh the rhetoric on apartheid, for foreigners that had been residing in the country even before apartheid ended, fell victim to the May 2008 violence as well (Steinberg 2008; Sichone 2008). When looking into the violence more closely, we can identify a process where in the run up to the violence, minor differences were transformed into major and insurmountable differences (Ignatieff 1999). Black South Africans described black Africans as 'pitch blacks' (Sichone 2008) or 'too black to be South African' (Harris 2003: 10). Moreover David Goggins (2008) and Owen Sichone (2008) bring to the fore that black South Africans subjected darker-skinned Africans to language tests to pick out foreigners; those who did not master the Nguni or Sotho language were attacked.[7] Bronwyn Harris (2002: 2) recalls an incident where 'a man from Congo was attacked [by a thief] and he cried but no-one helped him. And after the thief had gone, the people on the sides said that 'because you are crying in English, we didn't help you. If you are crying in Zulu, we will help you.' Ironically those prerequisites made native South Africans with a darker pigmentation or without knowledge of black South Africans' language(s), fall victim to May 2008' hostilities too.[8] For instance, a South African woman was arrested, detained and assaulted by black policemen for being an "immigrant", as her 'complexion, facial appearance, accent and her style of dressing' resembled foreignness (Harris 2003: 10). It are those incidents that prove the difficulty of distinguishing black South Africans from black Africans. This issue has been perfectly phrased by Fredrik Barth (1969: 15): 'Ethnic groups show as much overlap with the neighboring groups as they show variety within their boundaries.'

In between the lines above we can identify a process of *identity reification* (I will elaborate on this later) between black South Africans and black Africans in the run up to the May 2008 violence. That is, (ethnic) identity boundaries are treated as something natural and inherent, instead of as the product of people's actions (Baumann 1999). This reification gives identity 'the [false] appearance of

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[7] Nguni and Sotho are languages spoken by black South Africans (Harris 2002).
[8] In fact here are a lot of native South Africans that do not meet these prerequisites (Sichone 2008).

being an autonomous factor in the ordering of the social world.' It is through this process that identity boundaries become hardened and insurmountable (Baumann 1999: 62). For example, prior to the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Hutus and Tutsis lived peacefully together and intermarriage was common. The opposite was true during and after the genocide in 1994 (Gourevitch 1998). In South Africa the process of identity reification took the form of black South Africans constantly expressing the notion that black Africans do not belong in South Africa. This is concretized by the word *makwerekwere*, a pejorative word meaning 'person who speaks an unintelligible language' (Steenkamp 2009: 441) and 'people of no origin' (Duffield 2009: 22), used to denote black African foreigners and South Africans perceived to be foreign (Matsinhe 2011).[9] The word emphasizes the differences between the native black South Africans and black Africans. In the documentary *Where do I stand* (Blank 2010), which sheds light on the May 2008 violence through testimonies of foreigners and South Africans of any ethnicity, a Rwandan boy residing in South Africa delineates the meaning and impact of the word *makwerekwere*:

'What *makwerekwere* means to me is like, someone who doesn't belong here, someone who's different. It hurts. It's like someone, it's like basically you're, it's like somebody just took a big brick and wracked you right through the head. And you just lay there, want to die.'

These two paragraphs aimed to illustrate that through the course of time socio-economic conditions in the Johannesburg area townships fostered a process of identity reification between the black South Africans and black Africans in South Africa. In this process the former placed considerable emphasis on making the latter aware that they are thought of not to belong in the country. Also, this reification seems to have converted black Africans into scapegoats or bogeymen onto which all wrongdoings are projected by black South Africans. For example, at the time of the May 2008 violence David Eviratt (2008) staged various focus groups, involving black and colored South Africans, during which the reason of the violence were discussed.[10] The general opinion amongst the participants there seemed to entail that black African foreigners are responsible for *all* hardships that black South Africans are faced with, that is, not only unemployment, high crime crates and the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also for example the high level of alcohol abuse and the lack of food within townships. One participant, echoed by many others, articulated the general opinion of the focus groups participants as follows: 'I think foreigners are to blame for all the problems that we are experiencing' (Everatt 2008: 18). This statement encapsulates the core of the discourse on black Africans dominant in the Johannesburg area townships.

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[9] Steenkamp (2009) explains that the sounds and tones of languages spoken by African foreigners are completely different from black South African languages and are therefore called *Makwerekwere*.
[10] Of course these focus groups, hosting 300 people in total, are not totally extensive nor representative, though it should be able, according to Everatt (2008), to extract key issues, themes and message components from here.

Whereas Schröder and Schmidt (2001) argue that the stage of confrontation is followed by a stage of legitimation and violent imaginaries, rather the two seem to coalesce – at least in the case of South Africa. The highly antagonistic relationship between the black South Africans and black Africans that arose in the run up to the May 2008 violence has largely been fed by violent imaginaries, and vice versa.

