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SOWETO RESIDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK FOREIGN SPAZA SHOP OWNERS IN THE 2015 XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS

by

Boitshoko Shoke
200831757

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Supervised by

Prof Kezia Batisai

Co-supervised by

Prof Pragna Rugunanan

Date of Submission
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

Those who are dear & kind to me,

beginning with my mother & father

Those I have seen or never seen;

by reason of their rejoicing

in my gift of merit,

I give thanks.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Supervisor Professor Kezia Batisai for her constant support, encouragement and kindness throughout this process. Your guidance and patience pulled me through. You are one of the wisest people I have ever met. Thank you for believing in me.

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Basetsana Shoke, thank you for uplifting my spirit when I thought I could not do it, for walking this long journey with me. Bassie, you are the light of the world. I love you.

Thank you to my husband, Michael Thabiso Khumalo, for carrying me through this process. Witnessing your experience as a black foreigner in South Africa inspired me to actively pursue fairness and equality. I love you.

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I would like to thank my friends for their love and support throughout my Masters.

To the residents of Dobsonville, thank you for allowing me into your lives and sharing your stories. I could not have done this without you.
ABSTRACT

The 2008 xenophobic attacks made international and local headlines, creating an interest in issues pertaining to the causes and prevention of xenophobia. However, research done after the 2008 attacks has not curbed violence against foreigners as can be seen through a series of violent outburst against foreigners in 2015 and in 2018. Violent xenophobic practices by South Africans targeted against foreign spaza shop owners are underrepresented in the literature on xenophobic violence and locals are excluded from these narratives. In response to this problem, the study provides insight into how Soweto residents made sense of the January 2015 violent xenophobic attacks against the foreign shop owners. The township of Dobsonville in Soweto was chosen for this investigation as it is one of the townships which recorded violence against foreign spaza shop owners during the 2015 attacks. The researcher conducted ten semi-structured interviews with witnesses of the violence in Dobsonville who were chosen as the target population for this study as research done on xenophobic violence has mainly concentrated on the views of foreigners or perpetrators of violence whilst neglecting other segments of the population who might not actively participate in violent attacks. The gender and age spread of the participants allow for different perspectives into violence against foreign spaza shop owners. The witnesses’ biographical information and real-life accounts are treated with respect and confidentiality throughout the research study. The study has found that the witnesses’ of the 2015 attacks believe that the success of foreign spaza shops is the cause of violence between locals and foreigners. The witnesses also believe that crime is a motivator for the attacks. Drawing on these perceptions, the study concludes that xenophobic violence against foreign spaza shop owners is based on a myriad of issues including unemployment, crime and xenophobic attitudes. The study also determines that Somali shop owners are normally the casualties of these attacks, due to their dominance in this sector, rather than being selectively targeted. The study recommends rigorous government efforts to formalise the informal sector, particularly where spaza shops are concerned. This includes conducting regular inspections to ensure that counterfeit goods are not sold in these stores. It is hoped that Soweto residents’ perceptions will contribute significantly to the development of economic and social interventions, aimed at supporting the growth of the township informal economy while protecting and assisting foreign-owned outlets. Overall, the findings of this study significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding violence and xenophobia in South African urban settlements.
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Chapter 1. The death of the ‘rainbow nation’: xenophobic violence in South Africa

1.1. Introduction

South African modern-day politics, economy and social formations are often shaped by the previous inability to move freely during Apartheid (Landau & Segatti 2009). Post-independence, the once forbidden streets of South Africa have become a primary destination for migrants, mostly black African foreigners escaping the political and economic perils in their own native lands (Landau & Segatti 2009). This freedom of movement has resulted in many more migrants coming into the country (Hagensen 2014). Years of separation from the rest of Africa have consequently resulted in the fear of strangers among locals (Hagensen 2014) which has had a ripple effect on foreigners in South Africa, with surveys showing that most foreign nationals have been victims of xenophobia at some point in their stay (Muanamohoa et al. 2010). The cumulative destruction of these violent attacks has resulted in thousands of people being displaced, losing their homes, livelihoods and in dire cases, losing their lives.

The 2008 xenophobic attacks made international and local headlines, raising awareness of issues pertaining to the causes and prevention of xenophobia. Sadly, research done after the 2008 attacks has not curbed violence against foreigners following a series of violent outburst against foreigners in 2015 (and again in 2018) (Simelane & Nicolson 2015). The outbursts followed the death of a 14-year-old teenager by the name of Simpiwe Mahori who was part of a crowd that attempted to raid a foreign-owned spaza shop. The community reacted to the death of the teenager by destroying and looting the property of foreign-owned shops (Patel & Essa 2015), in which the aftermath of the violence saw the destruction of approximately 120 foreign-owned shops located in Soweto and Kagiso – a nearby township in the West Rand (Patel & Essa 2015).

Spaza shops are an established feature of the township economy and, although informal, are the second most important retail store in urban townships (Charman et al. 2012). The spaza shop has provided an alternative source of income for many unemployed citizens living in townships (Charman & Piper 2012). Between 2006 and 2016, the South African spaza sector witnessed a rise in ownership among foreigners emanating from other African countries (Charman et al. 2012). During this period, there was a growing number of attacks against foreign shopkeepers in South Africa

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1 A spaza shop is a small convenience or grocery store located on a residential premise in the township (Tladi & Miehlbradt 2003; Terblanche 1991). The business activities of a spaza shop include the buying and selling of household groceries to community members (Van Scheers 2010; Liedeman et al. 2013).
2 A township is a residential area for any group which was not white during apartheid (Parnell 2013).
(Charman & Piper 2012). This change in ownership is demonstrated in a study conducted by Liedeman (2013), who discovered that since 2005, *spaza* shop ownership had shifted in favour of Somali natives. The dominance and success of foreign *spaza* shop ownership in South African townships has led to ‘anti-foreigner’ narratives and coordinated acts of violence against this group (Piper & Charman 2016). Foreign shop owners are accused of infringing on locals’ social opportunities and stealing jobs and women from South Africans (Liedeman et al. 2013). As of the 2008 attacks, this transition in *spaza* shop ownership has been pinned amongst the reasons for the continuous xenophobic violence against foreigners (Piper & Charman 2016). While there are many studies that have been conducted on xenophobic violence (Angen 2016; Liedeman et al. 2013; Charman & Piper 2012), especially those on violence against foreign shop owners, the studies often diminish the voices of South Africans and do not explicitly explain why violent xenophobic practices are targeted towards certain foreign *spaza* shop owners, such as Somali traders.

### 1.2. Xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa

Xenophobia has been a contentious problem in the post-apartheid era, rearing its ugly head in the 2008, 2015 and most recently the 2018 violent attacks against black foreigners. ‘Xenophobia’ broadly refers to the hatred of and discrimination against non-nationals by residents within a country (Harris 2002), manifesting in many different forms and can be experienced as ongoing daily institutional discrimination, verbal abuse, physical violence and public hostility for those whom it is directed towards (Batisai 2016; Harris 2001). In South Africa, xenophobia often evolves into violent attacks where foreign-owned shops are vandalised and torched, victims are ‘necklaced’ with burning tyres or people are killed with guns, machetes, garden tools and other traditional weapons. Foreigners are driven away from their homes and businesses by angry, armed mobs (Wilkinson 2015). These violent activities are vastly different, yet all involve an act of prejudice (Angen 2016). For instance, the casualties of the 2008 and 2015 violent attacks were predominantly black ‘foreign’ immigrants, coming from Africa and South Asia; for this reason, Gqola (2016) argues that South African xenophobia is ‘negrophobic’, mirroring the racial oppression seen during apartheid.

Xenophobic sentiments were clearly demonstrated on the 11th of May 2008, when a Mozambican migrant Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuavhe was burnt alive surrounded by a crowd of apathetic South Africans in the township of Diepsloot in Johannesburg (Worby, Hassim & Kupe 2008). This particular event, gruesome in every respect, ignited a wave of xenophobic attacks in South Africa for several weeks thereafter (Duncan 2011). Tensions further rose when the violence started in Alexandra, an informal settlement in Johannesburg, where foreigners and those suspected to be foreigners were evicted from their homes, violently attacked and brutally murdered by mobs of violent South African men (Duncan 2011). This violence, through which language, appearance and physical appearance were seen as markers of difference often resulted in the discrimination, physical attacks and verbal abuse of foreigners (ION 2009; Worby, Hassim & Kupe 2008; Langa & Kiguwa 2016; Misago et al.
2015), quickly spread to other townships, resulting in the looting and destruction of foreign-owned shops.

The ramifications of the violence included the death of 62 individuals, of which 22 were South Africans who had either been married to foreigners, refused to participate in the carnage or were “mistakenly” branded as foreigners (Landau 2011:1). An estimated 120 000 others were displaced and official reports conclude that 324 shops and retail outlets (mostly owned by foreigners) were looted during this period (Crush et al. 2008:11; Landau 2011). The absolute disregard and lack of respect for human life demonstrated during the attacks, showing mobs of young men carrying weapons, shook many South Africans and as stated made local and international news headlines (Dodson 2010; Nieftagodien 2008; Soyombo 2011). These scenes “were soon replaced by images of people who had fled in fear of their lives to seek refuge in churches and police stations, eventually to be re-housed in tent settlements like those housing famine or war refugees” (Dodson 2010:3). The South African government deployed the army to restore peace and order in the areas where tensions were high, however, even though the military had instilled calm in most communities, xenophobic violence continued post–May 2008. (Landau 2011:1). These sporadic acts of xenophobic violence culminated in the 2015 xenophobic attacks.

In early 2015, violent attacks against foreigners, such as those seen during the 2008 xenophobic attacks in Alexandra, flared up in Soweto and various cities and townships across South Africa. The violence was sparked by the death of a teenager who was part of a mob that tried to rob a foreign-owned shop. The homicide of a schoolboy ignited violent protests among residents and forced most foreign shop owners to flee the area (Ndinda & Ndhlovu 2016; Patel & Essa 2015; Simelane & Nicolson 2015). The violence which started in Snake Park gradually spread to Bram Fischer, Mapetla, Dobsonville, Emndeni and Zola, where the mass looting of foreign-owned shops continued (Watson 2015). More significantly, the attacks resulted in the murder of a Somali shop owner (Simelane & Nicolson 2015). It is important to note that while xenophobic attacks are generally targeted at all foreigners, the attacks that occurred in Soweto in 2015 were directed specifically at foreign-owned outlets – owned by Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis (Hlubi 2015).

Although xenophobic attacks against foreigners, as indicated by various social scientists, are not a new phenomenon in South Africa (Peberdy 2009), the violent attacks in 2008 and 2015 exposed the negative and stereotypical attitudes of South Africans towards black foreign nationals, even among some political and traditional leaders. These views are particularly damaging as they are not only in public spaces but also in the political realm. For example, the former Minister of Home Affairs Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi compared illegal immigrants to a headache (Human Rights Watch 2008; Goggins 2009). Similarly, King Goodwill Zwelethini actively promoted the ostracism of foreign nationals prior to the 2015 xenophobic attacks (Tewari 2015:11).
The nature of the May 2008 violence prompted a response of intellectual inquiry and commentary by academics, policy analysts and government who tried to make sense of what was happening in South Africa’s Rainbow Nation (Nieftagodien 2011). These explanations include the struggle for resources, access to low-cost housing and business opportunities (most notably) within the informal markets, Afrophobia, poor border control, poor service delivery, poverty, unemployment, corruption as well as historical, structural and attitudinal factors (Dodson 2010; Crush et al. 2008; Gqola 2008; Neocosmos 2008; Pillay 2008; Sharp 2008; Sebola & Khalo 2010). Various researchers have commented on the fact that most of the xenophobic incidents that have plagued South Africa before, during and after May 2008 consistently occur in economically and socially depressed townships (Landau & Misago 2009; Nieftagodien 2008). These sentiments are further reflected in the 2009 IOM report which found that anti-foreigner sentiment is particularly more pronounced in impoverished informal settlements, wherein poverty is rife and the competition for limited resources, such as housing, is great. This, in part, explains the trend to position foreign nationals as scapegoats for increasing poverty and unemployment among the marginalised poor (McKnight 2008).

However, while providing the socio-economic context in which xenophobic violence occurs, the explanation does not provide clarity regarding the lack of violence in areas with similar socio-economic conditions (Landau 2010:215). Significantly, these studies do not provide explanations for violent xenophobic practices targeted toward certain groups of foreigners, mainly towards Somali shop owners (Landau 2010; Nieftagodien 2011; Steinberg 2008). To address this gap in research, Charman, Petersen and Piper (2012) have conducted a study that focused on xenophobic violence against Somali shopkeepers in Delft South, Cape Town. The researchers argue that although violence against foreign shopkeepers is often cited as xenophobic violence; it can also be explained in terms of criminal activities and economic competition. The study’s methodology involves interviewing shopkeepers in Delft about their personal experiences of crime and violence. The study further attempts to determine the link between the crime affecting small business in the area and foreign-owned shops. Although providing valuable information on meanings that shopkeepers attached to their experiences, the study positions the shopkeepers as victims of crime, rather than victims of xenophobia and xenophobic violence.

Studies conducted after the January 2015 xenophobic attacks frame the role of gender and race identities, prejudice, socio-economic oppression, exclusion from citizenship and language as reasons for xenophobic violence in South Africa (Batisai 2016; Chandia & Hart 2016; Gqola 2016; Langa & Kiguwa 2016). These studies do not explain why violent xenophobic practices by South Africans are targeted mainly towards foreign shop owners. To bridge this gap, Angen (2016)

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3 Rainbow Nation is a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe South Africa, after South Africa’s first fully democratic election in 1994. The Rainbow Nation represents an inclusive human community (Tshawane 2009).
investigated the factors that contribute to the manifestation of xenophobic violence towards foreigners. Although Angen’s (2016) study examines the reasons why xenophobic attitudes turn into xenophobic action, there is still a gap as it does not establish why certain groups of foreign nationals are attacked more than others. Misago (2011) elaborates on this notion and states that South African literature on xenophobia often focuses on the divide of foreign versus locals, which limits our understanding of xenophobia as it does not explain the lack of violence in areas where foreigners and locals live in harmony. Furthermore, the existing literature on xenophobia further focuses on the victims of the violence, while the perspectives of South African citizens are underrepresented in the literature (Dodson & Oelofse 2000; Harris 2002; Kamwimbi et al. 2010).

Post-apartheid Soweto technically remains a township, despite a response by the City of Johannesburg together with the Johannesburg Housing Company to transform apartheid spatial planning; Sowetans have better living standards than most black people in the province and the country as most residents in the township have piped water, brick houses and televisions (Ceruti 2013). Given that Sowetans have better living standards in comparison to residents of other townships in South Africa, poverty and economic competition alone do not provide an explanation for the violent attacks that erupted in 2015. The perspectives of the Soweto residents who witnessed the 2015 xenophobic attacks may add valuable insights into understanding the phenomenon and into developing interventions to prevent future violent xenophobic attacks on foreign spaza shop owners. These are predominantly Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis who own spaza shops, defined as small convenience stores located on a residential premise in the township (Tladi & Miehlbradt 2003; Terblanche 1991); whose business activities include the buying and selling of household groceries to community members (van Scheers 2010; Liedeman et al. 2013).

1.3. Research questions

The context chosen for this investigation was the township of Dobsonville in Soweto to provide insight into how the residents made sense of the January 2015 violent xenophobic attacks against the foreign shop owners. Thus, the main research question for the study is as follows: What meaning did Soweto residents attach to witnessing the January 2015 violent xenophobic attacks against foreign spaza shop owners?

To answer the research question, the following objectives are pursued:

- To explore the perceptions of Soweto residents regarding the violent attacks against foreign spaza shop owners in 2015.
- To understand the reasons why certain foreigners such as Somali spaza shop owners are targeted more than others.
Based on the answers for the preceding questions, to determine what needs to be done to curb violent attacks against foreign *spaza* shop owners.

### 1.4. Soweto: A history of resistance and political violence

Given that the xenophobic attacks of January 2015 took place in Soweto, the township is discussed as the location for the commencement of the violence by referring to its history of violent political revolt and socio-economic disparities. This chapter also draws attention to the township’s past and current social ills and how these aggravate feelings of hostility towards foreigners. The pre-history of Soweto is intricately tied to the end of the South African War (1889-1902) and the post-war reconstruction of Johannesburg in 1902 (Phillips 2013). The then governor of the Transvaal, Viscount Alfred Milner, wished to transform the former Boer republic into a modern state that would attract British settlers and compete as an international producer of gold (Phillips 2013:313). Although the origins of Soweto are linked to spatial planning of the apartheid city, the township emerged as a reaction to the multiracial slum areas that had formed in Johannesburg following the end of the war (Wale 2013). To rectify this problem, Alfred Milner appointed Major W.A.J O’Meara to assess the ‘slum problem’ (Phillips 2013). With the bubonic plague (which had come from China in 1894, spreading to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 1904), O’Meara was determined to destroy any potential of the plague moving inland (Parnell & Beavon 1996; Phillips 2013). From this angle, the best solution was to destroy the ‘unsanitary’ slum yards in the Johannesburg “Coolie Location” and surrounding areas (Parnell, 1988: 308). Indians and Africans were removed from the “Coolie Locations” to Klipspruit (Phillips 2013). While black migrant mine workers in the Witwatersrand were restricted to Klipspruit, the Indian community relocated back to the inner-city in a Malay Location which was later renamed Pageview (Parnell & Beavon 1996:14). In the 1920s, the belief that racial purity could be realised by the exclusion of blacks from the inner-city slums motivated the proclamation of legislation promoting racial segregation (Parnell, 1988:313). The Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923 facilitated the racial discrimination of blacks by forcibly removing them from their homes, restricting them from owning land in urban areas while making provisions for white people to occupy the inner city (Parnell & Beavon 1996:13).

With the expansion of Klipspruit and the inflow of migrants into the city, the apartheid government built the township of Orlando in 1930. Orlando was peddled as a respectable place to reside; however, residents recall the poor living conditions in which they lived (Wale 2013). The Second World War resulted in the growth of the working class in Soweto as influx controls were relaxed to allow an inflow of black workers for the demand of the war effort, however, the Johannesburg Council was unable to provide housing for these workers due to wartime shortages of building resources

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4 This was the name for the Indian Location which was developed in 1893. In 1904, however, the location also had blacks as well as coloureds residing there (Rand Daily Mail, 1904 cited in Parnell 2013)
As a response to the housing problem, residents in Orlando could take in sub-tenants, which resulted in serious overcrowding. The lack of space and housing in the township resulted in squatter movements and the expansion of hessian shelters into Jabavu (formed in 1944) and Moroka (formed in 1947), which form part of Soweto today (Wale 2013). The expansion resulted in the apartheid government developing 26 other residential townships which accommodated approximately 500 000 Africans by 1959 (Phillips 2013:330). Derived from its location, South Western Township, the townships were formally named Soweto in 1963 by the Johannesburg City Council (Phillips 2013).

1.4.1. Soweto under apartheid

During apartheid, through the Group Areas Act, the black population in Soweto was separated along tribal lines through ethnic zoning (Bonner & Segal 1998). Apartheid further created divisions between urban and migrant blacks (Wale 2013). Divisions along migrant, urban and tribal lines in Soweto were implemented through the construction of hostels and the Native Urban Areas Amendment Act of 1956, which compelled migrant workers who were living in the city to move to the newly constructed Dube Hostel in Soweto (Beavon 2004:134). The pace of hostel construction increased in the late 1950s and 1960s, following the National Party's policy of entrenching tribal divisions; each hostel was reserved for a particular ethnic group (Bonner & Segal 1998:39). In practice, this meant that houses were allocated according to ethnic groups, traders could only buy from shops within their own ethnic area and children were forced to attend schools for people of the same ethnic origin (Bonner & Segal 1998:43).

The introduction of the Abolition and Coordination of Documents Act of 1952 introduced a new passbook also known as the dom pass, which carried the bearer’s identity and which was compulsory for all adult black South Africans to carry. The dom pass contained details such as their employers’ status, address, fingerprints and other means of identification (Perumal 2013). The Act drew a clear line between urban blacks and migrant workers (Wale 2013). Those classified as migrant labourers were restricted from entry into this urban working class and could remain in South Africa only if their labour was required by white employers (Posel 1991: 82-85). By contrast, those classified as settled urban blacks with residential rights were given job preference to reduce urban unemployment (Posel 1991: 82-85). This history of Soweto provides a backdrop to the development of xenophobic attitudes in the township. The isolation of migrant workers from South African natives can be seen as a consequence for the fear and hatred directed towards foreigners. By 1964, the apartheid project of racial segregation and oppression was at its pinnacle, with the pass system defining the lived experiences of blacks and constituting the very symbol of oppression and abuse (Wale 2013). During that period, attempts at political emancipation had been suppressed and the leading resistance organisations were banned and were sent into exile (Wale 2013).
1.4.2. **The Soweto uprising and political struggle**

The Soweto of the 1970s was characterised by student uprisings, most significantly the 1976 student protests against Afrikaans as a medium of learning and instruction in schools (Callinicos, 1988:3). The international outcry from the destruction and loss of lives caused by the brutality of the then apartheid government against blacks, particularly students, prompted a period of reform (Ndlovu 1998:319). The reforms unintentionally encouraged further resistance against the apartheid state and linked the urban middle class with others in developing township organisations, while workers cultivated powerful trade unions for protection (Callinicos, 1988:3).