3.4 Legitimation and violent behavior

Violent imaginaries – narratives, performances or inscriptions emphasizing the historicity of present-day confrontations – are said to make violence conceivable and imaginable for people.[11] This is fairly important for violent conflict to erupt, because first 'violence needs to be imagined in order to be carried out' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 9). So, violent imaginaries are seen as easing the decision to resort to war; even more so because they construct a strictly polarized "us-versus-them"-divide that leaves no room for ambiguity. Also those imaginaries depict the out-group as an imminent threat, while glorifying the in-group and its perceived superiority (Schröder and Schmidt 2011). Taking all this together, violent imaginaries might provoke the notion that violence is the legitimate course of action.

In the run up to the May 2008 violence, those imaginaries largely took the shape of narratives on the anti-apartheid struggle.[12] According to black South Africans, black Africans have forsaken to contribute to this struggle (Warner and Finchilescu 2003). This appears to be a sincerely flawed representation of history, since many (African) countries have pushed for the abolishment of apartheid back then (Warned and Finchilescu 2003; Klotz 1995). However, referring to this struggle still emphasizes the differences between native South Africans who have been residing in the country for a long time, and the African foreigners who, in comparison, arrived relatively recent. The latter do not share the experience of South Africa being liberated from apartheid with native South Africans; they do not know how life was during apartheid. That is the perceived difference that is clinged upon here. The fact that those African foreigners are nevertheless able to live in South Africa and rely on (or steal, in the minds of black South Africans) the same scarce resources as black South Africans do, makes the latter perceive that the former are nowadays illegitimately benefitting from the fruits of this struggle and the opportunities in modern South Africa. Especially this idea served as legitimation of the May 2008 violence. To wit, the violent mob alluded to this rhetoric by singing freedom songs composed during the struggle against apartheid, which no longer narrated the white minority rule, but the so-called "job- and house stealing, criminal foreigners" instead (Steinberg 2009: 3). Additionally, black South Africans justified the widespread looting, stealing and appropriation of foreigners' properties (this will be set forth in the next chapter) by claiming that 'they [foreigners]

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[11] These violent imaginaries decontextualize and fragment elements of history. In other words, they do not provide an impartial or veracious representation of those elements (Schröder and Schmidt 2011).
[12] As this research is solely literature-based, it has been unable to expose violent inscriptions and performances present in the Johannesburg area. Therefore in its analysis it only focuses on the narratives.

didn't fight in the freedom of this country [South Africa]' (Blank 2010). So black South Africans seem to hold the notion that those who (ostensibly) failed to contribute to the anti-apartheid struggle, should be denied the right to prospering in South Africa.

Apart from this focus on the anti-apartheid struggle, another dominant violent imaginary can be identified, though this one's content character differs from the ones Schröder and Schmidt (2011) describe. Whereas the authors only focus on the historicity of conflicts that violent imaginaries are said to emphasize, violent imaginaries dehumanizing black Africans, that is portraying them as animals or insects and so stripping them of their humanity, are present in South Africa. The South African English press seems to play a large role in dehumanizing black African foreigners here. Apart from portraying them as job stealers and criminals (Duffield 2008), those media channels have been inclined to describe foreigners as "aliens", and commonly use naturalistic metaphors to describe the ostensible huge influx of foreigners into South Africa, such as "rising tides", "floods", "swarms", "waves", "hordes" (Danso and McDonald 2001; Duffield 2008; Murray 2013). Since the media is often the only source of information for many people, such delineations are of great influence on the construction of reality. They seem to have fed 'a sense of country under siege from an alien invasion, bringing disease, destruction and death' amongst native South Africans (Duffield 2008: 7). Martin Murray (2013: 448) agrees with this by stating the following:

> 'This steady barrage of fearsome images of the foreign "other" has stigmatized immigrants as dangerous threats to social order who are typically perceived as supernumerary nuisances, deadly parasites, and hardened criminals. Menace and anxiety are therefore projected outward, exteriorized upon the enigmatic figures of foreigners.'

As those excerpts illustrate, portraying foreigners as a threat and as insects swarming into South Africa might trigger the feeling that the country is being invaded and becomes polluted. Indeed, one of the key issues Everatt (2008) identified during his focus groups seemed to entail that black African foreigners pollute the country and should be deported, irrespective of the way how. Everatt (2008: 22) cites a South African woman's opinion on black African foreigners: 'Johannesburg is filthy, there are too many of them [foreigners] here and they are making Johannesburg dirty.'