Youth organisations and civics played a key role in mobilising and organising township resistance towards the apartheid state in the 1980s (Swilling & Phillips, 1990:68). A key civic organisation was the Soweto Civic Association (SCA), launched in 1979 and which set up branches throughout Soweto and proceeded to mobilise on issues of rent and service charges (Shubane 1991:262). By 1982, there were a series of calls for an umbrella body to help with the coordination and facilitation of urban resistance and to link local struggles to the national resistance movement (Seekings 1992:94). A significant shift in internal resistance politics came with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, when several different anti-apartheid groupings came together to resist the government’s ‘New Deal’ decision to create separate parliaments for the coloured, Indian and white populations (Bonner & Segal 1998:11; Seekings 1992:95). The creation of the UDF coincided with an economic recession that worsened the already poor living conditions in the township and ignited popular struggle (Bonner & Segal 1998:112). By 1984, the unemployment rate in Soweto was at 53% and many of the unemployed youth found a sense of purpose within the student movement (Bonner & Segal 1998:112). As of late 1988, anti-apartheid resistance inside South Africa was unified under the Mass Democratic Movement within which the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was centrally involved (Bonner & Segal 1998:130-1). For black South Africans living in Soweto, the use of violence was based on the desire for political power and liberation (Segal 1992). Police brutality during apartheid narrowed the possibility of peaceful protest, thus violence was utilised and sanctioned in the political spectrum as a tool for liberation (Hagensen 2014). The resistance politics of the 1980s effectively laid the foundation for an ongoing culture of violence as a means of resolving conflict in South Africa (Nieftagodien 2011).

1.4.3. **Soweto in a post-apartheid South Africa**

As mentioned, post-apartheid Soweto remains a township despite a response by the City of Johannesburg together with the Johannesburg Housing Company to transform apartheid spatial planning, by building alternative family units for the hostels that were built to house male migrant workers during apartheid (CoJ 2015; Nieftagodien & Gaule 2012). The City of Johannesburg no longer refers to Soweto as a ‘township’ but rather intentionally refers to neighbourhoods within
Soweto as suburbs (Krige 2012:22). This deliberate attempt in referring to the area as a suburb reflects the city’s vision for transforming Soweto into a thriving residential and economic hub of Johannesburg (Krige 2012:22). Soweto has received favourable treatment by the city due to many of the country’s political leadership being Sowetans, to the detriment of other informal settlements and townships in South Africa (Krige 2012:23). Soweto, more than any other former African municipal township in Gauteng, has benefitted from substantial household debt write-offs from the City of Johannesburg, as was the case in the 1980s (Krige 2012:23). Post-apartheid Soweto has also seen a rise in public and private investment (Krige 2012:23). Private business ventures have focused on the construction of new garages, restaurants and shopping centres in Protea, Baragwanath, Jabulani and Maponya Mall; indirectly increasing property prices and fostering tourism into the township (Krige 2012:23).

Despite the investments in the township, there is a high level of inequality among its residents, with some living in areas characterised by the poverty seen in the apartheid era (Nemavhandu 2009:10). Typically, only those who reside in more lucrative areas such as Orlando and Diepkloof Extension have benefitted the most from the post-apartheid townships transformation, while others have been neglected (Nemavhandu 2009:10). Soweto’s historic and contemporary expressions of violence and poverty link to the manifestation of aggression and anger towards foreigners. Xenophobic attitudes inevitably flourish in an environment where foreigners and locals are competing for the same resources and space.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study focuses on xenophobia and violence against spaza shop owners, with reference to the 2015 xenophobic attacks in Soweto, Dobsonville. The focus of the study is not merely regarding xenophobia in South African townships but rather aims to provide the perceptions of South Africans with regard to the violent attacks against foreign-owned spaza shops during the 2015 xenophobic wave in Soweto. The significance of this study is rooted in its contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding violence, entrepreneurship and xenophobia in South African urban settlements.

Research done on xenophobic violence has mainly concentrated on the views of foreigners or perpetrators of violence, neglecting other segments of the population who might not actively participate in violent attacks. This dissertation looks specifically at xenophobic actions taken against a particular type of foreigner and the reasons for targeting shop owners more than other foreigners. Further research points to economic competition as the key motivation for violence against foreign-owned spaza shops; however, this study explores other reasons that fuel xenophobic attacks against foreign-owned spaza shops in the hope that the findings of the research will contribute significantly to the development of economic and social interventions aimed at supporting the growth of the township’s informal economy while protecting and assisting foreign-owned outlets.
1.6. Organisation of the dissertation

The dissertation has six chapters. Chapter One offers the context and motivation of the study. Chapter Two presents the literature review, which gives key insights and an examination of the current debates on xenophobia and xenophobic violence in South African society. The chapter reviews existing literature on xenophobia and xenophobic violence as well as the factors presented by scholars in understanding the cause of violent attacks on foreigners and foreign shop owners. Chapter Three considers the qualitative methodology that is used to investigate the perceptions of South Africans towards foreign spaza shop owners. The use of the qualitative research approach, as well as other research techniques that are employed in the study, are explained. Chapters Four and Five present the research findings which are categorised in themes that have emerged from the data analysis. Chapter Four highlights the demographic profiles of the witnesses. The chapter explores their socio-economic conditions and the circumstances which might motivate attacks on foreign spaza shop owners in Dobsonville. Chapter Five responds to the research questions by interpreting and comparing the study results to the literature. Chapter Six discusses and compares the findings emanating from this research to other studies that have been conducted. The chapter further summarises and concludes the main findings that are uncovered by the research. The limitations of the study are provided followed by recommendations for future studies.
Chapter 2. Literature Review: Exploring violence against foreign *spaza* shop owners in Soweto

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provides the background to the study. The problem statement demonstrates that xenophobic violence against foreign *spaza* shop owners has often been reported through the perspectives of those who have been victims. This has resulted in the underrepresentation of locals in the literature, which is a gap this study hopes to address. By focusing on the perspectives of those who have witnessed the attacks rather than on those who have been victims or perpetrators in the attacks, the expectation is to uncover insights regarding attacks on foreign *spaza* shop owners.

This chapter, which is structured in four parts, provides an overview of the literature used to inform this study. It proceeds by offering a broad conceptualisation of xenophobia, which is then narrowed to focus on the manifestation of the phenomenon in the post-apartheid South African context. The second part gives a historical overview of violence as a social norm in South Africa and how it is rooted in the political struggle for freedom. This suggests a foundation for the exploration of violence as an outcome of xenophobic attitudes, which is followed by an in-depth description of the 2008 and 2015 attacks and, as such, presents a framework for the recent violent xenophobic practices. The third part of the chapter reviews various theories which have been used to explain the emergence of xenophobic violence in the post-apartheid South African context.

The chapter discusses the theory of ethnic violence, group threat theory, the scape-goat hypothesis, the isolation hypothesis and the bio-cultural hypothesis which all form the theoretical framework adopted for purposes of this study. The researcher uses this theoretical framework to position this research and explain the manifestation of xenophobic violence in South Africa. Lastly, the review explores the informal sector and draws conclusions on the motivations for violence against foreign *spaza* shop owners. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the gaps in the literature which this dissertation hopes to address.

2.2. Conceptualisation of xenophobia

Xenophobia is a term used to characterise the negative attitudes of locals towards immigrants and is broadly identified as the prejudice, fear and hatred of foreigners (Reynolds & Vine, 1987; Harris 2002; Mothibi, Roelofse & Tshivase 2015). Derived from two Greek words, *Xenos* - meaning stranger and *phobia* - meaning fear, xenophobia is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, “which is intrinsically tied up to nationalism and ethnocentrism, both of which are tied to the superiority of one’s nation-state over others” (Yakushko 2009:44). Studies on xenophobia reveal that hatred of
foreigners is based on a perceived threat to economic opportunities, social hierarchies and national identity (Harris 2001; Solomon & Kosaka 2013). Although widely used, it is a highly contested term (Angen 2016:3). The contestation lies in the inability to compare work done on the topic as it manifests in various ways and is highly dependent on varying contextual factors (Misago 2016; Tshitereke 1999:4).

A study conducted by Solomon & Kosaka (2013) reveals that nationalism is closely related to the negative views that citizens hold towards foreigners. This preconception yields radical political xenophobia, which results in the longing to form and apply public policies that enthusiastically discriminate against foreign individuals (Watts 1996). Discrimination against foreigners takes on many forms through the media, discriminatory political statements, negative public perceptions, threats of violence, mob violence, vigilantism discriminatory policies, harassment by public officials and abuses of all types (Harris 2001; Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005:4; Misago 2016).

Several scholars have engaged in the debate of xenophobia in South Africa and these include Tshitereke (1999); Harris (2002); McDonald (2000); Charman & Piper (2012); Crush (2000); Misago et al. (2015) Morris (1998) and Nieftagodien (2008). Studies conducted on xenophobia reveal that although defined as a state of mind, in South Africa, the phenomenon goes far beyond an attitude or dislike of foreigners and is usually accompanied by physical violence (Graf 2011). The conceptualisation of xenophobia as an attitude disregards the consequences of prejudice, particularly in South Africa, where xenophobic attitudes often advance into morbid violence (Harris 2002). In post-apartheid South Africa, xenophobia is understood as a product of the country’s colonial past, which is underpinned by a culture of violence and racism. Despite the country’s transition to democracy, these discrepancies still exist (Langa & Kiguwa 2016; Neocosmos 2006). The aversion to foreigners in South Africa has two characteristics. Firstly, it deals with who it usually targets; the group that is mainly targeted is other black Africans, not exempt from this are South Africans who are categorised as aliens based on their dark pigmentation (Hagensen 2014; Harris 2001; Gqola 2008). This suggests that xenophobia in South Africa is racialised as the victims of discrimination are other black foreigners (Zegeye 2009:8). Secondly, it usually erupts in tension and violence, often resulting in physical and verbal attacks as well as the looting and destruction of foreigners’ homes and businesses (Charman & Piper 2012; Hagensen 2014; Kersting 2009; Mothibi, Roelofse & Tshivase 2015).

This study adopts an extensive definition of the concept to include all forms of discriminatory attitudes and violence towards black foreigners and is primarily concerned about the attitudes of black South Africans towards blacks from elsewhere on the continent. This motivation is acceptable as it has been established that South Africans’ discriminatory attitudes towards non-nationals are largely orientated towards other blacks and although white South Africans are more likely to hold anti-
immigrant views than blacks, they are less likely to be in a position to systematically discriminate against them (Crush 2000).

2.2.1. Xenophobia, unemployment and economic competition

Various researchers have noted that most of the xenophobic incidents that have plagued South Africa occurred in economically and socially devastated urban townships (Nieftagodien 2008). Solomon and Kosaka (2013) identify the crux of xenophobia as being economic. The Southern African Migration Programme (2001) survey illustrates that South Africans believe that foreigners are attracted to the economic opportunities in the country. This sentiment is shared by Crush and Pendleton (2004), who attribute the high levels of xenophobia in the country to the perceived economic harm to South African citizens. However, foreigners that are believed to contribute positively to the economy are tolerated, such as the Chinese who are believed to contribute to the economy by spending money in the country and providing employment opportunities to locals (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). In comparison, those coming from other African states such as Nigeria, Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia are believed to take money out of the country (Solomon & Kosaka 2013; Neocosmos 2006).

2.2.2. The media’s influence on xenophobic sentiments

Xenophobia is a global phenomenon closely linked to times of economic and political instability and globalisation (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). However, this trend is particularly characteristic of post-colonial societies where unfulfilled expectations of prosperity and social ills are blamed on foreigners (Harris 2001; Neocosmos 2006). It is suggested that economic imbalance and political instability attracts individuals toward countries with prospects of better financial opportunities and safety (Marsella & Ring 2003). Consequently, the large migration of people across borders can result in the host community feeling threatened by the newcomers, either due to a perceived strain on the economy (a threat to employment, grants and social services), cultural differences or diluted political influence (Esses et al. 2001; Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005; Yakushko 2009:46). In South Africa, these sentiments are explicitly reflected in the negative public and political discourse regarding foreigners (Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005:6; Peberdy 1999).

Peberdy’s (1999) analysis indicates that the state often portrays foreign Africans as criminals and social parasites. These sentiments were explicitly clear under the former Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Mangosotho Buthelezi in 1996, who proclaimed that African foreigners were a threat to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005: 6). Generally, it appears that South African print media represents foreigners in a negative and stereotypical manner. A study conducted by Bekker et al. (2008) uses secondary and primary literature to demonstrate that South Africans held xenophobic views towards foreigners prior to the 2008 xenophobic attacks. The findings demonstrate that “xenophobic sentiments or sentiment that
have been construed to be xenophobic were reported as being held by government elites, politicians, journalists, home affairs officials, police officers and ordinary people” (Bekker et al. 2008:15). Much of the media reporting on foreigners focus on their socio-economic impact and this is portrayed negatively (Harris 2001).

The media has become an important vehicle in communicating information responsibly to the public, however, the media has occasionally sensationalised and contributed to the negative views about foreign migrants. In a study conducted by Muswede (2015) on two tabloid newspapers, it is debated by academics that personal encounters with foreigners are not the reason for the xenophobic feelings among South Africans but rather a result of false information from ancillary sources representing working-class conditions in current media (Muswede 2015). In his article, Tevera (2013) highlights research done by scholars explaining that the xenophobic violence in South Africa has been fuelled by the use of derogatory images and language in reports and articles and these stereotypes are continuously reproduced before and during xenophobic attacks.

Studies conducted on the South African media found that the media has compounded the negative views of foreigners in South Africa; representations of foreigners are mainly negative and biased and include the use of anti-foreigner expressions directed towards Africans with very little content directed towards Europeans and Americans who are also in the country illegally (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). Media reporting tends to associate certain crimes to different nationalities, for example, drug-related crimes are linked to Nigerians, car thefts to Mozambicans and illicit sexual acts are associated with Zimbabweans (Nyamnjoh 2006). Rising crime rates in South Africa are blamed on foreigners, despite the fact that there are deeper social problems underwriting the issues of crime in the country (Solomon & Kosaka 2013).

Social media sites also have a role to play in fuelling xenophobic attacks when the comments are negative or in support of xenophobic images and acts. Rasakanya & Sebola (2015) further state that social media has a negative impact relating to violence as the images or reports posted are seen globally and may result in civil unrest, targeting South Africans in those countries.

Despite the government taking relevant measures to educate people and tackle xenophobia in the hopes of preventing damage to South Africa’s newly found democracy, some politicians have publicly expressed xenophobic views (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). The most notable example was in 1996 during a parliamentary briefing the previous Home Affairs Minister Dr Buthelezi described the influx of immigrants into the country as a barrier to economic transformation. Negative stereotypical thoughts about foreigners were also expressed by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini in 2015, who implied that foreigners should return to their native countries given that they were enjoying the wealth of South Africans (Ndou,2015). His statements are closely linked to the narrative that foreigners are taking away employment and wealth from locals (Rasakanya & Sebola 2015). His statements would seemingly encourage the xenophobic attacks in 2015 and result in some foreigners returning to their
countries (Rasakanya & Sebola 2015). Clearly, discrimination against foreigners is not limited to the media but also spills into the political spectrum.

2.2.3. Xenophobia and the nation-state

Due to its pattern of systemic discrimination, the South African government has been criticised for using state institutions to reduce the number of immigrants coming into South Africa (Palmar 2004). This is clearly demonstrated with the introduction of The Immigration Act of 2002, which makes provisions for law enforcement officers to detain undocumented immigrants (Neocosmos 2006). The Act explicitly fails to include strategies which promote the protection of foreigners (Neocosmos 2006). In less tangible ways, targeting foreigners can contribute to the nation-building project, where “a shared foreign threat” can serve a unifying role (Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005:8). These thoughts reflect the arguments offered by Peberdy (1999) and Morris (1998), who situate xenophobia within a context of nationalism. From their perspectives, foreign black Africans are represented as a threat to the new South African nation. Hook and Harris (1998), for example, explain that South Africa’s transition to democracy introduced a new form of patriotism which coincided with a shift from racism towards nationalism wherein the African foreigner is the enemy of the new nation.

In consideration of the fact that foreigners are categorised as ‘outsiders’, it is important to note (as Crush et al. [2009] rightly states) that xenophobia affects all categories of migrants in varying degrees. The level of discrimination varies depending on their cultural, racial and ethnic make-up, class composition, migration status or location (Crush et al. 2009). In other words, even in societies or countries where xenophobia or negative attitudes are widespread, they are directed and felt differently by different categories of outsiders generally depending on their perceived ‘threat’ to the local socio-economic status quo (Crush et al. 2009; Misago 2016). Non-nationals from Botswana, for example, receive generally positive treatment from residents of North West Province as well as former Mozambican refugees living among Shangaan speakers in Limpopo Province. The foreigners are positively integrated into the daily lives of the locals that reside in the area due to having similar cultural practices and language (Reitzes and Simkins 1998). In some ways, South Africans have expressed acceptance of non-nationals, however, there is a clear indication of uneasiness towards the presence of foreign nationals (Misago 2016).

2.3. Xenophobic violence in a post-apartheid South Africa

Violence is seen as a socially acceptable method of resolving the conflict for inhabitants of poor urban settlements in South Africa (Harris 2001; IOM 2009). South Africans in informal settlements and townships often use violent protests to garner a response to their service delivery distresses (Serino 2014). This suggests that violence is perceived as the most effective way to receive assistance (Nieftagodien 2011). The use of violence as a means to voice grievances can be traced
back to South Africa’s struggle for freedom during apartheid and xenophobic attacks cannot be separated from this history; they constitute a new form of violence in the democratic era (Hagensen 2014; Harris 2001).

The culture of violence is a legacy of apartheid and finds its roots in the 1980s when violence was predominantly political in nature (Hagensen 2014; Harris 2001). Maitse (2000:201) argues that acts of violence and control over women were an extension of the state tools used during apartheid to maintain order. Nationalism gave men permission to oppress and exploit women for their own as well as the state’s maintenance of hierarchal and patriarchal structures, this resonates with how the colonial project and ideals of nationalism in many African contexts are deeply embedded in these structures (Barnabé 2007; Batisai 2013; Harris 2001).

For black South Africans, the use of violence was based on the desire for political power and liberation (Mokwena & Segal 1992: 202). Police brutality during apartheid narrowed the possibility of peaceful protest, thus violence was utilised and sanctioned in the political spectrum of liberation (Hagensen 2014; Hamber 1998). The politics of the 1980s have effectively laid the foundation for an on-going culture of violence; whilst levels of political violence have generally dropped, the post-apartheid state has been characterised by intense increases in violent crime. The nature of violence has changed from being political to criminal and although the form of violence seems to have altered across time, violence itself remains the dominant means to solve problems in South Africa (Hamber 1998; Nieftagodien 2011). In Soweto and other townships, South Africans had lived with foreigners and individuals from varying cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds for decades (Landau 2013). As such, violence in South Africa was not xenophobic (Landau 2013). With the advent of democracy and the migration of foreigners into South Africa, a number of xenophobic attacks have been reported, particularly against foreign shop owners (Pillay 2008). Xenophobic violence in this context is seen as a justifiable solution to rid the country of crime, unemployment and poverty believed to be caused by foreigners living and operating businesses in the country (Harris 2001; Landau 2004).

Xenophobic violence has often been labelled as a new phenomenon in South Africa following the 2008 attacks (Bekker et al. 2009). However, a number of xenophobic events have taken place since the advent of democracy and the discrimination perpetrated against foreign Africans during apartheid continues, despite the country’s political transition (Hagensen 2014; Pillay 2008). The first incidences of xenophobia were reported in December 1994 and January 1995, when armed South Africans illegally evicted foreigners from their homes (Shepherd & Robins 2008: 256). The explanation for the attacks was economic, with many of the perpetrators believing that foreigners were blocking employment opportunities (Shepherd & Robins 2008: 256). These types of attacks were not only seen in Gauteng but were reported in other provinces such as the Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal (Bekker et al. 2008).
2.3.1. The 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa

The events above indicate that xenophobic attacks in May and June 2008 are not the first expressions of violence against foreigners in South Africa. The violent attacks reached their peak in 2008. From May 10th to June 2008, 134 xenophobic events took place across South Africa (Bekker et al. 2008:33-37). The violent attacks against foreigners most significantly peaked in the township of Alexandra and left 62 people dead and over 100 000 people displaced (Landau 2011; SAHO 2015). The attacks saw the looting of 342 shops of which 213 were burnt to the ground (Landau 2011). The xenophobic attacks which started in Alexandra quickly spread throughout the country to other townships and informal settlements (Hassim, Kupe, & Worby 2008). Within days, violence flared up in KwaZulu Natal and Cape Town (Amnesty International 2008). The perpetrators were mainly young black male South Africans.

The events that occurred in Alexander were labelled as ‘xenophobic attacks’ by the media, public and those working in academia, although presented as mere acts of criminality by politicians (Hassim et al. 2008). As such, an opposing view of xenophobia as the cause of the attacks was presented by Thabo Mbeki in 2008, who explained the incident as a display of barbaric criminality rather than xenophobia. On the other end of the spectrum, academics and social scientists believe that there has been an over-emphasis by politicians on defining the attacks as mere acts of criminality and argue that while criminality is inevitable in political unrest, it is not an underlying cause for the attacks that took place in Alexandra (Nieftagodien 2008). The explanations offered for the attacks include the government’s poor implementation of services and economic transformation post-apartheid, poor border controls resulting in the influx of illegal foreigners, the high unemployment rate among the black youth, as well as police inefficiency to contain the violence (Bekker et al. 2008). The government has viewed the 2008 attacks on foreigners as a ploy by criminal enterprises to capitalise on the violence, as a result, the xenophobic outbreaks where never addressed appropriately (Crush & Ramachandran 2009).

2.3.2. The 2015 xenophobic attacks in Soweto, South Africa

The 2008 xenophobic attacks made local and international headlines, creating an interest in issues pertaining to the causes and prevention of xenophobia. Sadly, research done after the 2008 attacks has clearly not curbed violence against foreigners, following a series of violent outbreaks on the 19th of January 2015 (Simelane & Nicolson 2015). The violence followed the death of a 14-year-old teenager by the name of Simpiwe Mahori who was part of a crowd that attempted to raid a foreign-owned shop. The teenager was accidentally shot by a foreign shop owner who acted in self-defence. The community reacted to the death of the teenager by destroying and looting the property of foreign-owned shops. The aftermath of the violence saw the destruction of approximately 120 foreign-owned shops located in Soweto and Kagiso – a nearby township in the West Rand (Patel et al. 2015). More
significantly, the attacks resulted in the murder of a Somali shop owner (Simelane & Nicolson 2015). In April 2015, xenophobic attacks similar to those seen in Alexandra and Soweto sprang up in Durban as a reaction to the xenophobic public statements made by King Goodwill Zwelethini, requesting foreigners to leave South Africa. However, following the outbreak of the attacks in Durban, the King appealed for the atrocities to stop (South African History Online 2015). Despite his rebuttal, the attacks managed to spread to other parts of the country (SAHO 2015).

2.3.3. The August 2018 xenophobic attacks in Soweto, South Africa

In August 2018, at the time of writing this dissertation, further attacks took place against foreign spaza shops in Soweto. The events took place after it was insinuated that foreign shop owners in the area were selling expired products to the public (Mashaba 2018; Shange 2018). This resulted in public violence and the looting of foreign-owned spaza shops (Mashaba 2018; Shange, 2018). Areas such as Pimville, Mndeni, Chiawelo, Zola, Mofolo, Senoane, Naledi and White City were most affected after further suspected shootings were said to have been carried out by a Pakistani national in White City (Mashaba 2018). The raids took place on a Wednesday afternoon, steered mostly by school-going youth of White City, who broke into stores and stole goods from foreign-owned spaza shops (Mashaba 2018). At the time of the attacks, there was very little police presence, despite one of the attacks taking place five minutes away from a police station, mirroring the same apathy seen from police officials during the 2008 and 2015 attacks (Shange 2018).

In the recent outburst, it is evident that the majority of the locals shared the same sentiment with Gauteng Premier Makhura with regard to foreigners occupying businesses in the area; stating that foreign shop owners are not welcome in Soweto (Simelane 2018). The recent mayhem that erupted in August 2018 clearly demonstrates the importance of investigating the reasons for attacks on foreign-owned spaza shops, as they will continue to happen.

2.3.4. Violence against foreign spaza shop owners

Scarcity is the driving force for conflict in densely populated communities in South Africa (Mamabola 2015). Service delivery protests in recent years have been caused by the failures of national government and municipal leaders in following through with their promises made during elections, resulting in locals directing their aggression towards foreigners and foreign shop owners (Lekaba 2014). The scarcity of resources and lack of service delivery in an analysis done by Lekaba (2014) in the townships of Alexandra and Bekkersdal identifies a link between service delivery protests and xenophobia by using Runciman’s (1966) theory of relative deprivation. This theory explains that during the election seasons, the hopes of locals are higher than usual. This is rooted in the perception that hard work will result in a better life with superior opportunities, however, this optimism is threatened when service delivery is poor and foreigners seem to be performing better than locals in the informal sector (Lekaba 2014).
Street trading and *spaza* shops are a fundamental source of revenue for low-income families in the townships but another underlying threat in this competitive market is spatial (Tevera 2013). The townships and informal areas in South Africa are highly populated due to the geographical limitations set by apartheid legislation. Tevera (2013) draws attention to the fact that local shop owners see foreign nationals as a danger to their household incomes. This resentment towards foreign *spaza* shop owners is derived from the belief that locals are being driven out of the informal business sector (Tevera 2013).

Currently, almost every neighbourhood has several *spaza* shops with most being foreign-owned and this subsequent competition between local shop owners and foreign migrants is usually the reason for the conflict between the two groups (Tevera 2013).

The presence of foreigners in the townships and informal settlements has been met with different views from local residents (Tevera 2013). To some poor classes, they are welcomed because they offer relatively cheap products to low earning members of society (Tevera 2013). On the other hand, they have become a source of bitterness to local shop owners who feel that they are being forced out of business and would like to see the government introduce legislation that restricts the operations of foreign traders in South Africa (Hunter & Skinner 2003; Tevera 2013). This is evidenced by the results from a study conducted by Crush (2008:2) which states that about 74% of South Africans support deportation of anyone who is not contributing economically to South Africa, while 61% believe that foreign nationals should not be able to start a small business in the country.

Premier Senzo Mchunu established the Special Reference Groups on Migration and Community Integration in Kwa-Zulu Natal (2015) as a means to investigate the rising tensions between locals and foreigners with a particular interest in the causes and the consequences of the January-May 2015 violent attacks against foreigners. The findings from the inquiry revealed that many South Africans operating in the *spaza* sector made allegations that businesses owned by foreign nationals thrive due to unfair advantages and these ‘improper ties’ directly undermine the viability of locally-owned businesses (Madlala 2016). The allegations against foreigners include the use of illegal activities to gain an advantage against local shop owners; which include the fact that immigrants’ businesses are not registered and they do not pay taxes and that foreign nationals sell products at prices below those that local business owners conclude are feasible (Report of the Special Reference Groups on Migration and Community Integration in Kwa-Zulu Natal 2015). Local shop owners believe that foreign shop owners receive unfair privileges from wholesalers due to shared religious beliefs and intentionally operate *spaza* shops in close proximity to locally-owned businesses thus ‘stealing’ potential customers (Report of the Special Reference Groups on Migration and Community Integration in Kwa-Zulu Natal 2015).

South African literature generally defines *spaza* shops as small convenience stores typically located in the township or informal settlement operating from residential stands or homes that provide
neighbours with basic household groceries (Fatoki & Oni 2016; Liedeman et al. 2013; Tladi & Miehlbradt 2003; Terblanche 1991; Van Scheers 2010). These small shops trade items that are regularly in demand by the locals and that can be easily acquired from wholesalers, such as bread, milk, cigarettes, soap and alcohol (Liedeman et al. 2013). Spaza shops are not formally recognised as business institutions that can procure financial assistance from banks, the capital to run the business generally comes from personal savings or relatives (Basardien et al. 2014). The spaza shop market includes basic trade activities where basic consumer goods are procured from wholesalers and sold to customers (Basardien et al. 2014).

Spaza shops are characteristically found in most townships and informal settlements in South Africa (Hadebe 2010). For many years, spaza shops were the main source of additional income to black South African households while providing basic grocery items for residents (Liedman, Charman, Piper & Peterson 2013). More recently, as a result of globalisation and the migration of foreigners into South Africa, other nationalities such as Somalis, Pakistanis and the Chinese also operate spaza shops in townships and informal settlements as a means of generating income (Basardien et al. 2014). This has had a negative influence on the market share of South Africans operating in the sector, as foreigners possess superior business strategies and offer consumers lower prices (Charman & Piper 2011). The success of foreign-owned spaza shops has been an issue of contempt among locals often resulting in violent attacks against foreigners, more significantly against Somali nationals (Basardien 2009; Charman & Piper 2011).

Xenophobia has resulted in widespread acts of violence against foreign spaza shop owners (Fatoki 2016). Charman & Piper (2012) note that in the last couple of years, violent attacks against immigrant shopkeepers in informal settlements have increased. The authors argue that violence against foreign spaza shop owners should not be seen only within the context of xenophobia but in the context of criminal activity and economic competition, known as "violent entrepreneurship" which has affected South African spaza shop owners (Charman & Piper 2012:97). Lack of funding from formal financial institutions has contributed to the slow growth and expansion of spaza shops due to the high costs of financing the business (Fatoki 2016). Liedeman (2013) has investigated why certain migrant groups such as Somalis have been able to take control of the spaza market so swiftly and successfully. He conducted an ethnographic study of spaza shop owners in Delft. His basic finding is that the business approach and scale of operations of foreign-run spaza shops trumps predominantly micro-or-small scale ‘survivalist' business approaches of most South African spaza shops. An important difference is the role of social networks. In the case of the Somali shopkeepers, clan-based social-networks play a key role in enabling a more competitive business model. The networks provide various services including access to cheap labour (recruited from Somalia), group purchasing to secure discounts and operational economies of scale and facilitating micro-finance by organising investments and business partnerships (Liedeman et al. 2012; Plastow 2015).
Basardien et al. (2014) similarly focus on the role of culture on business practices and entrepreneurial orientation on business performance, rather than providing reasons for the attacks on foreign-owned spaza shop owners. The study attempts to add to the growing body of knowledge of entrepreneurial dynamics in the informal sector in South African by examining the cultural differences between the practices associated with South Africa and Somalia. Although the study focused on the changing nature of the spaza shop industry in South Africa, it did very little to illuminate the reasons for xenophobic violence against foreigners. The study establishes that the business practices between local and foreign spaza entrepreneurs are poles apart as a consequence of cultural differences. Foreigners work in teams while locals operate individually. Liedeman et al. (2012), Plastow (2015) and Basardien et al. (2014) observed that the distinct differences between the two groups provide foreigners with superior advantages when purchasing goods as they are eligible for discounts which positively influences their pricing models and competitiveness in the market.

This competitive pricing and success has resulted in foreigners being the victims of hate crimes, discrimination and xenophobia (Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005). To establish the reasons that foreigners are targeted, preceding authors such as Landau (2011); Masonganye (2010); and Charman and Piper (2012) have conducted studies documenting the experiences of xenophobic violence against foreign shop owners in the informal sector. However, these experiences have all been documented from the perspective of the victims or perpetrators, while the voices of the witnesses have remained silent. Furthermore, these studies focus on the informal sector in general, without explicitly looking at the spaza shop industry as an independent segment. As previously indicated in the introduction of this study, to close this gap, a significant study documenting the violence against spaza shop owners has been conducted by Charman, Peterson & Piper (2012). However, the study positioned the shopkeepers as victims of crime rather than victims of xenophobia. Furthermore, the study documented the experiences of the foreign spaza shop owners, neglecting the views of South Africans.

2.4. Theoretical approaches to xenophobic violence in South Africa

The manifestation of xenophobic violence in South Africa cannot be explained by a single theory due to its complexity. The explanations for this phenomenon come from a range of disciplines and are not mutually exclusive, often offering varying degrees of insight. The study will focus on the sociological, socio-cultural and structural explanations for the phenomenon. The sociological explanation will be captured through the scapegoating hypothesis. The socio-cultural explanation will be captured through the isolation and bio-cultural hypothesis. The structural explanations consist
of the theory of ethnic violence and group threat theory. Each theory is explained below, highlighting their argument and shortcomings as well as their relevance to the study.

In her writings, Harris (2002) offers three different but complimentary explanations for xenophobic violence. The scapegoating hypothesis, which expounds that foreigners are blamed for limited economic resources and ruined expectation regarding the country’s democratic transition (Harris 2002:171). The second hypothesis for xenophobia is the ‘isolation hypothesis’, which argues that due to the strict border controls during apartheid, a post-apartheid era that allows foreigners in the country has resulted in tensions (Culbertson 2009). The third hypotheses, namely the ‘bio-cultural hypothesis’, explains that xenophobia is fuelled by physical appearance and cultural differences (Harris 2002:173). These hypotheses combined provide varied and interlinked explanations for xenophobia within South Africa (Harris 2002; Burns 2008). Harris (2002) draws from the work of Tshitereke (1999), who positions xenophobia within a context of social and political transition, where the perceived expectations of citizens are dashed. Tshitereke (1999) argues that transformation amplifies the unequal distribution of resources and wealth among the inhabitants of a particular society, resulting in aggression towards foreigners for limited resources such as housing, education and health-care. This author is not alone in making the link between social and economic inequality and violence.

The concept of relative deprivation was formally introduced into sociology literature by Runciman in 1966, focusing on class, status and power hierarchies in Britain. Relative deprivation theory has been used primarily to understand the processes of social identity and the responses to disadvantage by both privileged and disadvantaged groups of society (Walker & Smith 2002). The feeling of deprivation derives from one’s perceived feelings of dissatisfaction, based on the belief that one is getting less than one is entitled to (Runciman, 1966). The gap between reality and expectation results in spontaneous conflict (Harris 2002).

2.4.1. Scapegoating hypothesis

The negative attitude towards foreign nationals is significantly higher in South Africa in comparison to other African countries, seemingly stemming from the belief that foreign nationals are responsible for the social and economic inequality within the country (Mattes et al. 1999; Valji 2003). The scapegoating hypothesis locates xenophobia within the context of social transition and change. Hostility towards foreigners is explained in relation to limited resources, such as housing, education, health-care and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999). The scapegoating theory explains prejudice as a means by which people express hostility arising from frustration (Marger 1991). In essence, this theory implies that a person becomes so frustrated in his or her efforts to achieve the desired goal that he or she tends to respond with aggression (Mothiba, Roelofse & Tshivase 2015). Harris (2002:171) is of the opinion that the
relatively new phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa is explicable through the scapegoating hypothesis. The scapegoating hypothesis of xenophobia condemns the foreigner as a scapegoat, someone who represents societal ills, crime and dysfunction (Tshitereke 1999). Tshitereke (1999) suggests that in the post-apartheid era, unmet expectations and dashed hopes have increased discontent and frustration among the populace. This has propelled South Africans, pushing them to great lengths as they are even willing to take action unto themselves in order to protect what, for them, is a threat on local jobs and security (Harris 2002).

The competition for economic resources in the informal sector additionally makes South African nationals feel that black foreign shop owners are a threat to their livelihoods (Hunter & Skinner 2003; Landau 2004; Masonganye 2010). The instigators of the xenophobic attacks often come from groups that are unable to compete effectively in a modernising economy and society, while the target is those who are able to do this (Du Toit & Kotze 2011:162).

The traditional criticism directed at the scapegoating hypothesis is that it does not explain why black foreigners are the group that is burdened with the hatred and bear the brunt of the prejudice (Duncan 2011). The traditional criticism directed towards the scapegoating hypothesis is that it fails to shed light on the reasons that black foreigners, as opposed to Europeans and Americans, symbolise unemployment, poverty and deprivation (Duncan 2011; Gqola 2008; Harris 2002). Furthermore, there are places in the world where people live in poverty and have not seen the extreme levels of xenophobia as seen in some South African townships (Culbertson 2009). This suggests that poverty alone cannot provide a full explanation for the xenophobic violence in South Africa. Although the study does not seek to evaluate the theories of xenophobia, but rather to evaluate the nature of violence against foreign shop owners, this hypothesis is relevant to this study as it illuminates the reasons why foreign shop owners are targeted more than other foreigners, particularly why frustrations are targeted at certain nationalities over others.

### 2.4.2. Isolation hypothesis of xenophobia

The isolation hypothesis situates xenophobia as a consequence of racial isolation during apartheid. It suggests that suspicion and hostility towards strangers in South Africa exist due to its history of isolation during apartheid (Harris 2002:172). The theory leans on racial segregation and international isolation, particularly isolation from the rest of Africa, as an explanation for intolerance towards foreignness (Duncan 2011; Morris 1998). The end of the apartheid era opened up the country’s borders to the international community which brought South Africans into contact with unknown diversity (Culbertson 2009). According to this hypothesis, contact between the previously racially and politically segregated South African citizen and the ‘unknown’ foreigner forms an atmosphere of antagonism (Culbertson 2009). Despite the fact that there might be some truth in this hypothesis, the query that it rears is why this intolerance towards variance is largely expressed in relation to
black foreigners and not to other races (Gqola 2008; Neocosmos 2006). The isolation hypothesis is relevant to this study as it can show how social identity (beliefs and ideologies) can contribute to xenophobic violence.

### 2.4.3. **Bio-cultural hypothesis of xenophobia**

In this hypothesis, the biological and cultural features, such as hairstyles, accents, immunisation marks, traditional dress and physical appearance are used to isolate foreigners from native South Africans (Culbertson 2009; Harris 2001). Research has shown that some foreigners such as Nigerians and Congolese are easily identifiable and victimised for their distinct outfits and difficulty speaking a local language (Morris 1998). The arrests of some foreigners have been on the grounds of physical appearance (South African Human Rights Commission 1999).

While the bio-cultural hypothesis explains that xenophobia operates through the level of physical and cultural appearance, it does not explain why certain physical and cultural features take on a significance and are treated with disdain, while others are not (Harris 2001). The most obvious response to this question is racism (Culbertson 2009). This is a response that seems to be missing from the three hypotheses outlined above. The bio-cultural hypothesis does not reflect on the reasons why some cultural nuances and physical features are embraced, while others are shunned (Harris 2001). A plausible reason for this is racism which, as stated, has been neglected in the hypothesis above (Culbertson 2009).

The bio-cultural hypothesis explains that xenophobia operates through the level of physical and cultural appearance, applying it in this study has the potential to demonstrate the reasons why certain nationalities took on a significance and were treated with disdain during the attacks, while others were not. Although providing valuable insights, these theories represent a significant mainstream view that often fails to engage with the historical implications of racial oppression and “blackness” in particular (Langa & Kiguwa 2016:81). The attacks on foreigners provide a distraction from the racial and ethnic divisions that confront South Africans daily and, by ignoring their differences and focusing on the ‘other’ being the foreigner, South Africans are able to bond in a unified group (Langa & Kiguwa 2016).

### 2.4.4. **The theory of ethnic violence**

The theory of ethnic violence, developed by Horowitz (2001), goes a step further and argues that xenophobia is a consequence of both external factors and local factors which range from short term causes to suppressed emotions in a community. Based on this definition, violence against foreigners is situational, which means that this kind of violence arises when there is little to no fear of the rule of law in society (Horowitz 2001). This form of violence is usually carried out by one social group against another and is motivated by the fear of the less privileged against the more privileged group.
for access to limited resources (Horowitz 2001). This fear results in violent acts in which victims are chosen based on social groups, accessibility, whether they are a threat and if their propensity to retaliate is low.

Horowitz (2001) further states that this form of violence takes place in three stages; the first being that there must be a condition that provokes the violence. This condition, as explained in the scapegoating hypothesis, is usually a background of hatred towards foreigners. This aversion, in the South African context, is fuelled by poverty, high unemployment and inequality (Harris 2001). Secondly, this then leads to violent acts, where the targets are selected on a judgement of little to no risk of retaliation (Bekker 2010:143). This selection is usually based on the perception of immunity from punishment, where the police are biased towards the perpetrators. Lastly, this is then followed by anecdotes which serve as a justification for the actions.

Based on this explanation, it is evident that violence against foreigners’ stems from the societal fear of the perpetrators losing their social status in society (Horowitz 2001). This explanation offered by Horowitz (2001) provides a useful explanation for the analysis of xenophobic violence in the 2015 attacks, particularly when complemented by the scapegoating hypothesis. The specific events that occurred in the 2015 attacks demonstrate a situation where the perpetrators find themselves unable to compete economically with foreigners, thus leading to rumours which flared into organised mass violence. The lack of police presence, as well as the bias of the police in unison with the perpetrators, provided favourable conditions for ethnic riots. This theory is applicable to this study as it will illuminate if foreigners were attacked based on misguided information regarding their success. The propensity for ethnic violence to occur against a lower-ranking group towards a more successful ethnic group will assist in explaining the reasons for the 2015 xenophobic attacks. The fact that this type of violence flourishes in situations where law-enforcement is ineffective offers an explanation as to why the violence was not contained appropriately.

This theoretical section has discussed four theories which demonstrate that xenophobic violence in South Africa cannot be narrowed down to one explanation. It is a multi-faceted phenomenon which can be explained through an analysis of the current socio-economic problems which have historically and continue to plague the country. It is a phenomenon that can be explained by social and cultural superiority, poverty, poor or lack of service delivery, unemployment and unsolicited hatred fuelled by inequality.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter suggests two broad areas through which to understand the perceptions and experiences of xenophobic violence in contemporary South Africa. The analysis illustrates that xenophobia is a product of historical factors and the mechanics of South Africa's period of transition.
It does not exist separately from other manifestations of violence but symbolises continuity, as well as change, from previous and contemporary forms. It further illustrates that violence is the result of competition for scarce resources and thus is economic in its nature. Previous studies on xenophobia by authors such as Harris (2002); Eliseev (2008); Nieftagodien (2008); Landau (2004) and Worby, Hassim & Kupe (2008) delve into violence directed towards foreigners and not particularly towards foreign spaza shop owners, while others such as Charman & Piper (2012) and Glaser (2008) focus on economic competition for resources, however neither has captured these experiences from the perspective of the witnesses. The studies conducted by Glaser (2008) and Charman & Piper (2012) expound on the facts that foreign spaza shop owners are attacked as a result of their success and the location of their shops being in direct contact with locally owned spaza shop shops. However, there are several gaps that exist in the literature, particularly the fact that these experiences are either captured from the perspective of the victim or the perpetrator while the perspectives of witnesses to violence are not provided. Additionally, there is very little explanation for the targeting of certain foreigners, such as shop owners, other than their competitive advantage. This study aims to bridge this gap and provide an account from those that witnessed the attacks as well as illuminating the reasons why certain foreigners are attacked while others are not. The next chapter outlines the research process and the methods used to gather data for this investigation.
Chapter 3. Methodological processes for exploring violence against foreign spaza shop owners in Soweto

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provides a background to xenophobia and violent attacks against foreign spaza shop owners in South Africa. The chapter concludes that xenophobic attacks in South Africa are a result of a myriad of social political and economic factors. South Africa’s history of isolation and racism has continued to perpetuate a culture of paranoia and hate against black foreigners. Foreigners are positioned as scapegoats for the failed expectations of South Africa’s transition to democracy; for the poverty among those living in informal settlements around the country; for the crime and corruption found in urban areas and the high levels of unemployment among citizens (Harris 2002; Landau 2011; Nieftagodien 2008). The chapter further explores violence as a socially acceptable method of resolving conflict in South Africa. Literature exploring the business practices of foreign-owned spaza shops and South African owned spaza shops has been reviewed in an effort to understand the causes of violent attacks against foreigners in general as well as in the context of the 2015 xenophobic attacks.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the steps taken to explore the perceptions of Sowetans with regard to violent attacks against foreign shop owners in 2015. The chapter provides a brief discussion of the research paradigm used for this study. This is followed by the explanation and justification of the study’s research approach. The selection and recruitment of participants as well as the data collection techniques and ethical considerations are explained. The chapter expounds the data analysis process and concludes with the learnings from the methodology.