Scholars have widely acknowledged that such dehumanization makes the eruption of violence more likely, for it 'overcomes the normal human revulsion against murder' (Stanton 2013, no pagination). Namely, killing animals – let alone insects – appears to be easier for human beings than murdering fellow human beings (Stanton 2013, no pagination). As such, it eases the decision to resort to violent conflict – this is exactly what happened in South Africa in 2008. Interesting to see here is that the violent imaginaries' content is largely reflected in the character of the violence. For instance, the perpetrators largely focused on "cleansing" those "polluted areas"; they sought to drive black Africans out of townships – even out of South Africa. This comes to the fore in a testimony from John

Makola, chairperson of the Diepsloot Community Police Forum, narrating about the violence in Diepsloot.[13] He states the violence there started with attacks on the people who fled Alexandra, but that soon perpetrators were chasing every foreigner out, accusing them of being criminals or stealing their jobs (Hawley 2008). This adds up to the fact that, during the May 2008 violence, black South Africans went from door to door to search for foreigners and, when found, evacuated them from the area in question (Steinberg 2008). Additionally a fragment of the documentary *Where do I stand* (2010) illustrates this by screening a mob screaming about the necessity of chasing foreigners out of the townships: 'We should invade them. If they don't want to go, we should kill them. And we're doing so. We have arrived. We're going in! We have arrived. We're going in! Let's take them! Let's take them!' These chants show that there should be no escape for foreigners: they will be eradicated in any way. The effect of dehumanization is clearly identifiable here: if black African foreigners are unwilling to leave the area, why not just kill them?

This dehumanization is also reflected in the way some black Africans were murdered by black South Africans during the May 2008 violence. As mentioned in the first chapter, they were killed by stone throwing or necklacing, and were even set alight (Human Rights Watch 2008; Evans 2008; Steinberg 2008; Duponchel 2013). As to weapons, multiple researchers (Dixon 2008; Steinberg 2008; Blank 2010) highlight that guns whips, *knobkieries*, machetes and axes amongst others, mainly used for hunting birds and small game, were now used to attack and murder foreigners. A man interviewed in the documentary *Where Do I Stand* (2010) states that: 'It is as if they were just hacking an animal, or hacking something that wasn't alive, like it didn't really mean much to them.' Those grave and sometimes gruesome attacks on black Africans by black South Africans might be one of the most extreme consequences of reified identity boundaries.[14]

3.6 Conclusion

Using the discursive approach and Schröder and Schmidt's (2011) framework on the processual character of violence, this thesis found that South Africans operate within a largely anti-immigrant discourse, which fiercely disdains and even dehumanizes black African foreigners. Yet, in contrast to what has been concluded by various researchers, this discourse does not appear to be fed by apartheid's legacy or intolerance of difference. Rather it is the competition over scarce resources, such as houses and jobs, and the notion held by many black South Africans that black Africans are responsible for unemployment and high crime rates, that has led to a reification of identity boundaries between the two ethnic groups. In this process the former placed considerable emphasis on its South

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[13] Diepsloot is a township situated north of Johannesburg (Hawley 2008).

[14] Schröder and Schmidt (2011) do not specifically set forth what they think happens after the culmination of violent conflict, yet apparently such violence creates fertile soil for repetition of the whole process of conflict, confrontation, legitimation and violent conflict. To wit, at least in South Africa reified identity boundaries and antagonistic relationships fostered by the earlier violence seems to persist after the culmination of the May 2008 violence. Black African foreigners still expect to be treated badly by black South Africans; in turn black South Africans still perceive black Africans to be both physically and socio-economically threatening. As a result both identity groups try to differentiate themselves from each other (Steenkamp 2009; Everatt 2008).

Africanness and on making the latter aware that they are thought of not to belong in the country. Also, black Africans are converted into scapegoats or bogeymen onto which all wrongdoings are projected by black South Africans. Reinforcing those identity boundaries and easing the decision to resort to violent conflict, are the disdaining and dehumanizing narratives on black African foreigners implemented or reinforced by multiple media channels. The negative discourses and narratives on black African foreigners seem to make a recurrence of similar violence more likely. However, it has been argued by various scholars that discourses alone do not lead to the eruption of violent and ethnic conflict. Therefore local factors should be taken into account too. The next chapters seeks to identify the different actors and motives involved in igniting and prolonging the May 2008 violence.

Chapter 4. Behind anti-foreigner sentiments

The previous chapter found that South Africans operate within a largely anti-immigrant discourse that fiercely disdains and even dehumanizes black Africans. This is said to have paved the way for the outbreak of the violence and hostilities in May 2008. Yet the discursive approach's assumption that people passively incorporate the dominant discourse on African foreigners, without holding any agency themselves, has been contested by various theories, amongst which the alliance theory.

4.1 A mixture of motives

Alliance theorists, such as Paul Brass (1996), David Keen (1998) and Kalyvas (2003) argue that civilians cannot solely be seen as passive or manipulated actors, but rather as actors that use the "master cleavage" of a conflict, for example ethnic conflict, to pursue their local or private interests or settle local feuds (Demmers 2012; Kalyvas 2003). Therefore alliance theorists argue that conflict should rather be understood as the outcome of the dynamics of local cleavages and intra-community dynamics. Kalyvas (2003) shows that civil war fosters interaction among a range of rational actors: local and central, insiders and outsiders, individuals and organizations, civilians and armies. Each of them has different identities and pursues different interests (Demmers 2012: 29). Ethnic war may thus constitute multiple types of violence, such as private, political, domestic, criminal and sexual violence (Kalyvas 2003) and can merely be 'a cover for other motivations such as looting, land grabs, and personal revenge' (Fearon and Laitin 2003: 874). The novelist Dubravka Ugrešic (cited in Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 5) describes war in more poetic terms: as a delicious piece of cake that everybody, ranging from politicians to journalists and from criminals to philosophers, wants a piece of.

The following statement made by Kalyvas (2003: 475) perfectly summarizes the above statements and captures the core argument of the alliance theorists: 'It is the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives that endows civil war with its particular character and leads to joint violence that straddles the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual.' So whereas one black South African might have attacked a black African because it has been argued the latter is to blame for the high unemployment rate in the South African townships, another black South African could have done so because of a personal vendetta against his black African neighbor. When analyzing the May 2008 violence through the lens of alliance theory, it indeed seems to entail a mixture of political and sexual violence and criminal intents. Let us start with looking into the political aspect.

4.2 South Africa's shadow governances and political violence

Schröder and Schmidt (2001: 5) highlight that wars are made 'by those individuals, groups or classes that have the power to successfully represent violence as the appropriate course of action in a given situation.' Violence often seems to be in those entities' interests. For example, elites who fear losing power or legitimacy may gamble for resurrection by provoking ethnic conflict. Demmers (2012: 30)

explains that the alluringness of such conflict is that it is an effective key to group-making, for people start to feel and act collectively as soon as they are targeted because of their putative identity. Through scapegoating and name-calling other ethnic groups, elites are able to portray themselves as the savior of their own ethnic group and thus gain in legitimacy and power (Demmers 2012: 29).

In the South African context elites were indeed of influence in the instigation and prolongation of the May 2008 violence. What must be mentioned here is that those elites are seemingly not constituted by political parties or affluent persons, but rather by local leaders swaying in townships. The South African government namely is largely absent in these townships, regarding both social services and institutions. Barry Bearak (2009: no pagination) shows for example that only the better parts of Diepsloot have government-built houses, whereas the worst only have 'haphazard shacks, with no light except that provided by kerosene and paraffin. Water trickles from communal taps. Toilets are the portable kind found on construction sites.' Bearak (2009) and Karl von Holdt et al. (2011) highlight furthermore that state functions, such as policing and the prevention of crime and the regulation of trading, are barely to be found in townships. The consequences are that the state has a remote and ineffectual presence here and that its initial tasks are not infrequently appropriated by local elites and their organizations. In time this has resulted in a high level of private security, mob justice and impunity. Cooney (cited in Morris and Graycar 2011: 824) observes that people in locations where the state is virtually absent have hostile relationships with legal authorities and rather obey local leaders. A report written by Jean Pierre Misago, Loren Landau and Tamlyn Monson (2009: 38) proves this is indeed the case in South Africa:

> 'The government has a big role to play, but they are not doing it. They must encourage people, there is no leadership, and the councillor is voiceless. There is lack of leadership, councillors have lost, they have a higher voice but they are silent. They are hardly known by the community, they don't interact with the community. Then, when there is trouble, it is difficult to address the community because they are not known by the community. They can't offer anything to the community, they are supposed to be more powerful […] more than even the Premier or Mbeki but they are not informed, they don't know what migrants are, they don't know about Human Rights, […] therefore what can the community learn from them?'

This excerpt shows that the South African government and its state functions barely have authority in these townships. So who then takes of care of the townships' residents?

In line with Von Holdt et al. (2011), Misago, Landau and Monson (2009: 38) continue by illustrating that, in the absence of official institutionalized leadership in these townships, other groups completely appropriate the authority that should belong to the legitimate government. Street Committees, Block Committees, Community Policing Forums (CPF) and the South African National Civic Organisation concern themselves for example with fighting crime, and solving socio-economic

and service delivery issues amongst others.[15] Moreover, as mentioned briefly, these groups are well represented in the private security sector too (Bearak 2009; Charman and Piper 2012). In that sense it can be stated that this structure of groups functions as a sort of shadow government: 'a parallel political power structure other than that associated with the official government apparatus' (Nijssen 2011: 1) which takes on the actual government's tasks. Research shows that involvement in these groups, understood to be a form of community leadership, is an attractive alternative for the township's largely unemployed inhabitants, since the supposedly voluntary groups generate income by charging for their services and taking bribes in exchange for solving problems (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009).