3.2. Research paradigm

This study subscribes to the social-constructivist research paradigm (Creswell 2014). The ontological assumptions held by the social-constructivist paradigm consist of reality, truth, knowledge and the meaning that people attribute to their experiences which can be discovered through collaborative research methods that involve written and spoken language (Nieuwenhuis 2007). The social-constructivist paradigm is appropriate for the study, as the researcher aims to gain understanding of the meanings that the residents of Soweto attached to the 2015 xenophobic attacks. The researcher has uncovered these meanings using collaborative qualitative research methodologies that saw the participant as the expert and where knowledge was co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Creswell 2014; Fouché & Schurink 2011). This
approach is valuable for the research as it seeks to study the subjective perceptions of participants in their natural setting and make sense of the meanings attached to their lived experiences (Creswell 2009; Leedy & Ormond 2010).

3.3. Research design

Following Creswell (2014), an exploratory approach has been considered most applicable for this study as it includes collaborating with participants to gain insight into the meanings they attach to their lived experiences and thus co-constructing knowledge with participants (Trotman 2006). For the current study, the exploratory approach allows the researcher to gain insights into the perceptions that Soweto residents have when witnessing violent xenophobic attacks against foreign-owned spaza shops. Through qualitative research methods, the researcher aims to co-construct knowledge with the participants, to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions of the underlying causes of violence and what they perceive might have led to the violent attacks against black foreign shop owners. In line with Creswell (2009:4), the qualitative method is the most appropriate for this study as the open-ended questions give the participants an opportunity to express their views and thus provides them with a say in the outcomes of the findings.

3.4. Dobsonville: The study location

The research site is Dobsonville, Soweto, as it is one of the areas that reported violence against foreigners during the January 2015 xenophobic attacks. In 2011, there were roughly 40 328 people living in Dobsonville comprising of 11 852 households (Stats SA 2017). This means that 3 per cent of Soweto residents live in this area. The township is predominantly black (99.14%) and the main languages spoken are Setswana (38.25%), isiZulu (22.1%) and isiXhosa (14.9%) (Stats SA 2017). Townships surrounding Dobsonville include Bramfischerville, Meadowlands, Mofolo and Protea Glen; these areas also reported violence against foreign shop owners in January 2015 (Simelane & Nicolson 2015).

When entering Dobsonville using the historic Elias Motsoaledi Street, there is an exciting energy in the air, the bright orange buses line up in the Putco depot, street traders sell fresh produce along the tarred pavements, children play and laugh happily in the streets and along the dusty sidewalks. The socio-economic conditions in Dobsonville reflect the inequality in South Africa, with most people still living in the old ‘matchbox’ houses characteristic of the apartheid era, while others have renovated their houses to reflect their middle-class incomes. The number of occupants in each house differs, with some residents living with four generations under one roof while others live alone. Most of the yards have back rooms which are either occupied by family members or tenants.

The streets are lined up with cars, new and old, ranging from a Volkswagen Polo, Mercedes Benz, BMW and Hyundai. Taxis stop to pick up commuters from the newly renovated Dobsonville Mall.
The Police Station is one of the first buildings seen upon entering the township, next to the Dobsonville hostel, characterised by men walking in and out of the narrow passage leading to their rooms. Spaza shops and small businesses are a dominant feature in the township. The spaza shops are scattered across the township with most of them operating in garages located on residential yards. The spaza shops are operated by foreigners, with some of the shops emulating a miniature walk-in supermarket.

![Figure 1: Dobsonville, Main Road](image)

3.5. Negotiating entry into Dobsonville

The researchers’ first visit to Dobsonville included a meeting with the community auxiliary workers at Young Voice Academy. The meeting was used as a platform to explain the purpose of the research, build rapport and foster trust between the community auxiliary workers as the gatekeepers of the community. The researcher encouraged the gatekeepers to ask questions so that they can find common understanding and collaboration. The purpose of this non-official meeting was also to survey the community life of Dobsonville. The researcher further used the opportunity to meet a few of the participants that would participate in the study.

The researcher anticipated that the Soweto residents who witnessed the xenophobic attacks in 2015, were possibly difficult to identify as they were a hidden population. To gain access to participants, the researcher contacted the Young Voice Academy as well as Phaphama which are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working on xenophobia in Soweto. The NGOs facilitated
access to a community development worker who assisted the researcher in identifying potential participants that witnessed the violence in Dobsonville.

3.6. Sampling witnesses of the 2015 violent xenophobic attacks

Given that access was negotiated through NGOs, snowball sampling is the sampling method most appropriate for this study. Snowball sampling refers to an iterative process of identifying participants by asking one participant to identify and refer researchers to additional participants who might take part in the study (Creswell 2014; Gagan et al. 2014). An advantage of this sampling method is that participants are more easily accessible as a result of a referral being done through someone they trust. A possible drawback of this sampling method is that because participants knew one another, they might discuss the interviews amongst themselves. To address the problem, the participants are asked not to disclose their participation in the research with anyone.

For the purpose of this study, all participants are adults over 18 years, who had witnessed the xenophobic attacks in 2015 and are current residents of Soweto. This criterion excluded anyone who partook or was a perpetrator in the violence that erupted. The category ‘witness’ in this context refers to those who saw the violence as it unfolded, while ‘perpetrators’ were those who actively participated in the looting. The researcher conducted 10 semi-structured individual interviews to reach data saturation. To ensure an equal spread across gender and age, the researcher had initially intended to interview five males and five females between the ages of 18 and 60 to accommodate varying perceptions. Unintentionally, during fieldwork, the youngest participant is 18 years old and the oldest 47 and the majority of those interviewed are male; four participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years; four participants between the ages of 26-35 years and two participants between the ages of 36-47 years. Of the ten participants, eight were male. Initially, the researcher had intended to have an equal gender spread, but it was easier to recruit male participants as they were referring other males in their networks. As a result, only two females were recruited to participate in the study. The researcher had set interviews with three other females; however, upon arrival, they refused to participate in the study. In essence, all of the participants are unemployed with an exception of two male participants who are volunteering community workers and two other participants who are students. All the participants have been residing in Soweto for more than four years, with six participants having lived in Dobsonville their entire lives. For a more complete profile of the participants, please refer to Appendix A which demonstrates the bio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees who participated in the study. In line with the privacy and confidentiality agreement, participants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout this dissertation.
3.7. Data collection process

3.7.1. Semi-structured interviews

Due to the sensitivity of the research subject and the participants being a hidden population, semi-structured individual interviews are deemed the most appropriate method of data collection. This method allows the participants to express their opinions without being influenced by others in a group and accordingly reflects their own perspectives. Semi-structured individual interviews are structured in the sense that questions are developed beforehand, however, they are flexible and allow the participants to speak about their own perceptions and experiences without imposing limitations through pre-defined categories (Creswell 2014; Fontana & Frey 1994; Monette, Sullivan & Dejong 2005). Although there are predefined questions, the flow of the interview is similar to a conversation which allows the researcher to probe for additional information (Creswell 2014).

The interview schedule used for the semi-structured interviews is a crucial part of the fieldwork plan in preparation for the data collection process (Terre-Blance & Durrheim 1999:128). Guided by Creswell (2014:183), the researcher constructed an interview protocol with instructions to follow so that standard procedures are followed from one interview to the other. The researcher develops the guiding questions to assist with conducting detailed interviews. The nature of the questions focuses on the attacks against foreign spaza shop owners in 2015 and how the participants experienced them. The open-ended questions used in the interviews allow for a natural and conversational interview style (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim 1999:130). Provision is also made for strategic follow-up questions in order to probe and gain clarification where answers are vague. Please see interview guide in Appendix B.

3.7.2. Piloting the interview schedule

In line with Prescott & Soeken (1989), the researcher has also conducted a pilot study to guide the final interview for the study, given the sensitivity of the study. A pilot study is used to explore any methodological issues arising from putting the methodology into practice. The pilot study allows the researcher to provide details on exactly what is learnt during the preliminary data collection as well as the necessary changes that need to be made to the study. Pilot studies have benefits for both the research being conducted as well as for the researcher (Van Teijlingen & Hundley 2002). The pilot further assists the researcher in identifying the weaknesses and strengths in their research design.

The first stage of the pilot study includes assessing the study location as well as the chosen recruitment method. The environment and recruitment method are assessed to determine the availability and willingness of people who had witnessed the violence to participate in the study. Thereafter, it is essential to conduct pilot interviews before proceeding with the interviews. The
research guide is then assessed to determine if it answers the research questions and to ensure that the questions are abundant, satisfactory and answerable. The interview guide had been piloted over a period of two days on the 9th and the 10th of May 2018, with two participants who did not form part of the research sample. The aim of the pilot is to identify problems that the potential participants might have in either their understanding or interpretation the questions asked (Kumar 2011:159). The outcome of the pilot requires that some questions be rephrased in the interview schedule, as demonstrated in Appendix C, as they may not be clear which makes it difficult for participants to answer accordingly. The benefits of this exercise include the rectification of the research guide, where without the amendments to the tool, erroneous data might be collected during final data collection.

Piloting allows the researcher to gain a reasonable idea of how long interviews are likely to take (David & Sutton 2004:88). This is important when arranging interviews as interviewees need to be informed of their availability beforehand. This further helps the interviewer plan and practice conducting interviews, considering and preparing for possible disturbances, lack of privacy and environmental interferences such as noises during interactions that could affect the recording process (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim 1999:129). During the piloting process, the researcher piloted two male participants and lost an opportunity to interview a female, furthermore with both males being middle-aged, neglected the youth factor in the interviews. The researcher had learnt to be more mindful of the participants that are recruited for the study with the hope of having a diverse sample to reflect different views. Audio recording was initially an issue for interviewees who hesitated to share information after they had been informed that taping would be used. This hesitation turned into outright disapproval in one case as the participant was afraid the information given would link directly back to him. In this situation, it was necessary for the researcher to build a bridge of trust between themselves and the participant. The researcher calmed the participant by explaining how highly privacy and confidentiality of data are valued in the university regulations. This information was greatly valuable in reassuring the participants of their privacy.

3.7.3. Final data collection

Data collection commenced from 10th of May 2018 and was completed on the 27th of July 2018. Interviews were conducted in English, Setswana and IsiZulu and participants were allowed to respond and interchange between either of the languages above. The researchers’ ability to converse and understand all three languages allows for easy clarification of questions where necessary during an interview. Translators are not used during the interview process. The interviews are conducted based on the availability of the participants and many participants had preferred to have the interviews on weekends, at a time that was convenient for them. With the permission of the participants, the interviews are conducted in their homes; this also assists in maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Interviews last an average of 40 minutes. The interviews are all
conducted in line with the discussion guide covering the following themes: community life and personal background, perceptions about foreigners, feelings regarding foreign-owned shops, the events of the January 2015 xenophobic attacks in Soweto, justification for violent attacks against foreigners, as well as opinions regarding the prevention of violence against foreigners.

The researcher recorded the interviews using a dictaphone and took observational notes using an observation protocol. The observation protocol for each interview is a single page separated into two columns for notes. The left side of the page is for descriptive notes. The descriptive notes include the physical setting, accounts or particular events and activities during the interviews (Creswell 2009:181-182). The descriptive notes are, more importantly, used to describe the non-verbal expressions and body language of the participants allowing the researcher to make sense of the emotions attached to the discussion. The right side of the page is used for the reflective notes which allows the researcher to express their impressions and prejudices immediately after each interview is conducted (Creswell 2009:182). The researcher has ensured additional recorders for back-up and ensured that the recording equipment was in proper working condition before interviewing participants.

The researcher has transcribed her own work; although time consuming, transcription gives an understanding of the themes that emerge from the data. Transcribing is a useful way for the researcher to ‘get close’ to the data; knowledge of the conversations prior to analysis is a great method of gaining insight (David & Sutton 2004:91). In instances where English is not used, the researcher has transcribed the audio and later translated it. Translation involves understanding the context and cultural background from which the original text comes and choosing the correct words to best convey the meaning of the message.

3.8. Data analysis

Data for the current study has been analysed using inductive content analysis, as themes emerged from the data (Creswell 2014). In line with the process involved in inductive content analysis (Creswell 2014), the researcher has familiarised herself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts before data analysis could commenced. The researcher has organised the data and chosen one transcript to begin analysis with. Subsequently, the researcher has demarcated the focus of the analysis by concentrating on the research questions that guide the analysis and has again, chosen one to begin with. Collectively, the research questions answer the main research question of the study. Following this, the researcher decided to begin with open coding, which involves selecting relevant segments of text that answer the research question and then assigning a label to each relevant segment. Axial coding follows open coding, where all the similar code labels are grouped together. The coding is instrumental in identifying themes that reflect the literature. Once the axial codes are grouped together, themes such as unemployment, crime, substance abuse,
feelings towards foreigners and feelings towards foreign-owned spaza shop can be used to contextualise the study. These themes are used to uncover the underlying issues which could have influenced the violence against foreign-owned spaza shops. Other themes such as the location of the foreigners during the attacks as well as the reasons for the attacks are used to establish why certain spaza shop owners, such as Somali traders, are attacked in comparison to other. Using the themes, the events of the 2015 attacks are presented chronologically to provide a coherent answer to the main research question.

3.9. Ethical considerations

The researcher has obtained ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg’s Ethics Committee to conduct the study. Through the submission of a detailed proposal, the researcher has been given permission to conduct interviews with participants. Please see attached an approval letter in Appendix D. Kumar (2011:245) argues that participants should be informed about their role in the study prior to participation. According to Neuman (2003: 245), deception occurs when the researcher intentionally misleads participants through written or verbal instructions, the actions of others, or aspects of the setting. For the purpose of this study, participants interested in participating in the study have been given a participant information sheet, as seen in Appendix E, which includes a truthful description of the study and its procedures. The researcher has not hidden their role as a researcher for purposes of facilitating data collection. Full identification of the researcher is provided; any risks or benefits associated with participation in the study are also outlined prior to participation. During the study process, no incentives have been provided to any of the participants.

Informed consent has been obtained from each participant recruited. The consent form contains background information on the study, the aim of the study, what is expected of participants, any risks or benefits for participating, as well as the duration of participation. The informed consent form, Appendix F, emphasises that participation is voluntary and that should any participant feel uncomfortable, they are free to withdraw from the study without consequence (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport 2011). Participation in this study is anonymous and confidential and the findings will not disclose the participant’s identity (McLaughlin 2007). There is a slight risk to anonymity due to the snowball sampling method that has been used, however, this is conducted with caution and no names will be linked to participants in the dissertation or any conference proceeding. The participants have been asked to sign a confidentiality agreement not to disclose one another’s names to anyone outside of the research. The data and consent forms are securely stored digitally with password access to prevent accidental disclosures which could result from insufficient diligence in handling and storing data (Abrahamson, 1983). The researcher will additionally not divulge what has been learned about others without their permission (Kent 2000). The results of the study will also be made available to participants if and when requested.
Discussing perceptions and experiences of violent xenophobic attacks could possibly be sensitive as participants might have suffered trauma as a result of witnessing violence against others. To ensure that no participant is traumatised by the study, the researcher has had a counsellor on standby. Fortunately, there have not been instances where a participant asked to speak to a counsellor even though they were aware of the service. The research findings have been submitted in the form of a report to the University of Johannesburg. The findings presented are entirely the views of the participants. The findings are reported in a correct and unbiased manner and attempts have been made to convey the information in clear and unambiguous terms (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 526).

3.10. Ensuring the trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness refers to the accuracy and consistency of qualitative research methods and findings (Creswell 2014). Four principles guide trustworthiness, namely, dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Fouché & Schurink 2011). Credibility refers to how well a study describes patterns of interaction (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011). To ensure the credibility of the study the researcher has frequently attended debriefing sessions with her supervisors and conducted member checking with the study participants to guarantee the accurate interpretation of their perceptions and experiences. Transferability involves how applicable the findings of the study are to other contexts, as qualitative research is not generalisable, attempts are made to describe the context in detail so that the findings could possibly be applied to a similar context instead (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011). To ensure transferability, the researcher has provided detailed descriptions of her participants and their context. Dependability refers to the consistency of data over time and to ensure this, the researcher has conducted an audit trail that includes her inclusion and exclusion criteria for the analysis that she has conducted (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011). Confirmability refers to the findings being confirmed by another researcher and to ensure this, the researcher has had an independent coder analyse her data (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011). The researcher and the independent coder have compared codes and reached a consensus to improve the trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.11. Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument whose subjectivity cannot be removed from the research process (Nieuwenhuis 2007). The researcher’s role as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell 2009:196). Being born and raised in Soweto, as well as having relatives that reside in the community of Dobsonville, the researcher is well acquainted with the value system and everyday life of the community. In line with Creswell (2014), the researcher acknowledges her subjectivity regarding her own values, biases and assumptions and efforts are made to minimise this
subjectivity. The researcher has identified potential problems beforehand, during the pilot study and addressed them immediately. In going through the audio recordings after the pilot interviews were conducted, the researcher has observed that she had been less than cautious about revealing some of her preconceived ideas. To minimise this bias in research, the researcher has learnt to withhold her thoughts by not completing sentences as those are her views and not necessarily those of the participant. By allowing the participants to complete their sentences, the researcher has gained new insights which she had not yet thought of. Similarly, great care has been taken to review, analyse and present the data with extreme caution and neutrality. Interview recordings have been played back multiple times to ensure accurate transcription, to ensure that bias is minimised throughout the interview and data analysis processes.

3.12. Conclusion

This chapter deals with the research methodology used to conduct this study. The ten semi-structured interviews that have been conducted with the residents of Dobsonville in their natural setting provide in-depth dialogue between the researcher and the interviewees. The gender and age spread of the participants allows for different perspectives on violence against foreign shop owners and provides valuable insights which the researcher had not yet contemplated. The participants’ biographical information and real-life accounts are treated with respect and confidentiality throughout the research study. The inductive content analysis applied in the study provides an opportunity for the dominant themes to emerge from the data, thus providing answers for the research questions. The findings emanating from this study are illustrated in the next chapter.
Chapter 4. Witnessing violence in Dobsonville: An attack on foreign-owned spaza shops

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter and the next one, the researcher discusses the findings of the study on xenophobic attacks against foreign spaza shop owners. The findings are drawn from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the study participants. The researcher also draws from her interaction with members of the Young Voice Academy who are the gate keepers to the community of Dobsonville for this particular study. The findings provide a context for the research study and give insights into the community life of those living in Dobsonville, Soweto. The chapter further explores the underlying beliefs the community holds toward foreigners in general and those who own spaza shops in Dobsonville. The chapter looks at the relationship the community has with foreign spaza shop owners, their disgruntlement against this group and the effects that foreign-owned spaza shops have had on the local economy.

While seeking to explore and determine the socio-economic interactions between black foreigners and the residents of Dobsonville, Soweto, the study investigates how these interactions have influenced the propensity for violence towards foreign spaza shop owners.

4.2. Life in Dobsonville: unemployment, crime and substance abuse

The discussion below outlines the perceptions of those who witnessed the 2015 attack on foreign spaza shop owners in Dobsonville. The researcher has invited the witnesses to provide narratives of their living experiences in Dobsonville. This includes providing an account of their surroundings, livelihoods and overall living conditions. The idea is to assess whether the study participants’ socio-economic conditions reflect those of communities where xenophobic attacks typically occur, as outlined by Nieftagodien (2008). Drawing from the events before and after the 2008 attacks in Alexandra, Nieftagodien (2008) argues that xenophobic attacks consistently occurred in areas that were characterised by poverty and despair. It was important for the researcher to establish the overall milieu of the community and deduce whether the socio-economic circumstances of those residing in Dobsonville may have had an impact on the community’s decision to attack foreign spaza shop owners.
The findings demonstrate that the participants are well acquainted with the value systems as well as the societal issues that are currently facing the community. Most of the witnesses indicate that they have resided in Dobsonville for the duration of their lives, with the majority stating that they were born in the community. The community provides a mixed review of the township, mirroring the contradictions that are characteristic of life in South Africa; where the good and the bad co-exist. The findings demonstrate that the community has been provided with many amenities since the advent of the country’s democratic state. However, even with these improvements, the community navigates various social problems, such as crime, unemployment and substance abuse. These problems were clearly articulated by a young man, who details the difficulties he and his peers are facing. In his words:

*We are facing many things especially when you just finished school, the challenges of unemployment, crime and substance abuse is rampant (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).*

The participants acknowledge that the community has changed for the better, enjoying many infrastructural developments such as tarred streets, Wi-Fi and electricity. This is demonstrated in Thabiso’s response and his appreciation for infrastructure and service delivery improvements over the years he has lived in Dobsonville. He is acutely aware that the amenities that are enjoyed by his community are not often available in other townships. His eyes widen with every word spoken, expressing a sense of pride about his community:

*Yes, there is a vibe, that’s why if you look around people are flocking to Dobsonville, everything that we need is close to us, transport, parks, community halls, library and everything is close to us (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).*

Sandile agrees with him, reflecting on the time he was in school and comparing it to the changes that he currently sees in the community. He strongly believes that there are many self-development facilities available for the community to use, this includes the provision of information through various modes:

*We have schools, I see that most of the primary and secondary schools are now big unlike the time when we were still at school where by they were providing food, but it was not as healthy as the one that they serve now. Now there is a lot of research going on, there are Wi-Fi hotspots, there is a mall as well. There is a lot of change in a positive manner, there are many opportunities just that it depends on an individual (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).*

Tshepo agrees with Sandile, indicating that access to information and communication technology have benefitted the community. He states:

*It has become better because now there is free Wi-Fi and places like the community centre that helps people (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).*
Linda also agrees with him, indicating that they previously used gravel roads. In his perspective these changes were mainly cosmetic and not necessarily behavioural. In his words:

_Eh well in terms of; I don't know maybe I can speak about infrastructure changes that are like taking place. Ah we now have I don't know, streets, proper streets_ (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Although the majority of those interviewed indicate that life in the community has changed in a positive fashion, a few participants indicate that life in Dobsonville has not improved. Unathi is distressed about the lack of progress, particularly among the youth. She further indicates that some, like herself, are still living in poverty:

_I can say that there are no progresses that I can say they are much...or for which are developing the youth, but I can say we live the life that we have been living now, like we have been raised from that life. Life in Dobsonville is just low class I can say that, there is no progress at all_ (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

Her view is shared by Keamogetswe who indicates that she would feel more comfortable residing in a different community. There are certain activities in the community she does not agree with, however, it is not clear which those are. She is certain that Dobsonville has not changed for the better.