This would not be a problem, if only these groups sticked to their initial mandates. However, what happens is that they are taking on each other's tasks. For example, the CPF, whose mandate it is to fight crime only, involves itself in solving all sorts of problems, ranging from socio-economic and service delivery issues – whereas the latter falls under the mandate of for example the street committee. The same accounts vice versa. This leads to a lot of infighting and competition among the multiplicity of groups for both power and legitimacy (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). Ironically this infighting breeds distrust among the communities themselves, which exacerbates their already low level of trust in the local leadership, since its functionality can be questioned for the situation in these townships are far from safe and peaceful (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). The community leadership groups' power and legitimacy are thus at best choppy and local leaders could use a way to prove their legitimacy. It seems those leaders have therefore been keen to provoke ethnic violence.

4.3 Framing black African foreigners

On the basis of field research conducted in the Johannesburg area, Misago, Landau and Monson (2009) and Steinberg (2008) point out that, prior to the violence, in many townships meetings were hosted in hostels, churches, police stations or public forums, where local leaders and township inhabitants discussed amongst others the rising crime rates and the high level of unemployment in the communities. At these meetings it were predominantly foreigners that were (wrongly) blamed for those concerns. For example, a local leader at one of these meetings has been recorded stating the following:

> 'The government is now pampering them [foreigners] and taking care of them nicely; as long as the foreigners are here we will always have unemployment and poverty here in South Africa […] there was no poverty and unemployment in South Africa before the influx of foreigners […] there is too much of them now, if the government does not do something people will see what to do to solve the problem, because it means it is not the government problem, it is our problem' (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009: 29).

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[15] These structures differ across townships. Moreover, where the same structures exist, its only by name, since composition and different modus operandi differ across sites too (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009).

Thus those local leaders here respond to (or reinforce) the discourse identified in the previous chapter, that portrays foreigners as stealing jobs and houses. Foreigners are considered the root of all problems and the axis of evil. The will of framing foreigners as such, comes even more to the fore in the next excerpt. During another community meeting, township leaders asked the local police to point out the persons most responsible for the high crime rates, assuming that the latter's answer would refer to foreigners. The police however, underscored that it were mostly South Africans themselves who were to be blamed for the high crime rates. The local leaders, very upset about this answer, started organizing meetings and planned attacks on foreigners (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009: 43). Subsequently some meetings ended with resolutions to chase the foreigners out of the area; others needed some follow-up meetings to get the violence ignited. It is not my aim here to discuss all township meetings and their contents, though it should be mentioned that during most of those meetings it were predominantly foreigners that were accused of the wrongdoings of the townships' inhabitants.[16] Important to touch upon here is that, as stated in the previous chapter, in societies there are always certain actors or social groups that possess more power than others, which makes them capable of implementing or strengthening a certain discourse (Schröder and Schmidt 2001). As Gourevitch (1998: 48) states: 'Power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality.' In the South African case it were community leaders, along with the media, that reinforced the dominant discourse of the criminal and job stealing foreigners.

Apart from the hate speeches on foreigners they predicated, local township leaders also acted upon the communities' concerns. Actions, as Sayyid and Zac (1998) highlight, strengthen acts of speech and, additionally, might give black South Africans the feeling that those leaders actually care about them and their concerns (which is not the case, as shall be set forth later). One of the May 2008 violence's major characteristics is that, commissioned by local township leaders, many black Africans were evicted from their homes, many of them RDP homes (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). This of course gives leaders a major legitimacy boost, for black South Africans wrongly believe that foreigners have acquired those houses through bribing those same leaders (Steinberg 2008). Anyway, by evicting the foreigners from their homes, local leaders acted upon the ethnic sentiments that play amongst the black South Africans. Furthermore, a former perpetrator gives an insight into how those local leaders pitted the various ethnic groups against each other: 'Every time they [leaders] entered the site, they wanted South Africans to join. Even myself I joined, but I was at the back. I was not carrying sticks and spears at the leaders in front' (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009: 40). This way of ethnic mobilization fosters strong cohesion between the different ethnic groups. Moreover by participating in the violence, the local leaders lived up to their speeches and were able to pretend they really cared about the black South Africans' concerns.

In essence local leaders did not necessarily cherish the ideal of ethnically clean townships or a South Africa without foreigners. Rather, they sought to extend their political influence and power

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[16] For more testimonies on the role of local leaders reading Steinberg (2008), Misago, Landau and Monson (2009) and Von Holdt et al. (2011) is recommended.

there. For example, Steinberg (2008: 6) illuminates that at least in Beirut, a part of Alexandra township, the violence constituted a political fight over local governance between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party. Consequently the latter political party is said to have mobilized its supporters to chase non-Zulu speaking inhabitants (supposititious ANC supporters), both South African and African, out of Beirut. ANC has been accused of being involved in a similar process of supporter mobilization (Misago, Landau and Monson: 2009). By underscoring the ostensible "influx of foreigners" while simultaneously delineating them as criminal and dangerous, local leaders are capable of portraying the foreigners as a threat to South Africans.[17] By subsequently acting upon those speeches too and pitting the different ethnic groups against each other, local leaders have been able to amplify their legitimacy and power, and to portray themselves as defending the community from the so-called dangerous black African foreigners.