_Eish! Sometimes things are complicated and just wish I could go and live somewhere because at times things that happen here are not alright. There is no change_ (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Consistent with the national trend of unemployment, the community is faced with joblessness. One participant estimates the unemployment rate in the community at 80%. Linda’s evaluation, although not accurate, gives an indication of the magnitude of the problem in the community.

_There is plenty of unemployment. 80% of the people that stay here are unemployed_ (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Linda’s theory seems to reflect the study’s findings as unemployment is problematic for all the witnesses, with most of them relying solely on social grants and others on small-scale entrepreneurship to cover their living expenses. Keamogetswe, a mother of 3, relates her experience with joblessness and financial insecurity. She reflects on her experience of surviving on government support:

_I don't want to lie, I don't have money, I want to do something, but I don't have the money to do what I want to do. So, we just survive on grant money to be honest and that money is_
so small, when it comes, the children have to eat, they have to pay school fees and all that stuff (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

This view is supported by Ompi, who details the struggles of the youth and their unemployment. However, his observation is not limited to the youth as he also highlights the plight of unemployment among those who are middle aged. He explains that those in older age groups have little support from the government and their chances of employment are diminished by their age. According to him:

You know there is a lot that this community needs first especially when we look at the environment, we need a healthy environment, many youths are unemployed, they are not working and even the grannies they are doing nothing and maybe it’s because of the age. Let me talk about the youth, there is something very interesting happening Boitshoko. We have 3 kinds of groups of people that are living in Dobsonville, especially the ones that after the age of 18 the youth and this group 18 – 25, other are from school and are starting to be men at home, these are the people that are struggling with jobs because after matric that’s when most of them sit at home especially students believe me. Now there is another group from 36 – 59 that’s another group, every time I always say, even the government they marginalise these people because after you turn 36 years and if you are not working you will never get any work because of age and because when they advertise vacancies’ they say 18 – 36 and what about 36 – 59, where are they going to get jobs (Ompi, a 53-year-old male).

Some study participants, although unemployed, creatively use entrepreneurship to earn a living. This involves selling small household goods and commodities to learners and the elderly in and around the community. Sandile shares his experience:

Well life has changed, as you grow up you come across difficulties but those particular difficulties, they are the ones which guide us and make us strong. I am currently unemployed. Usually every end of the month from the 1st to the 7th I sell yogurts and eggs to those people who have got their grant, so I do it twice, I start at Snake Park for 3 days and after those 3 days I come to Dobsonville (Sandile, 27-year-old male).

The participants attribute the high levels of unemployment to the lack of motivation among the youth, the absence of career development or skills development programmes in the community. The lack of funding for higher education is also noted as a barrier to employment opportunities. The findings demonstrate that there is a willingness among the participants to study and acquire skills that would make them employable. This ambition and drive, it seems, is a hollow dream, as they feel that it is nearly impossible to raise funds for education.
Unemployment rate I could say it's too much… Most of us in the community we are so young and we are unemployed, there are no supportive programmes for the youth to showcase their experiences, so yes, the unemployment rate is too high in the community (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Keamogetswe agrees with this, noting that the youth were capable and willing to work; however, the economy is failing to provide these opportunities. This reflects the South African economy, which has for a long-time experienced youth unemployment at 52% (Anwar 2017). Her view mirrors that of Ompi, who believes that opportunities for employment are lower as one gets older.

It’s worse, I don’t know if its laziness and we don’t want to work or what, but it’s not about laziness its just that there are no jobs and the high rate keeps going up, people get retrenched from work, families move and shops are getting closed and things like that and some shops they don’t want people who are over 25 to come and work there (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Tshepo further expresses that finding employment without having higher education was almost impossible as there are very few opportunities for those without formal qualifications. According to him, many individuals in Dobsonville have matric certificates but are unable to further their studies once they had completed their secondary schooling. This, he believes, has been the cause of idleness in the community.

I would say it’s too high because many people who have finished school can't further their studies, so they end up unemployed and here in Dobsonville there are too many unemployed people, it’s hard to find a job (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

Another participant, who had recently completed his secondary schooling, agrees. Drawing from his own experience, he has this to say:

Unemployment rate is too high in the community because our youth most of them they are not doing anything. Maybe it’s the finance they don’t have money to further their studies, I don’t know but the unemployment is too much (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).

In comparison, participants such as Unathi convey that the high levels of unemployment among the youth are due to the inability to raise funds to start small businesses, such as spaza shops. In frustration, she refers to not qualifying for a loan to finance her business ideas. In her words:

The unemployment rate in Dobsonville, it's too much for example I can say me…I can't open a Spaza shop, I don't have an income and even if I can say I can go to the bank tomorrow they will say I don't qualify, so we… I can say here in Dobsonville we are
oppressed. We don’t have capital and there is no way that you can start a business without capital, there is no other ways (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

Thabiso makes particular reference to projects which have been implemented in the community to provide short term employment opportunities. Thabiso acknowledges that the community programmes have, to a certain extent, assisted the members of the community.

You know at first there were many people who were not working in Dobsonville and then there was a project here in Dobsonville I think in 2015 and that’s the project that helped curb unemployment because many people are working there, there are skilled and unskilled workers and semi-skilled and some are taught there how to do the job and then they get certificates Out of 100 I would say 60 are employed and 40 are unemployed. Right now, I survive on social grant (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

However, Unathi senses that the project ‘unfairly’ benefits individuals who do not reside in Dobsonville. She believes that there is some form of political foul play in the allocation of jobs within the ward, often benefitting those residing in other townships located close to Dobsonville.

The unemployment rate is too high, very high, of which we have people with matric certificates, we have people who studied even further but still we see people…I feel like we are being oppressed. There are no other chances even if there is a campaign you would see people from White City, Meadowlands working in our ward here in Dobsonville, so I can say that our employment is being oppressed (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

The above stories provided by the witnesses, demonstrate the joblessness facing the majority of the individuals residing in Dobsonville. Through the provision of public amenities and services the community has received some level of privilege. However, these facilities although enjoyed by many, have not tackled the problem of unemployment in the community. To a certain extent, unemployment and poverty alone could not be the driving force behind the 2015 attacks. From their accounts, the community is also currently facing a drug problem. The findings demonstrate, to a certain extent, that unemployment and drugs are the cause of most of the crime in the community, as most of the participants mention that petty crime and burglary are rampant.

I feel honoured to be part of Dobsonville residents, it’s nice, it’s a very good community but then the only problem that we are facing is that there are too many people who are smoking drugs. I can say that crime is everywhere and there are so many people who are unemployed as you can see, some they sit in the corner there and smoke weed (Sandile, 27-year-old male).
This view is also shared by another participant, who concludes that goods retrieved from burglary are used to fund drug addiction, considering that most of the community is unemployed. He has this to say:

Yes, there is too much crime. It is, there are nyaope\(^5\) boys so they break into people’s houses (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

Inferring from the narratives, some participants demonstrate a nonchalant attitude towards the issue of crime. There is a participant, Linda, who speaks nonchalance about murder, as if implying it to be a norm in the community. He casually expresses his view:

Yeah, couple of murders here and there (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Agreeing with Thabiso, Ikaneng, an 18-year-old male, expresses that Dobsonville could not be the exception in a national standard, stating “Yes, not really but there is no township without crime.” Likewise, Sandile agrees with this but in his view, unemployment is the root cause of these ills. In his view, misdirected energy emanating from unemployment often results in crime and substance abuse. In his words:

I can say that crime is everywhere and there are so many people who are unemployed as you can see, some they sit in the corner there and smoke weed, sometimes we try finding jobs, we send CV’s via emails as you can see there is Wi-Fi here we try but it’s bad because some people commit crime because of unemployment (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Keamogetswe reminisces to a time when the township was safer. She recounts her memories:

When we were growing up, we could walk freely in Dobsonville with no worry even at night you could just walk with your phone and nothing would happen but now it’s scary, we are scared to walk at night, it’s no longer safe (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

It appears that residents have chosen to turn a blind eye to the problem despite knowing who the drug suppliers are. It is not certain why the community has decided to stay mum on the problem. It could be assumed are they afraid of being targeted by drug dealers or they are simply overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of the problem. This apathy towards the drug problem in the community could also point to a possible law-enforcement problem; perhaps the community has lost trust in the police.

\(^5\) Nyaope (also known as whoonga or wunga) is a highly addictive street drug unique to South Africa (Matuntuta 2014). Nyaope is a cocktail of illegal drugs with both heroin and dagga as the main ingredients, while other ingredients in the cocktail vary by location include, but are not limited to, anti-retroviral drugs, milk powder, rat poison, bicarbonate of soda and pool cleaner.
Yes, of which I can say that its either the people are ignorant, or they are just scared of what the people are doing, we have seen our young children getting into drugs and there is nothing that the community is doing even if they know who is supplying them with that nyaope or whatever drug they are selling. They just take a step back especially if it’s not their child that’s doing the drugs they don’t care (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

4.3. Foreigners are ‘stealing’ opportunities from South Africans

The study participants accept that foreigners are permitted to reside and work in South Africa. However, it seems that this acceptance is conditional for others who believe that foreigners should be allowed in the country if they have the required legal documentation. Linda indicates that foreigners should only be allowed in the country on the basis that they are legally in the country. This is his response:

*I think that foreigners are welcome in South Africa if they are, if they come and live here legally because if you come here illegally, I think that you pose a lot of threats to the country* (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

This conditional acceptance is reflected in Thabiso’s views linked to South Africa’s political history. On that basis, South Africa should accommodate foreign nationals as they had accommodated exiled South Africans during apartheid. In his view:

*I don’t have a problem with the foreigners, I feel like they are my brothers from another mother, even our history tells us that during apartheid South Africa was not a home to many people, we used neighbouring countries as our homes* (Thabiso, a 30-year-old male).

Unathi, on the other end asserts that foreigners cannot be judged as a collective but rather along nationality lines. She refers to Nigerians as foreigners responsible for drug trafficking, thus excluding other foreigners’ involvement in illicit activities. According to her:

*You know we can’t judge them individually; they are here for different purposes. I hear people crying about Nigerian people, oh well I have a problem with them because they bring drugs in our country* (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

This view of different foreigners receiving different treatment from South Africans based on their nationalities has also been noted in an article by Landau (2013), demonstrating that foreigners coming from Botswana are integrated more easily into the everyday day lives of Tswana speaking people of the North West. This trend is also seen with Shangaan speaking foreigners from Mozambique living in Mpumalanga province (Landau 2013). Some participants such as
Keamogetswe indicate that foreigners migrate to South Africa for economic reasons; she is acutely aware that foreigners are often ill-treated by other South Africans. She is particularly opposed to the use of derogatory terms such as *Makwerekwere* to describe black foreigners.

> It is worse actually because the children they put themselves in trouble, they came here thinking that in south Africa there are job opportunities and they came here to work and they are not wanted here, they are called names like ‘Makwerekwere’ and things like that so yes, it’s not nice at all (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

A considerable number of participants concede that foreigners journeyed to South Africa for better living conditions and to escape political conflict. They believe that foreigners should be allowed to work and earn a living in South Africa. The participants admire the work ethic of foreign nationals, particularly their drive to succeed in a foreign country. One participant, Sandile, acknowledges the valuable skills that foreigners bring into the country. According to him:

> We are all Africans we must be united, I don’t have a problem with them and sometimes they teach us their skills, they teach us life, so can you imagine someone coming here all the way from Zimbabwe with no family and nothing but they are able to start life afresh, rent a shack and pay that R300 a month and work and they are not choosy when it comes to jobs whether its construction, retail or office work as long as they can get money to be able to support their family back home (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Similarly, another participant reflects on the deprived economic factors which have forced black foreigners to migrate to South Africa. He explains:

> They are doing this for living right, so I think they are right which means in their countries maybe they were suffering and so they saw South Africa as the best country (Ikaneng, an 18-year-old male).

This view is echoed by Keamogetswe, who states:

> I don’t see that as a problem because they came here to work and make a living (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

The majority of the participants blame foreigners for unemployment among South Africans. This finding is reflected in an article written by Solomon & Kosaka (2013), who look at the causes of xenophobia in South Africa and mention that the treatment given to foreigners is not uniform and the acceptance of foreigners is tilted towards those who are seen to provide a positive economic contribution. Sandile’s opinions reflect the scapegoating process as described by Harris (2001),
where foreigners symbolise dispossession, unemployment and scarcity. In his view, foreigners are encroaching on his opportunity for employment. Yet, he also believes that foreigners are developing the economy and is open to learning about their culture. He explains his opinion:

Oh Eish, somewhere somehow I feel that they are just too much, sometimes they limit our chances of getting jobs but also I feel that its fine that they are here, they are here to support South Africa so that our economy can grow and so that we can also visit their countries and we learn a lot from them about their culture, what they eat, how they live and their history as well (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Pule shares the same sentiments, believing that not only are black foreigners taking employment or other opportunities from South Africans, but believes that they receive these opportunities through the use of illicit activities. He states:

Eish...about that I don't feel good because they come here and take opportunities that are meant for us because they pay bribe, it's easy for them to take out money so that they can get jobs and stuff like that (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Various scholars (Gqola 2008; Harris 2002; Mngxitama 2008; Peberdy 2009) argue that current displays of xenophobia are associated with the ramifications of a long and brutal history characterised by racial oppression and violence against black South Africans. The effects of this have been so deeply entrenched in South African society that the biases that were learnt then are still being maintained even after the fall of the apartheid state. This is demonstrated in the study findings, where white and Chinese foreigners in comparison to their African counterparts are seen to contribute positively to the economy. The study participants indicate that white foreigners provide opportunities for employment. This reflects the findings by Solomon and Kosaka (2013), demonstrating that xenophobic attitudes are directed towards those who are seen to take away jobs and particularly towards Africans coming from poorer African countries. When asked about his view, a participant has this to say:

White foreigners are ok because they bring us opportunities. Most of them, they are rich and they build big companies and they hire a lot of people (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Thabiso, in comparison, is more sceptical of Caucasian foreigners, believing them to have a strong influence on the country’s political affairs. He holds very strong views on South Africa’s policies being designed for the benefit of the country’s white populace at the expense of blacks.

I mean that they are also here to make a living; maybe where they come from there is no freedom as we have here, most of them especially whites they are here for investment and investing makes the economy to grow. Those are the ones that I have a problem with and you know why I have a problem with them, it's because they have too much influence in the
government because whenever the government is setting their policies it looks at how it will suit these white people more than us who live in the country, you understand what I mean? (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male)

One participant is fond of the lower prices of goods sold by the Chinese. They rely on Chinese merchandise based on their more affordable price point. In her experience:

For me I can say that if you can go to a Chinese shop and go to Mr Price, they are making something out of our living situation, I can get a jean at a Chinese shop for R60 of which I can’t afford that one for R120 at Mr Price. They are making life easier for those people who don’t as earn much as those that can go to Mr Price (Unathi, 31-year-old female).

This view is shared by another participant, who agrees. In his view:

The Chinese they help us because when you go to their malls, we get things cheaper, without them there is nothing we can afford (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

One participant has noticed that Chinese nationals are neither involved nor interested in South African politics, noting that they are solely interested in making financial gains. In his view, this has often resulted in Chinese foreign nationals purposely remaining outside the borders of social-integration.

Their products and they don’t interfere with what’s happening in South Africa, that’s why you will never find any Chinese in any protests, whatever is happening they don’t get involved, they are here for business (Thabiso, 31-year-old male).

The community of Dobsonville is currently struggling with issues of unemployment, crime and substance abuse. The issues of unemployment identified in these findings reflect the underlying conditions that contribute to tensions between South Africans and foreign nationals. This socio-economic challenge, including poverty, has been identified as one of the causes for the 2008 xenophobic attacks. Researchers, such as Nieftagodien (2008), note that these attacks normally occur in impoverished communities struggling with poverty and poor service delivery. Accordingly, these types of conditions as demonstrated in this study, are believed to contribute to sentiments of deprivation and resentment towards foreigners (Chandia & Hart 2016; Ndinda & Ndhlovu 2016).

4.4. Foreign-owned spaza shops do not belong in Soweto

The study has discovered that there is a general sentiment among the participants that foreign shop owners are armed and dangerous. Sandile’s view is informed by his knowledge of conflict in other African states. He initially thought that foreign spaza shop owners would pose a security risk to the community. He explains:
At first, I thought they are here because they are on a mission judging from what happening in their countries, in some there are terrorist attacks. I thought they will bomb attack us as well, I thought they will kidnap our kids and do human trafficking and all these bad things (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Although initially suspicious, Sandile has adopted an open mind and later learned that he shares many similarities with black foreigners. He continues:

…but as I got used to them I realised that they are also human beings and I am a very inquisitive person so as I was busy engaging them they were telling me that its better here than where they are coming from and most of them had to rob ships to make a living and they were getting killed so they had to run away and come this side to make a living so that they can be able to send money back home (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

However, one participant still holds tightly to his beliefs and is similarly suspicious of foreign spaza shop owners. He strongly believes that black foreigners have dangerous ammunition hidden within their places of businesses or are plotting terrorist attacks against the community. He lives in fear of a bomb detonation. He makes reference to the armed conflicts affecting some African countries, warning that foreign shop owners are trained rebels from those regions. In his view, foreign shop owners are seen as a security threat to the community. He worriedly explains:

We don’t know what’s happening because there are Pakistan’s and also these people are also fighting. So we don’t know under the foundations of the spaza shops, is there any bomb or whatever so that any day when it might get very ugly they would just press their thing because they can even go out at night …You see something of that nature, so it doesn’t help us, at least they should be limited yeah they should be limited and our community will be much safer, because we are not safe, we can outside how these people are living .And then they shoot, they don’t play, if it could go wrong her on the township, do you know that there are few of them but they can kill and finish off everyone here. That’s the bad danger part of them (Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male).

Drawing from his own experience, one participant recalls witnessing the 2015 violent attacks against foreigners. He saw foreign shop owners with guns. In his account, foreign spaza shop owners had guns to defend themselves against attackers. In his words:

They also do have guns. Ok, but when I saw that someone is going to get hurt, I would just distance myself because the Pakistan’s they also do have guns (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Thabiso is sceptical about the produce sold by foreign spaza shop owners. He asserts that they sell products that are unknown to the community which pose a risk to the health of the community. This finding mirrors the motivation behind the recent Soweto looting of foreign spaza shops in August of
2018. There was widespread content on social media suggesting that household items sold by foreign spaza shop owners were counterfeit and had expired (Simelane 2018). Foreign spaza shop owners were accused of opening food items such as mealie meal, planting them with poison and then sealing them again (Simelane 2018). From his experience, Thabiso says:

_There is nothing positive I can say about them, nothing, even their bread that they are selling is not of good quality, the slices are thin, I like Albany so when I go buy from them I just buy Albany bread and the cold drinks that they sell we don’t even know where they are getting them they are too acidic Black people have always bought their stock at Albany but them they came with many different things that we don’t know and they are introducing them to us and as a result people get sick and end up at Bara hospital and on the other side other businesses have fallen (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male)._ 

This perspective of foreigners selling counterfeit goods is also shared by Ngcobo, who has voiced his opinion on the foreigners not only destroying the livelihoods of local spaza shops but selling counterfeit goods at a cheaper price.

_Because other people they can’t anymore open a shop because already there is a cheaper somebody there you see and not knowing that things that they selling are not good are not healthy (Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male)._ 

Anti-foreigner violence in Soweto has recently flared up sporadically against a background of high unemployment, with foreign nationals accused of crime and taking jobs from locals (Shange & Gous 2018). Foreign-owned spaza shops have been an issue of contention among community members and local business owners in Soweto, with many of the participants claiming that foreign-owned spaza shops have wiped out shops run by locals. This anti-foreigner sentiment is shared by Keamogetswe who concedes that Soweto is saturated with foreign-owned shops. She further expresses that she would like to open her own shop but lacked the financial means. According to her:

_It’s not ok because even us we want to open the spaza shops, but we don’t have start-up money to open them (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female)._ 

Her views are shared by Thabiso, who feels that there should be a quota on the number of foreign-owned spaza shops in Soweto. He further mentions that foreign-owned spaza shops are highly competitive and are stealing his customers through emulation. This finding reflects those in Charman et al. (2012) who studied spaza shops in Delft South. The findings from the study show that foreign run shops have purposely positioned themselves to compete directly with local shop owners. This often works to the disadvantage of the local shop owner as foreigners offer customers lower prices on the same goods. He explains:
It needs to balance, not this corner to corner, everywhere its Makula, what kind of thing is that, everywhere it’s them; at least 3 will be fine so that we can also be able to open our spazas as well. If I get a stand to sell there and when they pass, they see that ok this is where kids make their stop to buy nice things and they also go and do the same thing, you understand what I am saying (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

This perspective is shared by Ngcobo, who expresses that foreign spaza shops are dominating the township economy. He suggests a limit on the number of shops that should be allowed to operate in Dobsonville and other townships in Soweto. He feels that this is at the expense of the country as a whole, believing that the income generated from spaza shops is sent to other countries, such as Zimbabwe. He elaborates:

They should be cut down and then their businesses should not be at every street, nowadays everyday there is a new spaza shop of foreigners. No, it’s wrong. Because other people they can’t anymore open a shop because already there is a cheaper somebody there you see and not knowing that things that they selling are not good are not healthy. You see something like that. So, like I don’t know my sister I don’t know. You see these spaza shops man Eish! [exasperated] no, no, no they are lots and when you get at Zola they are there, when you get at Dobsonville they are there You get to Braamfischer they are there; you go so when you look into things they took Mzansi’s money, taking it away, one day we will end up without money. Now it will require us to go to Zimbabwe to look for work (Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male).

Sandile similarly proposes the formalisation of the spaza shop industry, suggesting that foreign-owned spaza shops should be taxed. The implication is that only under these conditions should foreign-owned spaza shops be allowed to operate in Soweto. Once taxed, the funds collected would be used for community development. He suggests the following:

Yes, as long as the government can intervene and make them pay minimum tax so that they can better the community (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

One participant, Tshepo, finds it admirable that foreign-owned spaza shop owners had exploited a gap in the South African spaza shop market. However, in his response, there seemed to be blatant sense of anger toward foreign shop owners, citing their “arrogance” as a problem. He narrates:

Yes, because people didn’t see the need to open the shops but them, they saw an opportunity to do business and they also saw the need of having shops nearby. There is

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8 Mzansi means “south” when translated from IsiXhosa but in this context and in urban slang it is used to refer to South Africa as a whole.
nothing besides their attitude because now they think they are almighty since they settled in (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

The above stories demonstrate that the majority of black foreigners entering South Africa rely on informal businesses to create a livelihood (Hungwe 2012). The findings from this study demonstrate that in some instances this has come at the expense of local businesses, such as *spaza* shops, operating in townships such as Dobsonville. This competition from ‘outside’ sources has built resentment among those residing in the community, which manifests as xenophobic attacks. A new finding this study has uncovered is the possession of weapons among foreign *spaza* shop owners. The study participants indicate that foreign *spaza* shops pose a danger to the community. This danger is linked to foreign *spaza* shop owners having access to weapons such as guns as well as counterfeit goods which are sold to the community.

The study findings demonstrate that black foreigners in comparison to others are treated with suspicion. These feelings are driven by a myriad of assumptions, particularly those involving foreigners stealing opportunities from South Africans. The findings demonstrate that there is a perception among the participants that black foreigners utilise illegal documents and labour practises which place them at an unfair advantage for employment. These heightened feelings of injustice can be seen as a contributing factor for the outbreak of violence in January 2015.

4.5. Foreign-owned *spaza* shops are destroying the township economy

All the participants, apart from one, note that local *spaza* shops are struggling to compete with foreign-owned *spaza* shops. The basic findings reveal that foreign run shops are better stocked and offered the consumer comparatively lower prices on most goods sold. One particular participant believes that local *spaza* shops are currently stuck in a rut and failing to be innovative. He believes that a lot would be gained if local shop owners adopted the business models used by foreign shop owners.

Yes, I do think there is struggling I think that we can learn a lot from the way that people from other countries do business… So, they are reluctant to uh adopt uh new ways of doing business (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Many of the study participants mention the lower food prices of foreign-owned *spaza* shops. The finding suggests that South Africans are not business savvy in comparison to foreigners. This view is also shared by Tshepo, who attributes the failure of local *spaza* shop owners to their inflated prices in comparison to the foreign-owned shops. He narrates:
They are struggling because they want more profit and unlike the Pakistan’s, the Pakistan’s they have people that deliver for them and they order cheap and their prices are reasonable. Some of these shops they sell a 2 litre of coke for R20 whereas the Pakistan sells for R18 and so you see they are cheap. So, it’s not like they are struggling, they are doing it themselves (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

One participant indicates that foreign spaza shop owners have prices which rival major retail stores. She asserts:

They always sell at a cheaper price, if you go to Shoprite and you find that mealie-meal is R60 but at the Spaza shop maybe it will be R55 (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Foreign spaza shops are a favourite for locals, such as Sandile, who considers their lower prices more affordable. He explains:

Yes, too much because they sell their products cheaper than other people and the other thing, as I was saying they can give you stuff on credit, you find that almost 20 houses are owing that Spaza shop, so yes, they do make a difference. Us south Africans we are South Africans, we always complain, we complain about lame things for example south African owned Spaza shops are more expensive sometimes say you are short by R2 they will never give you what you want on credit, but the Somalia’s will give you when you are R2 short (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

He further comments on the way in which foreign spaza shop owners often help him and his family get by every month. Foreign spaza shop owners located in the community are known to give his family and other families goods on credit. The elderly benefit substantially from the credit facilities. He continues:

And they are helping us too much because say we are 5 in the house and R1500 grant money is not enough and we are all not working we are depending on that grant money, they are able to give our grandmothers stuff on credit, they go there and get bread, sugar and mealie meal and soap on credit and they won’t pester them for payment (Sandile, 27-year-old male).

Unathi acknowledges that the local spaza shops she knows of have all closed apart from one. However, she does not blame this on the presence of foreign-owned spaza shops but rather on the inefficiency of locals in maintaining their food supply.

She is the only one competing with the Pakistan’s because there are no other shops; I would be lying if I say there are there. They all went down but I can’t say that they went down because of the Somalis. you would go and buy and find there is no bread today, there is no
sugar, there is no what but those Pakistan’s they come here in Dobsonville and they saved us, if there were no Pakistan’s we would be buying at Shoprite (Unathi, 31-year-old female).

Similarly, Keamogetswe is frustrated by the lack of produce in locally owned shops which often drives her to purchase from foreign-owned spaza shops instead of local shops. According to her:

I don’t think they are struggling because we also buy from them so we go to the Makula’s when you find that the thing that you are looking for is not there in the other Spaza shop and right now these shops are struggling already because when you go there looking for something that something is not there, there are always out of stock and the advantage about Makula is that they stock in bulk, that is why you get everything that you want in the Makula shops (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Thabiso is particularly saddened by the closure of local spaza shops, particularly those that were previously lucrative. He blames the demise of these local shops on the presence of foreign spaza shops in the community. He relates his observations:

There is a spaza down there owned by Mr Majola, kit was a huge spaza up until Makula opened their just down the road and there was nothing he could do and then later on he died (Thabiso, 31-year-old male).

He further laments the fact that foreign shop owners are in romantic relationships with South African women. He described the features of the children in the community, complaining that their hair texture is different to that of black South Africans. He reports:

My sister its Makula everywhere, our kids they know that there is a ‘my friend’8 over there, our kids know how to speak in English now because they have to speak to them and it’s so painful because even our sister are now dating them and at the end of the day we have nephews with S-Curl9 (Thabiso, 31-year-old male)

When asked about the competitive edge that foreign-owned spaza shops had over South Africans, the participants indicate that Somali and other foreign shop owners have social networks that allow them to purchase goods in bulk which provides them with an economical trade model. This finding is reflected in a study conducted by Liedeman (2013) who found that foreign-run spaza shops rely on clan-based social networks which provide a more competitive business model. The model facilitates group purchasing which reduces costs and secures discounts.

8 A term used by black South Africans to refer to foreigners who sell goods at spaza shops.
9 An S-Curl is a hairstyle designed to loosen the natural hair texture of people of African descent using relaxers containing lye.
Unathi is particularly moved by the unity among foreign-owned spaza shops. She feels that they have a ‘brotherly’ love for each other not seen among South Africans. She particularly feels that they support each other financially and ensure that clan members are never left wanting.

*We South Africans we are not working hand in hand like the Pakistan’s are doing. I would say they boost each other for them to grow. Say you are my brother and I am financially stable I would say come open a shop here, I have this, I have that but us as blacks we tend to step back from each other … we are not united at all, if one of us is suffering we will exclude ourselves and not help the person, we as the unemployed we feel oppressed* (Unathi, 31-year-old female).

Another witness agrees with her. He has this to say:

*I think that competitive advantage that they have is that they are united* (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Foreign-owned spaza shops are also favoured for their locality. The participants indicate that the spaza shops are conveniently located, in comparison to other stores which are hard to access without the use of public transportation. This is a favourite among participants such as Ikangeng, who reports:

*Because people are now buying from them, had it not been for them we would be buying from the Caltex garage* (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).

This is also supported by Pule, who contradictorily welcomes their presence in the community even though he feels that foreigners are taking opportunities from South Africans. According to him:

*I think it’s best for them to come and sell in South Africa because here in our community we can’t got to the mall, we can’t travel all the way to the mall to buy bread while the foreigners are near us* (Pule, a 19-year-old male).

Findings indicate that foreign-owned spaza shops are generating income for locals. Some locals are renting out a space to foreigners on their properties which is providing an income. This is a positive aspect as it is the only income for some, particularly for the unemployed. One participant is positive about it, she has this to say:

*For us it’s a blessing, from here in the corner there is this lady who has rented her house to the Pakistan’s, she is old now but not that old but there is no way she could get a job as you know now that the latest is 35 years and they are renting there and there is nothing wrong, she is making an income and she can support her children with the money she is making by renting out her house* (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).
Another participant agrees. In her words:

_They are helping the older people; who don’t have grandchildren whom they can send to the shops because they can’t walk to the shops, so yes they are of great help these Spaza shops and the people that are renting them out they are making a living because there are no jobs and there is no money and they have family needs as well so I don’t see any problem because everyone does what they want with their property_ (Keamogetswe, 37-year-old female).

From the stories above it seems that locals are benefitting greatly from the presence of foreign-owned _spaza_ shops in the community. The _spaza_ shops offer convenience and provide savings for customers as well as credit for needy households. However, even with these advantages there is contention over foreigners operating in Soweto. The witnesses believe that foreign-owned _spaza_ shops are the reason for the demise of local _spaza_ shops. Some witnesses, however, acknowledge that it is not solely the fault of foreign-owned shops as many locals have failed to innovate and keep stock levels up.

### 4.6. Conclusion

The findings from this chapter demonstrate that the participants of the study are well acquainted with the community life in Dobsonville. The community life of the participants continues to improve with the provision of infrastructure developments and information technology. Although the surroundings have changed, the residents are still subjected to unemployment and inequality, with all the participants in the study indicating that they are currently unemployed. The unemployment rate in the community is very high, with the participants attributing the high levels of unemployment to the lack of motivation among the youth and the absence of career or skills development programmes in the community. All the study participants indicate high levels of crime in the community. However, although acknowledging that crime is a problem in the community, some participants demonstrate indifference towards the issue.

Views on foreigners living and working in South Africa are mixed although most of the participants have a positive outlook on this, indicating that foreigners are welcome in South Africa, yet some are apprehensive. Chinese and European foreigners are held in high esteem while African foreigners are treated with disdain. However, when asked if foreign-owned _spaza_ shops should be permitted to operate in the township the views are mostly negative. The participants indicate that the presence of foreign-owned _spaza_ shops is preventing them from opening their own shops and has resulted in many local _spaza_ shops closing. Foreign-owned shop owners are accused of selling counterfeit goods as a means of keeping their prices low. Interestingly enough, although detesting the economic success of foreign-owned _spazas_, the residents appreciate their lending services, convenience and pricing. The foreign-owned _spaza_ shops often sell goods on credit to the residents, which is to their
benefit. The participants further admire the business acumen that many foreign spaza shop owners possess, attributing their success to unity and drive. These findings demonstrate that the witnesses are only in support of foreign shop owners if it benefits them. Drawing from the findings, it is evident there is resentment towards foreigners who are economically successful. These findings could imply that the violence during the 2015 attacks could have resulted from the underlying frustration and hostility against foreigners or it could have been a result of criminality. Chapter Five continues to discuss the findings and focusses specifically on the research questions this study aims to address.
Chapter 5. Witnesses speak up: violence against foreign spaza shop owners

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the research questions asked in Chapter One will be answered, namely: What do Soweto residents perceive to be the cause for the attacks against foreign spaza shop owners? What reasons do the residents provide when explaining why certain foreigners such as Somali shop owners are targeted more than others? What do Soweto residents perceive to be the possible solutions for attacks against foreign shop owners? To answer these questions, the researcher uses the information from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the residents of Dobsonville who witnessed the attacks and combines these with the findings of various reports and articles analysed in the literature review of the study. In this chapter participants are also referred to as witnesses.

This chapter explores the perceptions of Soweto residents about the violent attacks against foreign spaza shop owners in 2015. Drawing from the findings of the interviews conducted, the researcher sets the scene of the events of January 2015, by illustrating the mood in the community. The researcher draws on the findings as well as the theories outlined in Chapter Two to describe the events that took place in Dobsonville in 2015 to present the underlying motives and reasons for xenophobic attacks against foreign spaza shop owners in the community. The chapter then continues to provide details on the events that triggered the attacks; the perpetrators, the targets and the reasons why certain foreigners, such as Somali shop owners, were targeted whilst others were not. Then finally, the chapter concludes by providing the participants’ views regarding violent attacks against foreign shop owners and presents the possible solutions, offered by the study participants, to curb future violent attacks against this population.

5.2. The 2015 violent attacks: looting of foreign-owned spaza shops

Drawing from the accounts given by the witnesses, there was no indication of xenophobic attitudes within the community before the attacks. Foreigners were well integrated in the community and many regarded them as family. One participant, Ikaneng, affectionately refers to the foreign spaza shop owners as his brothers. This view of coexisting and living peacefully with foreigners is reiterated by other witnesses, who indicate that the xenophobic attacks were triggered by media reports which trickled down to members of the Dobsonville community. It appears the flame of xenophobic violence
during the 2015 attacks was more reactionary than provoked. The attacks on foreign-owned spaza shops were a ripple effect of the happenings in other parts of Soweto. This finding seems valid as demonstrated in Chapter Four of this study where, although resentful of their success in township spaza industry, the community of Dobsonville acknowledges that foreign spaza shop owners are of great assistance to the community. Foreign spaza shop owners offer community members well-priced goods as well as produce on credit. With all these advantages, what then would be the motivation to cause destruction to foreign-owned-spaza shops? One participant affectionately indicates that before the attacks occurred there was no sign of prejudice towards foreigners in the community. According to him:

*Before the attacks it was fine, we were living in harmony, the only thing that brought all this is TV, you see in the news they were showing what’s happening in other townships (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).*

When asked to comment on the mood in the community before the attacks, Ikangeng states:

*It was ok because most of the foreigners we know they and we are used to them and we were communicating with them like our own brothers (Ikangeng, a 19-year-old male).*

The participants indicate that the attacks started somewhere else and rapidly spread to other areas in Soweto. Many indicated that the attacks started in Snake Park, due to the murder of a teenager. The participants acknowledge the raiding of a Somali spaza shop which resulted in the shooting and demise of a young man. Those that live in Dobsonville only caught wind of the events in Snake Park the day after the events. These findings reflect the media reports of 2015, which demonstrate that the violence was triggered by the shooting of an adolescent boy in Snake Park. One witness, Ikaneng, notes that the isolated murder created an uproar, implicating all foreign nationals to the killing. This is what he had to say:

*According to my own perspective the crime started when there was a crime committed in Snake Park where a little boy was shot by a foreigner, so I guess they thought that all the foreigners are like that so that’s why the attacks were happening almost everywhere in the township (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).*

Similarly, another witness had the same perspective. According to him, there was no tension or signs of hate towards foreign spaza shop owners in the community. Another participant, Ngcobo, agreed. He acknowledges that the attacks on foreigners started in Snake Park. In his words:

*You see eh this thing as much as our fathers once said you see that this thing, it didn’t start inside of Dobsonville. It happened somewhere and it got here... In the morning it was from Snake Park (Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male).*
Thabiso, who is also a witness, indicates that he was not completely certain where the violence started but mentions that it had started in areas within close proximity to Dobsonville, including the township of Kagiso in Roodepoort. He provides a timeline demonstrating the progression of the attacks. In his words:

_It started in Mohlakeng and then the following day it was Kagiso, then Tshepisong, then Snake Park and then Dobsonville and then Zola and then Zondi. I am not sure hey, I don’t want to lie, I don’t know where it started, I only realised when it was already in full swing._ (Thabiso, a 27-year-old male).

When describing the events of what happened, Sandile, remembers how the violence not only affected African foreigners but had also implicated South African Indians who were thought to be immigrants. He further recalls an incident involving a South African Indian shop owner who had fled his shop after hearing of the events that had occurred in Snake Park. The Indian shop owner’s spaza shop was later looted in his absence. He noted that most of the foreign shop owners had already fled Dobsonville during the attacks; however, the community continued the attacks on their property. Though the attacks were mostly targeted at foreign spaza shop owners in the process South African Indians were caught in the cross-fire. In his words:

_The whole thing started in Snake Park whereby some boys were robbing the Somali’s and so I think the shop owners were fed up and the police were not doing anything about it so the Shop owner shot one of those boys and he died and the community was angry and they started attacking them and they took advantage of their situation and they started stealing their stock and then it happened the whole day and then it spread to Dobsonville. Here in Dobsonville it happened the following day after it happened in Snake Park and when it happened this side I remember I had gone to buy bread and there was this guy called William, he is not Somali he is from India but they were treating him like he is part of the Somalis because he is Indian and they believe in the same religion and so on that day he just gave me the bread and asked me what else do I want and then I asked him why are you giving stuff way and then he told me that there is going to be an attack so he just want to collect money and close the shop and go, if the stock remains it doesn’t matter as long as he is safe and 30 minutes later when I went outside there were lots of people attacking the Spazas, it was a mess, they were looting shops, they were having a party if you know what I mean, everywhere in the corner people were sitting having snacks and cold drinks._ (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

A similar perspective was shared by Tshepo, who indicates that all spaza shops were looted, without discrimination. In his view, all foreigners that own spaza shops are Pakistani. This finding indicates that there was no particular method of identifying which shops were Somali-owned, it also indicates
that the community was not interested in the nationalities of the owners. The community, it seems, was only interested in the spaza shops and what was in them.

*It was bad, I remember one time a foreigner from Snake Park shot a small boy, I don't know what had happened before but he shot the boy and then the community decide that they will avenge the boy’s death by attacking all the Pakistan’s, so they broke into the shops and looted everything and there was no shop that was left it was in Dobsonville, Meadowlands and Braamfischer, the whole location, the Pakistan’s shifted for a while (Tshepo, 19-year-old).*

Another witness recalls an experience similar to that of Tshepo and Sandile. In his view, the attacks were happening only at places of business and no-one was exempt. This perspective echoes the idea that the attacks were primarily about stealing from the spaza shops and not necessarily on the foreigners themselves.

*It was happening everywhere; in each and every corner basically everywhere, there is a store. That’s ran by the Somalia’s it was happening (Linda, a 25-year-old male).*

As demonstrated by the stories shared by the witnesses, most of the foreigners in Dobsonville had already fled the scene by the time the attacks started in the community. Residents such as Unathi, after hearing of the events in Snake Park and learning of imminent riots in Dobsonville, forewarned the foreign shop owners to flee the area. She indicates that the community members had started a movement called “Kill Makula” which loosely translates to mean “Kill Indians”.

*It was very hectic, I can’t remember the dates quite well but it started in Snake Park, there was a boy that was attacked in one of the conflicts that occurred and that boy ended up dead on the scene whatever was happening and that thing spread and there was a thing called “kill Makula” and I just went to them and said guys tomorrow there is going to be a riot, they are saying they are coming to Dobsonville, so if you can just pack your things, whatever you can pack and run away (Unathi, 31-year-old female).*

The narrative above demonstrates that the community cannot differentiate the nationalities of the foreign spaza shop owners. This is particularly the case with Indians, Somali, or Pakistani nationals who are referred to collectively as “Makula”. The attacks were thus targeting all foreigners and not a specific nationality. The reason why Somali foreign shop owners would have been attacked over others is not a result of selection among the mob but rather as a consequence of their dominance within the community. Their dominant presence in the community automatically increases their chances of being attacked. The findings from this research study demonstrate that the media played a role in the spreading of the attacks. The findings demonstrate that the community of Dobsonville was unaware of the attacks prior to seeing media reports on television. During the attacks the media
was used to raise awareness and create vigilance among the affected communities. However, its misuse contributed to spreading exaggerated claims about the attacks on foreigners. This reflects the findings in the Report of Special Reference Group on Migration and Community Integration in KwaZulu-Natal (2015) which documents the causes of violence against foreigners. In their findings, the images used to report on the violence were from unrelated events in another province or from the 2008 violence (Special Reference Group on Migration and Community Integration in KwaZulu-Natal 2015). This finding also reflects those of Muswede (2015) who argues that negative feelings regarding foreigners are a result of false information from ancillary sources in current media which incite discrimination and violence against foreigners. Drawing from the findings, the community of Dobsonville had not felt the need to express violence against foreign spaza shop owners. However, once they had seen media reports there was an encouragement of violence.

5.3. “What’s for lunch?”: Mob violence by the youth

The majority of those that participated in the study indicated that the youth was mainly involved in the violence, starting their own movement called “What’s for lunch?” The name of the movement provides a clear description of the activities that were taking place in Dobsonville; shops were looted and food was stolen. The mob, according to the witnesses, was predominantly male school-going youth. Thabiso and Keamogetswe also implicate drug users, particularly “nyaope boys”, in the violence. Pinning the attacks on drug users within the community, Thabiso relayes:

> It was mostly the youth boys and the nyaope boys, elders were not part of it instead they were trying to make them stop (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

The mob in the 2015 Dobsonville attacks has parallel characteristics to the mob in the recent August 2018 attacks in Soweto. The 2018 attacks were waged against foreign shop owners by school-going youth for allegedly selling counterfeit and expired goods. Pule recalls the ‘purpose’ of the movement. According to him:

> So, they were angry and were saying that you can’t come from where you come from to kill people here. So yes, that’s how “what’s for lunch” started (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Tshepo believes that school-going youth were motivated to participate in the looting as a sign of solidarity with the 14-year-old teenager who had been murdered at Snake Park. He notes that both males and females were involved in the violence. Based on his description, the males were predominantly responsible for breaking into the shops while the females were in charge of collecting the goods from the shelves. From his perspective, it seems that the looters were solely from the area and had come from Snake Park. In his view, there seemed to be a coalition between the looters in Dobsonville and those from Snake Park. This is what he saw:
The people who were attacking the shops was mostly the youth and the school children because they had seen that they shot a fellow student and they use hammers to break down walls. It was both, the females would enter when the shops are opened and mostly it was a group from Snake Park and when they got here they found people who knew the location very well and they helped them go from shop to shop. Yes I remember because I was coming from school that day, we had knocked off early because of that issue, so when I got home the other kids had jumped the school fence and grouped to go and make the chaos (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

Furthermore, Tshepo, who was a learner at the time of the attacks, witnessed the same thing and confirms that the attackers were learners:

Yes, I remember because I was coming from school that day, we had knocked off early because of that issue, so when I got home the other kids had jumped the school fence and grouped to go and make the chaos (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

There were pockets in the community who were encouraging the mob to break into the stores. Ikangeng noticed that the youthful attackers were urged by their parents to incite violence against foreign-owned shops. In his words:

Mostly it was young people because they have the energy, they can run and all that stuff so yes it was youth and there were some other parents that were encouraging their children to go and attack the shops (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).