Alliance theorists however, reject this idea that elites can mobilize civilians for ethnic war by spreading violent imaginaries and acting accordingly. Rather civilians themselves, it is argued, have their own agendas, which might make them keen of resorting to violence. Simply put, 'war as a long-term period of antagonistic practice and ideology could not be sustained if only a small élite were to profit from it' (Schröder and Schmidt 2001: 5). The following testimony given by a black South African illustrates that it is not only leaders that decided whether or when to resort to violent conflict. Rather civilians themselves had a fierce influence on this decision: 'The leaders at the gate led the fighting of foreigners. They had no option… they must do what the community wants. If they don't, we shall remove them' (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009: 40). So it seems that, as emphasized by Demmers (2012: 30), ethnic identity is used by elites as a means to mobilize a support base, while it can simultaneously function as 'a cover up for the violent pursuit of local and private interests.' The following paragraph exposes some of the other motives and interests at stake in the May 2008 violence.

4.3 Sexual violence and criminal intents

One of those motives entails sexual violence. According to multiple sources, many foreign women and children fell victim to rape and sexual harassment during the attacks (Human Rights Watch 2008; Nkealah 2008; Steinberg 2008; Sigsworth 2010). However, since sexual assaults can differ in its nature, it is fairly difficult to distinguish its purpose in the South African case. For example this form of violence can be staged to humiliate women from different nationalities or ethnic groups, yet it could also be used as an act of violent crime against a women because of her gender or simply because a 'general atmosphere of violence and lawlessness allows for it' (Sigsworth 2010: 2). Thus far research on the May 2008 violence seems to have failed to thoroughly examine the use of sexual violence, so it is premature to argue against one or the other. Despite this, the existing literature on the subject

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[17] There is no evidence for the so-called voluminous influx of foreigners prior to the May 2008 violence that the community leaders talked about. In fact, most of the foreigners that were victimized had been living in the townships for years without encountering hostilities (Steinberg 2008; Misago, Landau and Monson 2009)

provides us with evidence that mostly refers to the use of sexual violence as a criminal act. For example, Nkealah (2008: 5) illustrates that a Zimbabwean women was raped four times by four different men in two separate attacks in one night; meanwhile the men had robbed her of her belongings.[18] Additionally Sigsworth (2010: 2) underscores that many of the foreign women are afraid to report assaults to the police, for the latter has a reputation for complicity in corruption, and in victimization, intimidation and abuse of foreigners. Perpetrators of the violence therefore often stay unpunished. It is this violent crime and the high degree of impunity that contributed to the intensity and the prolongation of the May 2008 violence (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009). This is further illustrated in the following paragraph.

4.4 Looting and appropriation

Paul Collier (2007: 199), proponent of the greed thesis, argues that violence occurs when people 'can do well out of war', and as long as people can do well out of war, people will pursue resorting to violence (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011). In other words: it are economic agendas that to a great extent cause violence (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Mall 2011: 400). As can be read in between the lines above, the May 2008 violence in South Africa seems to be largely motivated by greed and predation.[19]

First and foremost the magnitude of looting and stealing that flowed from and fed the violence in the townships is stunning; it could even be argued it was intrinsic to the violence. This clearly comes to the fore when reading various academic- and news articles (Smith 2008; Steinberg 2008; Duncan 2010; Harris 2002; Hawley 2009) and when watching the documentary *Where do I stand* (Blank 2010). Those sources cite testimonies of both victims and perpetrators on the looting, stealing and destroying foreigners' properties. For example, in Ramaphosa black South Africans came to destroy the rows and rows of stalls with vegetables, meat and cattle that black Africans had set up (Steinberg 2008). On a more personal scale, Steinberg (2008: 3) cites a foreigner in Dark City, Alexandra, whose story illustrates that in this township a mob of youths, whom he knew very well, started to take things from his and other foreigners' shops – such as tomatoes and cabbages. This is just one of the many cases of looting or destruction. The scope and intensity has been brought forward in chapter one: millions of Rand worth of property had been looted, destroyed or appropriated; 342 shops were looted, 213 were burnt down, and thousands of houses had been taken away from foreigners in any way (Steenkamp 2009; Duponchel 2013). The following testimonies, derived from the documentary *Where Do I Stand* (Blank 2010), illustrate the magnitude of the looting more in detail:

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[18] Many similar cased have been reported (Nkealah 2008).

[19] Interesting to see is that shortly after violence, mostly directed against foreigners, broke out in South Africa in January 2015, black South Africans almost immediately started to loot and appropriate foreigner owned property on a massive scale. The 2015 violence has therefore been described as criminal violence, rather than xenophobic violence (Essa 2015; Moftah 2015).

'That night [when the violence started] I went there I told myself I want to build a shack for myself. So I needed the corrugated iron. But I couldn't take them because the older people were taking them. So I decided to take the nice things. Things like sweets, chips, French polony. Things that I could eat right away. Hair creams because at that time we liked to make our hair nice.' – South African boy, 18 years.

'They cracked open the burglar doors. I don't know how they managed that, but they did open it. They took meat, rice, they took money and everything.' – South African girl, 15 years.

'We came home, all my stuff is gone. My school bag, school shoes, school clothes, everything was just gone. The beds, the mattress, blankets. Everything you can imagine you have in your house is just gone before one day. Even as we play on the corner we can see our beds right staring us in the face […] My cousin, she used to have a dress with flowers on it. And there's also the shoes, white shoes with pink on the sides. There's a lady behind us. Her daughter took my cousin's clothes. So basically she screamed up, "There, that's my dress." So one of the girls said: "Look here *kwerekwere,* that's not your dress. I found it." […] But what can I do? I can't do anything. I can just say: "Look, there's my stuff."' – Rwandan boy, 13 years.

Judging from these testimonies, it seems that greed and predation played a prominent role in the violence and that black South Africans of all ages inhabiting these townships benefited from the environment of violence. In essence the violence gave them a license to loot and ransack shops and homes. Research has brought forward that it was the high impunity that fed and prolonged the May 2008 violence. For example, police men just stood by and watched how the attacks developed themselves, or even participated in the violence itself (Misago, Landau and Monson 2009; Steinberg 2008). Moreover, in peaceful times it are the townships' leaders, operating as a shadow governance, that bring people violating human rights in these townships to justice. However, when those township leaders themselves cheer, or are even involved in, the violence, looting and appropriation, who is there to tell the perpetrators wrong? Various youngsters interviewed in *Where do I stand* (2010) highlight indeed that no-one told them that what they did was wrong. Why then, should people stop looting or attacking?

On a quite similar note, Andrew Charman and Laurence Piper's (2012) article draws the attention to the appropriation of foreign owned shacks and shops by black South Africans. They argue that the role of economic competition within the informal economy, predominantly referring to the competition between black South Africans' shops and the often cheaper black Africans' shops (Steenkamp 2009; Duponchel 2013), in the May 2008 violence should not be underestimated. Black South African shop owners namely, profited from the fact that black Africans fled the neighborhood

(or South Africa) and that therefore the majority of foreign owned shops were closed. Charman and Piper (2012: 90) delineate the situation right after foreigners fled as follows:

> 'The moment the immigrants left, a number of Delft residents opened up *spazas* [shops] 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.'

It must be clear that appropriating shops and foreigners' properties was beneficial for black South Africans, and that chasing the foreigners out of the neighborhoods should have been very alluring to them. Although Charman and Piper's article is based on ethnographic research in Delft, a township situated near Cape Town, their findings most likely apply to the situation in townships situated near Johannesburg as well. To wit, Christina Steenkamp (2009) and Marguerite Duponchel (2013) amongst others put forward that black South Africans appropriated foreign owned houses and shops the moment the latter fled.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that different motives, such as political, sexual and criminal intents, have been of great importance in the instigation and prolongation of the May 2008 violence. Local elites in townships had a large share in the instigation and prolongation of the May 2008 violence. In need of strengthening their legitimacy and power in the townships in which they operate, they have strongly drawn on the existing dominant discourse exposed in the previous chapter in order to gain more followers. Hate speeches on the so-called job- and house-stealing foreigners, and evacuating foreigners from houses black South Africans perceived to be stolen from them, strongly resonated with, and reinforced, this discourse. Additionally, by abetting violence against black Africans, and by personally being involved in those attacks, local township leaders were able to strengthen their legitimacy and political power within these areas.