Similarly, Pule recalls that although the majority of those involved in the violence were school children, some of them were young adults. Women were encouraging young men to break into the shops so that they could gain access to shops and take what was inside. Pule reports:

Yes, it was not only school children; there were some young adults who are not at school anymore those who are smoking especially the males. Females were supporting the males because they would need man power to break into these containers and once open you just go in there and take what you want and leave and most of the times the females are the ones that went in to take what they want in the shop (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Agreeing with Pule, Sandile also indicates that:

It was mostly the youth and maybe 30 of our uncles and mostly it was males (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

The weapons used during the attacks were for the sole purpose of entering the spaza shops; anything that could break the windows was considered a tool. Some residents were so consumed
with rage that they used their fists to break the shop windows. In her recollection, Unathi witnessed the following:

_Yhoo, [sic] they had all kinds of weapons, spades, they even had spears and they were so violent, they were using their fists to break down the windows. They had weapons; they did have weapons (Unathi, a 31-year-old female)._

Another witness saw the looting happen in a similar fashion. In his words:

_For them to get inside they had to break in, so they would break down windows and all and they would steal money and all the stock that was inside (Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male)_

It is clear that the weapons were used to open the shops and threaten the _spaza_ shop owners. The mob relied on stones, bricks, knives, iron bars and spears to gain access to the _spaza_ shops. Entry by breaking windows was the common method applied. A female participant recalls the event of that day. In her words:

_The spades, shovels, knives and some iron bars, anything that they could use to break in (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female)_

Another participant agrees with her. He states:

_Spades, knives jut to scare the foreigners who were there and most of the kids were carrying stones and bricks (Pule, an 18-year-old male)_

Ironically, one particular witness believes that stones and bricks are not weapons. He casually spoke about the use of paraffin to burn the shops, which was not mentioned by other participants. He describes what happened:

_They were using stones and they were throwing stones inside the shops. No weapons, yes and maybe the paraffin just to burn the shop (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male)._

According to the witnesses, the looting was targeted at any _spaza_ shop within the community. One particular witness is convinced that the looting was particularly targeted towards Somali owned _spaza_ shop. Drawing from his account, he claims:

_It was happening everywhere; in each and every corner basically everywhere, there is a store that’s ran by the Somali’s it was happening (Linda, 25-year-old)._

The words which the mob used reflect several issues that have been alluded to in the previous section. Foreign shop owners are blamed for a myriad of social issues affecting the community. Foreigners were blamed for taking jobs away from South Africans. Keamogetswe heard the mob accusing foreign _spaza_ shop owners of stealing South African women. This finding reflects those in
Gqola (2008), where South African women are objectified and treated as if they are unable to make their own decisions. Keamogetswe and Unathi explicitly recall the mob ordering the killing of the foreign shop owners and hurling “Kill Makula” as they were looting the shops. Luckily, foreigners were not killed during the attacks in Dobsonville. In this situation the actions of the mob do not necessarily reflect the events of the day. However, it demonstrates the blind rage and hate towards the foreign spaza shop owners in Soweto. Comparable to “What’s for lunch?”, “Kill Makula” was not only a phrase that was used by the foreigners, but a movement aimed at the eradication of foreigners, even if this objective was not realised.

“It was very hectic, I can’t remember the dates quite well but it started in Snake Park, there was a boy that was attacked in one of the conflicts that occurred and that boy ended up dead on the scene whatever was happening and that thing spread and there was a thing called “kill Makula” (Unathi, a 31-year-old woman).

Another female witness heard them say:

“Kill Makula” because they are not from South Africa, some are here to take our jobs away and some they take our women and make foreign babies with them (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

During the attacks, the mob accused foreigners of selling counter fake goods, stealing employment opportunities, stealing women for South African males and being in possession of dangerous ammunition which posed a threat to the community. In his own words, Sandile recalls the following:

They were using swear words and they were saying that they want to kill us with their fake products and some were thinking that they are here to bomb us (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Similarly, another witness heard the same thing. In his words:

They were saying that they are taking their jobs; go back to your home country and things like that (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

When probed on property which was damaged during the attacks, the majority of the participants mention that primarily spaza shops belonging to foreigners were looted and vandalised. Unfortunately, South African spaza shops were also mistakenly caught in the crossfire. For participants such as Ngcobo, a 47-year-old male, the looting of a South African shop unveiled a façade which revealed that a local spaza shop was essentially owned by a foreign national. “That’s when they destroyed the shop of one of us, only to find that they were also with foreigners, like they were on top and foreigners were under them. So that it should look like it was owned by a black
person. You see something like that, yeah so it was one of the shops that was attacked, where they put these ‘Refresh’ of theirs at, like that place it was like a warehouse”, he says.

Most of the foreign shop owners operate from old shipping containers which have been revamped. During the attacks, these containers were vandalised as well as the properties which locals had rented out to foreigners for business purposes. “They were attacking properties owned by foreigners, things like the containers and the spaza shops”, explains Keamogetswe. If foreigners were found in the shops during the looting, they were attacked. She continues:

People were going to all the spaza shops that were owned by foreigners and when they found them there, they will beat them and they broke into the shops if they found it locked, they burnt their cars and stole their stuff and money (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Unathi was emotionally affected by the attacks that occurred against foreigners. She indicates that they lost everything during the attacks, including their identification documents. The attacks, from her perspective, were devastating and had left some foreigners homeless. She felt that the attacks were inhumane and rhetorically asked what was gained through the events that occurred.

People came out in numbers, they went on and took their clothes and they took their money and broke into their houses, their rented places because some of them they rent garages in our houses. They lost everything, from their passports, their permits that allow them to live in this country and their money. Everything was taken out and they took everything that was in the shops but for what…? It was a painful incident; some Pakistan’s were beaten up and others were left with no place to stay. We had to be the ones alerting them because they are also human. That is what I was saying to everybody before that if we had a crisis in our country, how would we feel if the treat us the way that we are treating them in our country (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

The items that were stolen from the stores, as indicated by almost all of the witnesses included consumable goods, airtime and money. Sadly, electrical appliances such as cell phones and refrigerators were also taken from the spaza shops during the looting. Recalling his personal experience, Pule states:

I saw school kids going to the spaza shops to steal food, everything, they took everything airtime, cold drinks and if they got there and the tuck shop is closed, they would forcibly open it and they would break in actually and after that they would move to another tuck-shop. The shops are the ones that were mostly destroyed because they wanted to make sure that they take everything inside (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

His assessment is echoed by Thabiso; according to him, the damage was all encompassing:
Yes, others had their cars stolen, can you imagine, if they know that you are a foreigner and you have a nice golf car it was taken by people that you know, people that you live with every day. The shops are the ones that were mostly destroyed because they wanted to make sure that they take everything inside (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).

In the 2008 attacks, the mob was mainly young males. The findings from this study provide us with fresh insights. The mob in this case was predominantly school-going learners. It is not clear who was leading the mob as it seems that both males and females had their role in the looting. The males were encouraged to break into the stores by females who would also take goods once they were inside the spaza shops. The question that needs to be answered is: what would make learners act in this way? The study findings demonstrate an interesting link between drug use and looting in the case of the attacks in Dobsonville. Some witnesses implicate learners and other individuals who are known drug users in the community to the events in 2015. Looting and violence against foreign-owned spaza shops could be a means to an end, a method of stealing to fund their habit.

The mob was accusing foreigners of stealing their employment opportunities, demonstrating the high levels of competition between South Africans and foreigners over scarce employment opportunities. This reflects a finding by Crush and Pendleton (2004), who attribute the high levels of xenophobia in the country to the perceived economic harm to South African citizens. Drawing from the findings, the attacks were driven by the perceptions and allegations that foreign national are detrimental to local business and employment opportunities.

### 5.4. Location of foreigners during the attacks

The majority of the witnesses have indicated that the foreigners had been alerted of the attacks by residents and fellow business owners. However, some had not been able to leave on time. Those that had remained behind sought protection from the mob by hiding in their places of business or seeking safety in their neighbours’ homes. Unathi indicates that the foreigners that had remained behind were caught off-guard as they had never thought the attacks would spread to Dobsonville and affect them. In her words:

*Some had already left but the other ones where in the streets, Obama, John and the others where in the streets, they had to come and pick them up to a place of safety, some of them didn’t believe that this thing was really going on here in Dobsonville because they were thinking that since this thing happened in Snake Park it will stay there, so it spread to Dobsonville, Pimville, Braamfischer, Meadowlands, it was everywhere (Unathi, an 18-year-old female).*

One witness corroborates her experience and indicates that some foreigners had informed their fellow business men of the looming destruction. She explains:
They were going to their places of business and they also told each other if they had just been attacked and so on and so they made each other aware and some ran away and other were hiding in their places of business (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

However, even though most foreign spaza shop owners had been alerted of the attacks, those who were left behind had tried to fight back. They were unsuccessful. Sandile witnessed the spaza shop owners trying to fight off the looters. In his words:

Some were lucky because they heard about the attacks early and so they ran away but others were there and some tried fighting back but because they were outnumbered, they were overpowered (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Pule indicates that there were foreigners who were armed and had used guns to protect their stores, it is not clear whether those that were armed had managed to successfully protect their businesses.

Some of them were alert, they would go and those ones that didn’t know anything they would try and protect their spaza shops with guns (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Thabiso, a 31-year-old witness, had earlier mentioned that mainly spaza shops were looted during the violence, however, he reveals that some foreigners who are not spaza shop owners were also attacked. The foreigners were identified by their dress codes which, according to him, distinguished them from South Africans. This reflects the bio-cultural hypothesis as explained by Culbertson (2009), where the biological and cultural features such as immunisation marks, traditional garb and physical appearance are used to identify foreigners. “They were everywhere, some were hiding in the houses and some had gone to work and some were coming from work, as you know that you can easily identify that this one is not from around, we dress differently so it’s easy to see that this is a Congolese or Zambian or whatever”, he says.

Tshepo’s experience was different. In his perspective when the attacks occurred, most of the foreigners were not in the spaza shops. They had all fled. He explains:

The thing is they were not attacking them personally, they were attacking their shops, so them they were not there when it happened because they saw what was happening in Snake Park and then they moved quickly with their things, but they didn’t have much time (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

However, some had not left in time and were found in their stores. According to him they were removed without harm, as the interest of the invaders was on the material goods, rather than on the foreigners themselves. He continues:

Yes, even if they found one inside, they would make them move and then they take what’s inside. For them to get inside they had to break in, so they would bread down windows and
all and they would steal money and all the stock that was inside (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

His view is corroborated by Ikaneng, who similarly had not seen any foreigners in the stores at the time of the attacks.

Actually, when they were entering the shops they were not there, I didn’t even see one of them; I don’t know where they were hiding themselves. Yes, they ran away and left their stuff behind (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).

The stories above demonstrate that the attacks happened at places of business. Furthermore, while the attacks were happening, most of the shop owners had already left the community, however their property was still looted. This gives us insights into the motivation for the attacks, which appear to have been for economic reasons.

5.5. Reasons for the attacks

The participants indicated that although there was a large criminal element to the attacks the motivation was purely xenophobic. All the participants indicated that in as much as South Africans were disgruntled about foreigners occupying spaces that were previously occupied by South Africans. Participants such as Thabiso and Linda acknowledge that the success of foreigners may have built some resentment towards them, but they firmly believe that it does not provide a solid reason to attack foreigners. Sandile shares the same sentiments; he believes that South Africans are frustrated about unemployment and are angered. The participants firmly believe that the victims were attacked as a result of their foreignness. However, in this instance, foreignness seems to be synonymous with crime, thievery, corruption and stealing opportunities.

This is clearly demonstrated in the views of Linda, who provides an outline of the issues which might have motivated the attacks; these include locals believing that foreigners are infringing on their opportunities. Locals are particularly bothered by their dominance in the Soweto spaza sector believing this has prevented them from opening their own shop. This dominance in the spaza sector, according to Linda, has been the cause of tension between foreign shop owners and locals, eventually causing the chaos that ensued. However, he closes this perspective by indicating that they were attacked merely because they are foreigners. In his words:

By them and they feel like they are taking bread out of their mouths. The, at first people were not threatened because they kind like felt that they still in control soon as the Somali shops started opening everywhere. That’s when the tension started slowly growing. Just like I said before that people were basically feeling threatened. And feeling like they are running oh uhm [sic] the Somalis are taking food out of their mouths. Yes, there was a
criminal element in those attacks. Okay I feel like it was basically it was discrimination against them. Yeah, they were attacked because their foreigners (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Sandile concurs with Linda, indicating that foreigners were targeted due to their business activities. However, he indicates that the attacks were fuelled by both criminal intent as well as the hatred of foreigners. In his view, violence against some foreigners such as Nigerians (due to their supposed illicit activities) is justified. However, he believes that not all foreigners are criminals and some are just hard-working businessmen. In his words:

The reason why the attacks happened is because us south Africans we cannot think for ourselves, we can’t do something constructive for ourselves so that we can make a living and now we are jealous, yes we are lazy to come up with ideas …yes and there is this thing that foreigners are crowding us and that we can’t find jobs because of them…Both because some foreigners are also criminals specially the Nigerians, they sell drugs, they do human trafficking but others are good hustlers. I think they were attacked because they are foreigners (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).

Contrary to Sandile and Linda, Thabiso acknowledges that the attacks had an element of criminality, as not everyone who was a foreigner was attacked. He indicates that foreigners who had goods or other valuable possession were the ones who were attacked. Those who were not so well off were left alone. This suggests that the attacks were purely economic and criminal. He explains:

Yes, they were being beaten, they tried fighting back but it didn’t help especially when people know that you have your own things and you have “what-what”, then you were a target and they target those people and they come to you and they know that you will run for your life and leave your stuff behind and then they will take the things. They didn’t go to those poor ones; they were targeting those ones whom they know are rich. It was no longer foreign attacks, it was now robbery because when they got there they would take everything that that person has on him, so if you are chasing them away why would you take their things because they won’t be able to go anywhere without money …What happened was daylight robbery because there are people today who are using the TV’s and fridges that they stole from those people that day, how do you live with yourself knowing that you stole from someone who was just trying to make a living for himself and his family (Thabiso, a 27-year-old male).

Another participant, Tshepo, corroborates this view. In his perspective, the attacks were based on criminal intent as those that were looting were primarily interested in the goods inside the shop. Tshepo believes that the lack of lighting during the period of the attacks compounded the situation as the darkness provided a cover for those that were looting from the stores. He reiterates:
Yes they were based on criminal elements because these boys wanted to steal the stuff inside and that Pakistan responded by shooting at them and the other time when it happened it was during load shedding and we didn’t have electricity for 2 weeks and they were attacking the public and they even stole power cables. Yes, obviously when there is load shedding its dark and criminals see an opportunity because it’s dark and they steal from the spaza shops and they also don’t have electricity so they didn’t know what they were doing (Tshepo, a 19 year male).

Similarly, Unathi blames the lack of drive among Dobsonville residents in opening their own businesses, adding that there was no real motivation for the attacks other than criminality. She felt that the attacks were in poor taste as foreigners had not done anything to deserve such behaviour. In her words:

I can say it’s a bad mentality for us, we tend to take other situations from other places and put it in our community and in terms of what happened there was no specific reason why they did that on that day because it was an incident from somewhere that they took and made it happen in Dobsonville as if any Pakistan or Somali has done anything wrong to one of our kids here in Dobsonville… People were just doing crime because basically what did any Pakistan from Dobsonville do, what did any Ethiopian or Somali do wrong here in Dobsonville. There was no reason for them to attack them the way they did, why did Dobsonville have to experience what they were doing at that time (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

Unathi further indicates that residents often blame foreigners for their problems, rather than blaming the government for the socio-economic problems the country was/is facing. This finding reflects the scapegoating theory as explained by Harris (2001), who expounds that foreigners are blamed for the failures of government in the provision of basic goods and services. This failure is directly linked to the lucrative promises which were made post-democracy that have barely manifested. She continues:

It’s not everyone who was happy about what was happening, some of the people felt ashamed, like they felt that what the others were doing was wrong, they could have just let them in the shops and deal with them than what happened, the way it happened because other ones thy didn’t know what happened in the particular incident. So we felt so sorry for them for what was happening thinking for them what if it was me, for me the government if South Africa is failing me, so we tend to turn a black eye and don’t blame the government for what is happening to us because they are also allowing them to come into our country, so if the government is allowing people to come into our country there is nothing wrong (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).
In contrast, Ikangeng feels the community attributed to the attacks on foreigners by exploiting opportunities or resources that they feel are ‘reserved’ for South Africans. He is certain that the attacks were purely xenophobic as there was no concrete reason for them to occur. He had this to say:

*They were saying they are coming from wherever and they take their businesses and I was thinking and asking myself how they came and take their business because they don’t have businesses too, I was asking myself how because the foreigners came with business because us, we are lazy to open our own businesses, so I saw that this thing doesn’t make sense… I think they were attacked because they were foreigners (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).*

Keamogetswe asserts that the death of the teenager in South Africa was not merely an excuse or a cover-up to attack foreigners. In her view the foreign shop owners were attacked as a result of the murder of the teenager and their nationality. In her view:

*I don’t know what started them, they just erupted chanting ‘kill Makula’ going to the spaza shops but what really started it I don’t know but I think it was because of that foreigner that shot and killed a child in snake park, I think that’s what caused the whole commotion…I think they were attacked because they were foreigners and they were calling them names, the shooting of the child I don’t think was the main cause of the attacks (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).*

Based on the stories provided by the witnesses, the attacks were as a result of a myriad of issues, the root cause being xenophobic crime. The criminal element is demonstrated by the property which was damaged on the day of the attacks. Only shops and more specifically spaza shops were looted, while residences were left unscathed in the commotion. This demonstrates that the mob was motivated to a large extent by financial gain. The other common cause identified by the witnesses was purely competition over scarce resources which has manifested into xenophobic attitudes. The witnesses further express that the attacks were mainly towards those who were from different ethnic groups and there was no other reason than xenophobia. However, based on the researcher’s findings, the high levels of crime in the area seemed a precondition for the violence that ensued in 2015. It seems that the attacks were precipitated by criminal acts as the community had managed to live in harmony for many years. Why then would they attack foreigners?

The theory of ethnic violence, as described by Horowitz (2001), helps one answer this question and explain what happened in Soweto during the 2015 attacks. Firstly, there was a precondition for the violence; the community of Dobsonville is riddled by unemployment and crime and many are unhappy with their current living conditions. Secondly, foreigners were predominantly attacked based on their lack of retaliation at the times of the attacks (most of them had fled the area and those
who has remained were vulnerable). Furthermore, the second condition is supported by the lack of police presence during the attacks which created some form of immunity from punishment for the perpetrators. Lastly, the perpetrators were justifying their actions by accusing foreigners of stealing their employment opportunities.

5.6. The aftershock of the violence: Mood after the attacks

Thabiso recalls the manner in which the community was divided about the events that happened on the day of the attacks. He narrates that many of the residents had turned on each other in an effort to provide protection to the foreigners in the community. He laments the fact that the attacks happened to other black foreigners, while white foreigners, as explained by Crush (2000), are exempt from such treatment due to their location and the types of businesses the engage in. He is proud that the community had, to a certain extent, managed to contain the situation and had not allowed it to continue for more than a day in comparison to other areas around Soweto.

Thabiso’s account of events demonstrates that the community was remorseful about the events that had transpired. He completely isolates himself from the events that occurred. He can not understand the reasoning behind hurting other people, people who he considers ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. Drawing from his experience he states:

*Yhoo! [sic] , it was bad that time because many people were hurt, they were attacking the foreigners but it affected many people and lives were changed till it reached a point where us as residents of Dobsonville we had to turn against each other trying to protect foreigners because it’s not all of us who saw those attacks against our brothers and sisters some of us came to their senses that no we can’t be beating people whom are just like us, why don’t we do the same with whites if we have a problem and that’s how we managed to win this war in Dobsonville because it didn’t last long like it did in other townships, here it only happened once and in one day (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).*

He further indicates that he was affected on a personal level as the foreigners had assisted him when he did not have funds. This could have been through the provision of credit facilities when purchasing or other benefits. He feels that the relationship and trust he had built with the foreign shop owners has been erased. He indicates that they have become suspicious and a substantial amount of time and effort is required to rebuild those friendships. He continues:

*Personally, I was disturbed because we have been living with these people and they are people who would help sometimes when I had nothing and so after the attacks they didn’t trust anyone from South Africa, they didn’t know who to trust, I had to start from scratch and prove myself to them so that they could trust me again (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).*
This tension is similarly noted by Linda, signifying a level of distrust between foreigners and locals after the attacks. However, those that had been affected by the violence felt comfortable enough to return to the township once everything had settled down. He claims:

Well there was still tension after the attacks because the Somalia, the foreigners that were involved, the ones that got left, came back to run their businesses, so there were still a lot of tension (Linda, a 25-year-old male).