However one should be careful with assigning all the blame for the May 2008 violence to those local elites, since, as has come to the fore in this chapter, local and private interests had a large share in igniting and protecting the violence a well. As slightly touched upon above, sexual violence was prominent during the violence, just as criminal intents – such as looting and appropriation. Scholars researching the violence must be aware that the way black South Africans justified the violence, for example by stating that black Africans are illegitimately prospering in the country and therefore deserve of such violence, are merely justifications and largely cover the true motives behind the attacks and hostilities. This is not to say that no single South African truly cherishes the ideal of a

foreigner-free South Africa. Yet this chapter has aimed to elucidate that this played a less bigger role than has commonly been assumed, and that local factors should be taken into account when analyzing such outbursts of anti-immigrant violence.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to establish a better understanding of the violence that broke out on May 11 2008 in the township Alexandra and spread rapidly to nine other provinces of South Africa within its fifteen days of existence. The violence was largely carried out by black South Africans and was predominantly directed against black African foreigners, coming from whatever country north of South Africa. As the May 2008 violence mainly had an anti-immigrant character, many scholars and journalists have been inclined to characterize the violence as the result of xenophobia, which would arise from relative deprivation or apartheid's legacy. The first theory holds that black Africans and black South Africans compete with each other over scarce resources, such as jobs and houses. This is said to have ultimately led to an eruption of violence and hostilities – the May 2008 violence. The second theory argues that the 53 years of brutalizing apartheid have made South Africans incorporate the apartheid's discourse that treats blacks as inferior to other races. Proponents of this theory argue that black South Africans attacked black African foreigners because 'blacks according to the racist scripts of the old order are deserving of such violence.'

Those common assumptions do not seem to cover the state of affairs during the May 2008 violence in South Africa adequately and leave many questions unanswered. For instance, they fail to address why the majority of perpetrators were black South Africans, or why the violence seems to erupt only spasmodic; neither do they illuminate why the violence did not take hold of all South Africa's provinces. Rather the theories give the impression to simply and uncritically reproduce each other's findings and to take black South Africans' testimonies on the May 2008 violence's causes for granted. Thus, the theories reduce the violence' complex character to a single explanation. In order to shed a different and more detailed light on the violence, this thesis has analyzed the relation between identity and the May 2008 violence on the basis of the discursive approach and the alliance theory. Using these approaches it unraveled whether the South African society as a whole (structure) begets hostility towards foreigners, and to find out how on the local level (the townships in the Johannesburg area) various factors provoked the May 2008 violence. By taking into account both the national and local dynamics, this thesis created a more detailed picture of the situation in South Africa in 2008.

On the basis of the discursive approach this thesis found that South Africans operate within a largely anti-immigrant discourse, which fiercely disdains and dehumanizes black African foreigners. In contrast to what has been commonly argued, this discourse does not appear to be fed by apartheid's legacy or intolerance of difference. Rather it is the competition over scarce resources and the notion held by many black South Africans that black Africans are responsible for unemployment and high crime rates, that has led to a reification of identity boundaries between the two ethnic groups. In combination with these reified identity boundaries, the disdaining and dehumanizing narratives on black African foreigners ease the decision for black South Africans to resort to violence. Using the alliance theory, this thesis illustrated that local dynamics such as political, sexual and criminal intents have been of great importance in igniting and prolonging the May 2008 violence.

Anyone researching the violence must therefore be aware that the way black South Africans justified the violence, for example by drawing on the dominant discourse set forth above, are merely justifications which obscure the true motives for attacking black African foreigners and looting their propety. This is not to say that no single South African truly cherishes the ideal of a South Africa cleansed of foreigners. However, it does mean that discourse alone cannot explain all aspects of the violence and that local dynamics should be taken into account too.

It must be mentioned here though, that this thesis has had a narrow focus due to the specific theories used for its analysis. Moreover it was solely based on literature, which made it dependent on, and so constrained by, the literature that has already been written on the subject. Therefore many aspects remain un(der)exposed, such as the South African government's stance towards the immigrants in the country and towards the May 2008 violence, and the victims' perspective on the violence. Although this thesis does not provide a fine-tuned and exhaustive analysis of the current discourses and the local dynamics in South Africa, in particular the Johannesburg area, it still has brought more nuance to the dominant explanations of the May 2008 violence by showing that the violence entails a variety of factors, and that it cannot be explained on the basis of broad and generalizing theories on relative deprivation or apartheid's legacy. Whereas a highly anti-immigrant discourse dominates the South African society, this alone cannot explain the outburst and the scope of the May 2008 violence; rather local dynamics should be taken into account too. Especially the latter can explain the timing, location and spread of the violence, and the ethnic composition of the perpetrator group.

Taking into account national and local discourses on black African foreigners, the local dynamics in townships, and the interaction between those two, thus seems to be the key to a better understanding of the anti-immigrant violence that sparked in South Africa spasmodic – most prominently in May 2008. Future research should therefore aim to distance itself from the common explanations on relative deprivation and apartheid's legacy in order to identify other factors and motives that played a role in anti-immigrant hostilities in South Africa. This thesis forms the beginning of such a trend. Hopefully such careful analyses provoke a more in-depth understanding of the anti-immigrant violence that sparked most fiercely in May 2008, and may one day lead to addressing the causes of such violence properly. Only then might Nelson Mandela's dream of South Africa as free and democratic nation, in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities, possibly come true.

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