Pule, an 18-year-old witness, has only realised the extent to which foreigners had helped the community once they were gone. He misses the convenience of having a spaza shop in close proximity to his home and he feels that the removal of the spaza shops has also changed the way the community lives. Elaborating on how this has affected their community, Pule said "Now if you wanted things like airtime you have to walk to the garage and it’s far whereas it was just a 5-minute walk to the spaza shop." Furthermore, Tshepo specifies that foreigners had offered them lower prices on goods and without them they were paying exorbitant prices for the same products sold at alternative stores. According to him:

It was hard, we were struggling because there were no shops anymore and the other shops that were there are expensive and you can’t buy bread for R16 it doesn’t make sense (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

Similarly, Ikangeng indicates that the community only realised the value of the foreign-owned spaza shops once they had been removed. Upon comprehending the ramifications of their actions, the community has become more accepting of foreign-owned spaza shops in Dobsonville:

They made me feel bad because these foreigners they came here to help us and after those attacks the whole community realised that what they had did was wrong because they are the ones that want the foreigners help because we didn’t have anywhere to buy, that’s why now they have let it go because they realised that these people are also human and they are helping us (Ikangeng, an 18-year-old male).

Although some witnesses indicate that there was a sombre mood in the community, other members in the community were pleased with the actions that had ensued. Sandile claims that those involved in the looting were gleeful due to their material gains made at the expense of foreigners. However, his tone points to a level of disappointment in what had occurred. According to him:

People were happy that they got whatever they got in those 2 minutes (Sandile, a 27-year-old male).
Keamogetswe agrees with him, claiming that there were members in the community who were not remorseful and continued to blame foreigners for the unemployment problem in the country. She explains:

_Some were hurting but there were others that were happy that they were gone because they were saying they are coming from wherever to come and take our jobs. My heart was sore because they are also people who are just here to try and support their families_ (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

The empathy shown by the witnesses towards foreign shop owners does not mean that the perception on foreign spaza shop owners has changed for the community of Soweto. This resistance to change was clearly demonstrated in the recent attacks on foreign spaza shops which had plagued townships in Soweto during August of 2018.

5.7. Curbing violence against foreign shop owners

The witnesses are generally opposed to the events that occurred in January 2015. When probed for viable solutions to the problem, the study participants are in support of a government solution and not necessarily one in which the community is accountable. Participants such as Ikangeng believe in a collective solution where locals and foreigners work together to reach an understanding. He believes in the fundamental use of education to build understanding. According to him:

_Working together as human beings and trying to understand other people’s situation so I think that can make them stop these attacks, understanding other people and their situation, understand why they left their country to come here, maybe things were not working well in their country so that’s why the decided to come here to do business, maybe some of them wanted to be engineers or something and there were no opportunities there_ (Ikaneng, an 18-year-old male).

This view was shared by Thabiso, who believes that there is a lack of understanding on the reasons that motivate foreigners to travel to South Africa. He indicates that they face many challenges in their native countries. A level of humanity is required from South Africans, which is a quality he believes is not present in the community:

_Frankly speaking I don’t like violence, these people has been through a lot, we don’t know what made them leave their homes and come to South Africa, maybe they left there because there was no peace, maybe they left because of hunger, you don’t even know how they got here or how their first day here was like till they got to where they are today and so Ubuntu is something that we don’t have here, by doing what we did it showed that we don’t have the spirit of Ubuntu_ (Thabiso, a 31-year-old male).
Keamogetswe agrees with this, believing that law enforcement needs to play an active role in educating the community about immigrants. The assumption is that this would be all in the form of road shows.

*I think we need to sit down and come up with a solution so that we can all live together in peace, they need to get permits to be here in South Africa and the police need to come here and talk to the community and tell them why these people are here and that they are here legally so people mustn’t bother them* (Keamogetswe, a 37-year-old female).

Over and above government intervention, Linda suggests that the community could also try to understand one another. His views are shared by Unathi, believing that a common understanding of the human condition and knowledge would assist in curbing violence against foreigners.

*We just need to realise that we are one, even if I was born in Ethiopia, Somalia or wherever, we are all human. We are all in this world for the same reasons. If I was studying in Bangladesh or wherever or my child gets a bursary to study somewhere, how will I feel and how would they feel having South Africans in their country because they know that their families are being mistreated in South Africa* (Unathi, a 31-year-old female).

Sandile believes in an economic solution, expressing that foreign-owned spaza shops need to be taxed. He elaborates on this idea by indicating that the tax earned needs to be ploughed back into the community, either for infrastructure improvements or skills development. He further indicates that the foreign-owned spaza shops should employ members of the community as a means of empowerment, where both locals and foreigners benefit. In his view:

*I think the government must intervene and try to engage them at least, make them pay tax so that we can grow the community and improve our community and maybe them they can also hire at least one person and create jobs so that it will be fair for both parties* (Sandile, 27-year-old male).

Pule’s views are in line with those proposed by Sandile. He thinks that the youth are disempowered and if they received some form of financial support from the state to support their entrepreneurial goals it would remedy the situation. According to him:

*If the government offers the youth some opportunities so that we also become entrepreneurs so that we can also open our own spaza shops, they must fund us. These foreigners they can see that in black communities there are no spaza shops and that’s why they are here* (Pule, an 18-year-old male).

Tshepo indicates that looting is primarily an activity in which the youth are the main perpetrators. In his view, this is an activity only those who are young participate in. He believes that there needs to
be a national conversation addressing attacks on foreigners, believing that this dialogue needs to be targeted at the youth.

They must speak with the youth because they are the ones that start the whole thing because they think that the guys have a lot of money and they keep the money in their houses since they don’t make use of the banks. By talking some sense into their heads and make them see that attacking these foreign-owned shops won’t help with anything instead it makes the problems worse (Tshepo, a 19-year-old male).

In summary, the possible solution to xenophobic attacks as recommended by the participants, is for political leaders to take a more proactive approach to enforcing laws that would deter those who commit these crimes; this would include laws that offer protection to foreign spaza shop owners. Another solution proposed by some of the participants was to intensify efforts regarding the dissemination of information aimed at educating locals about tolerance and diversity. There are also economic propositions for the mutual benefit of foreigners and locals, as suggested in the findings; foreign-owned spaza shops could provide employment opportunities for locals. Entrepreneurial programmes for locals are also suggested in the hope of empowering them to run their own shops.

5.8. Conclusion

From the findings, the reasons for the attacks in Soweto were purely economic. Based on the findings, the attackers were primarily concerned with the spaza shops and their contents. This insight is supported by the fact that most of the foreigners had already left the shops in Dobsonville by the time the attacks occurred. The attacks were not necessarily targeted at spaza shops owned by Somali shop owners; South African spaza shops were also looted in the process. The findings further indicate that the foreigners that had remained behind were not physically harmed during the attacks as they were either protected by other locals who were not part of the mob or they were overlooked as the attackers were more interested in their property than in them. There are obviously underlying driving forces for this behaviour, as indicated earlier, tensions between locals and foreigners have always been high in the community. This tension is fueled by beliefs that foreigners are taking away opportunities from locals. The fact that foreign-owned spaza shops dominate the township economy has not helped the situation either. Those that participated in the study are opposed to the attacks, believing that there are other means of resolving conflict.
Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The emergence of xenophobic violence towards foreigners living in South Africa provides an opportunity to expand the possible explanations and causes of attacks on foreign spaza shop owners. The aim of this study is to investigate Soweto resident’s perceptions on violence against black foreign shop owners with reference to the 2015 xenophobic attacks. The focus of the study is not merely about xenophobia in South African townships, but further aims to provide the perceptions of South Africans whose voices are often silent in literature pertaining to xenophobic violence. In an attempt to provide answers to the research questions, the chapter discusses the interpretation of the meaning Soweto residents attach to witnessing the January 2015 violent xenophobic attacks against foreign spaza shop owners. The chapter correspondingly compares the findings emanating from this research to other studies that have been conducted on xenophobic violence in South Africa.

The discussion is divided into four parts. It starts by illustrating the events of January 2015 in Soweto. The discussion then reflects on the reasons for the attacks by considering the feelings that the community has towards foreigners and foreign-owned-spaza shops. This part also considers other reasons given for the attacks, such as economic competition and crime. The third part discusses the possible solution to the problem of xenophobic violence against foreign spaza shop owners in South Africa. This is a solution which is provided by South Africans who witnessed the attacks. In essence, the chapter summarises and concludes the main findings that have been uncovered by the research. The limitations of the study are also provided followed by recommendations for future studies.

6.2. The events of January 2015

6.2.1. Xenophobic violence of 2015: What triggered the violence?

The January 2015 attacks in Soweto started in Snake Park as reported in the media. The research findings demonstrate that the media had a great deal of influencing the attacks in Dobsonville. In line with the news reports, the participants acknowledge the demise of a young man at the hands of foreign shop owners as a trigger for the attacks. The participants acknowledge that those that live in Dobsonville only caught wind of the events in Snake Park the day after the occurrences. There is very little information on how the violence broke out in Dobsonville and who started it. It seems that the violence was a ripple effect of the events that happened in Snake Park and not necessarily a result of any cause in the community itself. The mob, according to the witnesses, was predominantly male school-going children. Starting their own movement called “What’s for lunch?”, the mob’s main objective involved the destruction of foreign-owned shops and the stealing of goods. The mob in the Dobsonville attacks has parallel characteristics to those involved in the recent August 2018 attacks.
The 2018 attacks were waged against foreign spaza shop owners by school-going youth for allegedly selling counterfeit and expired goods.

In comparison to the May 11 2008 attacks in Alexandra, which were aimed at removing foreigners from Alexandra, the January 2018 attacks in Soweto seemed as though they were motivated by material gain. This view is supported by the fact that in Dobsonville, there were no fatalities and the attacks were focused on taking the goods in the shops. Interestingly, those that were responsible for the damage were of school-going age and not directly in economic competition with the foreign shop owners. Moreover, most of the spaza shop owners had already left their premises by the time the looting took place in the area. A participant recalls how the violence not only affected foreigners but had also implicated South African owned spaza shops. The participant recalls an incident involving a South African Indian shop owner who had fled his shop after hearing of the events that had happened in Snake Park. The Indian shop owner’s spaza shop was then later looted in his absence. This indicates that the attacks were not only against foreign-owned spaza shops, but all spaza shops.

The events that occurred in the 2015 attacks reflect the recent events of the 2018 attacks. Literature by Zwane and Mashaba (2018) and Shange (2018) demonstrates that the attackers were interested in taking the produce in the shops. Ironically, they had indicated that the goods had expired and were not fit for human consumption; yet they continued to steal them anyway.

The weapons used during the attacks were exclusively used to enter the spaza shops. The mob relied on stones, bricks, knives, iron bars and spears to gain access to the goods within the shops. Those that were part of the mob did so willingly and were not coerced by anyone. Instead, those who were involved were fuelled by the support they received by some members of the community.

Charman and Piper (2012) note that during 2006 to 2012, violent attacks against foreign shopkeepers rose significantly, particularly targeting Somali traders. The authors argue that violence against foreign spaza shop owners should not be seen only within the context of xenophobia but in the context of criminal activity and economic competition, known as “violent entrepreneurship”; which has affected South African spaza shop owners (Charman & Piper 2012). This research echoes the ideas reflected by the authors by demonstrating that these attacks were not necessarily motivated purely by xenophobia but also by criminal intent.

In summary, the attacks were predominantly led by school-going children, although different members of the community participated. As indicated by the research findings, these attacks were not targeted at foreigners who did not own anything; only those who had spaza shops and property with monetary value were targeted. The foreigners were not present when the shops were raided and those that were present were not harmed. The attacks were mainly a disguise for criminal intent, which demonstrates that the perpetrators saw an opportunity for financial gain and took it.
6.3. Perspectives on foreigners

6.3.1. Feelings towards foreigners

Generally, it appears that South African print media represents foreigners in a negative and stereotypical manner. A study conducted by Bekker et al. (2008) uses secondary and primary literature to demonstrate that South Africans held xenophobic views towards foreigners prior to the 2008 xenophobic attacks. Much of the media reporting on foreigners focuses on their socio-economic impact and this is often portrayed negatively (Harris 2001). Negative stereotypical thoughts about foreigners were expressed by the Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini in 2015, who implied that foreigners should return to their native countries given that they were enjoying the wealth of South Africans. His statements are closely linked to the narrative that foreigners are taking away employment and wealth from foreigners (Rasakanya & Sebola 2015). His statements encouraged the xenophobic attacks in 2015 and resulted in a few foreigners returning to their countries (Rasakanya & Sebola 2015). Clearly, discrimination against foreigners is not limited to the media but spills into the political spectrum. The findings from this research study provide a different perspective to this as the participants hold more positive views about foreigners in general. They generally do not have a problem with African foreigners and are aware of the factors which have led to the influx of foreigners in South Africa. They are against foreigners being painted with the same brush.

The study reveals that South Africans admire the trading skills of foreigners and are aware of their business models; the participants admire foreigners and commend them as being self-sufficient and hard-working. However, when asked about foreigners who own spaza shops, there is a clear dislike for them. The findings imply that the community is unhappy that foreign-owned shops have taken over the township economy. This discontent is based on the fact that the competitive prices of foreign-owned shops have resulted in the demise of spaza shops owned by locals. Some participants suggested that there should be a quota on the number of foreign-owned shops which are allowed to operate in the community. This reflects the findings of a study conducted by Charman et al. (2012) which has studied spaza shops in Delft South, a township in Cape Town. The research engages with all (179) recognisable spaza shops of which 90 were, at the time, run by foreign owners. The findings reveal that many of the foreign shops had positioned themselves to compete directly with South African businesses (Liedeman, Charman, Piper & Petersen 2013). The foreign run shops were also better stocked and appeared to be generally favoured by local consumers as they offered lower prices on various goods (Liedeman, Charman, Piper & Petersen 2013). The study findings from Cape Town reflect the current situation in Dobsonville, with some of the participants indicating that foreigners had an unfair advantage due to the use of their social networks.

The participants are generally unhappy about the presence of foreign-owned shops in the community believing that they should be taxed, restricted or forced to employ a South African. The belief is
rooted in the idea that foreigners are benefitting at the expense of South Africans. This is also reflected in the literature, where it has been documented that foreign shop owners often encounter problems with South African nationals who feel that they are a threat to their livelihoods due to their perceived advantages (Hunter & Skinner 2003; Masonganye 2010). This has resulted in foreigners being the victims of hate crimes, discrimination and xenophobia (Landau, Ramajathan-Keogh & Singh 2005). Liedeman (2013) explores the reasons behind the success of certain migrant groups in comparison to South African spaza shops. The business approach used by foreigners allows for large scale purchases through social networks, often resulting in a competitive pricing model (Liedeman 2013). These findings reflect what was noted by the study participants who regard the use of social networks as an unfair advantage to foreigners. The study participants acknowledge the strategic advantage that foreign shop owners have through their social networks; however, they associated these links with illicit activity. The insinuation is that foreign shop owners use their social networks to procure counterfeit goods. This finding of “counterfeit” goods being sold by foreigners is illuminated by this study and is the main reason identified for the cause of the August 2018 attacks. The truth to this is not fully known or verified. However, purchasing of goods on the black market has been noted among Somali spaza shop owners (Liedeman et al. 2013).

Furthermore, there is a general sentiment among the participants that foreign spaza shop owners are armed and dangerous although some participants have become less suspicious over time. This view is supported and influenced by knowledge of conflict in other African states. Ironically, the research findings indicate that South Africans have also benefitted from the presence of foreign-owned spaza shops in the community. The study findings reveal that community members are given credit facilities which allow them to pay for goods at their convenience. The credit facilities have created an innovative advantage which South Africans need to compete with. This is a new finding which emerged during the data analysis. In situations where spaza shops owned by locals are reluctant to give customers goods on credit, foreigners are using this to lure customers.

### 6.3.2. Negrophobia

White foreigners in comparison to their black counterparts are seen to contribute positively to the economy (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). The study participants indicate that white foreigners provide opportunities for employment while black foreigners from other African states are seen to be taking and not contributing to the economy. This reflects the findings by Solomon and Kosaka (2013), who illustrate that foreigners coming from other African countries are viewed as a burden to the economy. A slight number of the participants blame foreigners for unemployment among South Africans. This finding is reflected in an article written by Solomon and Kosaka (2013), who look at the causes of xenophobia in South Africa and mention that the treatment given to foreigners is not uniform and the acceptance of foreigners is tilted towards those who are seen to provide a positive economic contribution. The opinions of Sandile, one of the participants in this study, reflect the scapegoating process as described by Harris (2002:171), where foreigners symbolise dispossession,
unemployment and scarcity. In his view, foreigners are encroaching on his opportunity for employment. Yet, he also believes that foreigners are developing the economy and is open to learning about their culture.

6.4. Reasons for the violence

6.4.1. Unemployment

Nemavhandu (2009:10), notes that Soweto has a great deal of inequality among its residents with some areas being more affluent than others, while other residents still living in poverty as seen during the apartheid era. The findings for this study allude to this poverty. The participants, although happy with their lives, demonstrate a level of destitution and are frustrated by their own personal struggles of unemployment. This frustration, particularly against a backdrop where foreigners are seen to be thriving, could often result in feelings of resentment and violence.

The unemployment rate in the Dobsonville is very high, with the participants attributing the high levels of unemployment to the lack of motivation among the youth, the absence of career development programmes or skills development programmes in the community. The lack of funding for higher education is also noted as a barrier. The participants indicate that they are willing to study; however, they do not have the material means to do so. The unemployment rates among members of the Dobsonville community reflect those of the broader society, with South Africa having one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (Bernstein 2011). The findings illustrate that the study participants feel that the influx of foreign-owned spaza shops is infringing on their opportunities to make a living. This is demonstrated in instances where participants have indicated that their unemployment is further fuelled by their inability to gain funding to open spaza shops. The SAMP (2001) survey illustrates that South Africans believe that foreigners are attracted to the economic opportunities in the country. However, foreigners that are believed to contribute positively to the economy are tolerated, such as the Chinese who are believed to contribute to the economy by spending money in the country and providing employment opportunities to locals (Solomon & Kosaka 2013). In comparison, those coming from other African states such as Nigeria, Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia are believed to take money out of the country (Solomon & Kosaka 2013; Neocosmos 2006). This sentiment is shared by Crush and Pendleton (2004), who attribute the high levels of xenophobia in the country to the perceived economic harm to South African citizens.

6.4.2. Influx and success of foreign-owned shops

The influx of foreign-owned shops is seen as an issue of contention among the participants, who feel that foreigners are quickly occupying the spaza sector which has previously been occupied by South Africans. Locals are particularly bothered by their dominance in the Soweto spaza sector, believing this has prevented them from opening their own shops. This dominance in the spaza
sector, accordingly, has been the cause of tension between foreign shop owners and locals, eventually being a one of the reasons for the chaos that ensued. The phrases which the mob used, such as “Kill Makula” reflect several issues that have been alluded to in the previous section. Foreign shop owners are blamed for a myriad of social issues affecting the community. Foreigners are blamed for taking jobs away from South Africans. Keamogetswe, one of the participants, heard the mob accusing foreign spaza shop owners of stealing South African women. This finding reflects an article by Gqola (2008), where South African women are objectified as if they are possessions unable to make their own decisions. In this context, local women are seen as items which belong to South African men and provide a reason for violence against foreigners.

6.5. Possible solutions to the violence

The participants are generally opposed to the events that occurred in January 2015. They are disturbed by the events and do not condone violence against other people. Participants feel that the community should not have engaged in the looting of the foreign-owned shops. The possible solution to xenophobic attacks as recommended by the participants, are for political leaders to take a more proactive approach to enforcing laws that would deter those who commit these crimes; this would include laws that offer protection to foreign spaza shop owners. Another solution proposed by some of the participants is to intensify efforts regarding the dissemination of information aimed at educating locals about tolerance and diversity. There are also economic propositions for the mutual benefit of foreigners and locals, as suggested in the findings; foreign-owned spaza shops could provide employment opportunities for locals. Entrepreneurial programmes for locals are also suggested in the hope of empowering them to run their own shops. When combined, these possible solutions contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding violence, entrepreneurship and xenophobia in South African urban settlements.

6.6. Limitations of the study

The study is limited to the perspectives of South Africans, which neglects the views of the perpetrators and victims of the xenophobic attacks that took place in 2015. The purpose of using only South Africans in the research is to bridge a gap in literature where the perspectives of witnesses are often silent. The study also has more males that participated in the study than females because some of the females that had been referred by other participants through snowballing refused to participate in the study. The interviews had been conducted three years after the attacks had occurred, placing pressure on the witnesses to recollect the events of 2015. However, due to the intensity of the violence, many of their memories are still clear and they are able to recall and relay their perceptions of such violence.
6.7. Recommendations

6.7.1. Policy recommendations

The government should be more rigorous in its efforts to formalise the informal sector, particularly where spaza shops are concerned. This includes conducting regular inspections to ensure that counterfeit goods are not sold in these stores. Spaza shops should also have permits or licenses to operate, this will assist in legitimising the trade and building trust among the communities which they serve. Furthermore, interventions should be designed to assist South African spaza shops to compete with foreign-owned spaza shops. Educational interventions also need to be implemented to help South Africans understand the consequences of xenophobic violence.

6.7.2. Further research recommendations

The study findings demonstrate that the perpetrators of the violence were young, school-going youths. Research on the links between substance abuse among the youth and xenophobic violence needs to be investigated. This research should also seek to understand the reasons why school going children are the main perpetrators of this violence. Furthermore, the role of women in these attacks has been underrepresented in the literature. A study investigating the roles of women in these types of attacks needs to be investigated. A broader quantitative study which investigates the reasons for xenophobic violence against foreign spaza shops in South Africa should be carried out. A similar research study aimed at informing policy needs to be conducted with the perpetrators and victims of the violence, to gain a broader perspective on the reasons why these attacks occurred. Foreign spaza shops need more protection from police services and the programmes aimed at decreasing response times during these attacks need to be a priority.
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Moloi, R. 2014. ‘Exploring the Barriers to Sustainability of Spaza Shops in Atteridgeville, Tshwane’. Master of Arts, University of South Africa.


http://www.apartheidarchive.org/content/abstracts/abstract_zegeye.pdf
Profiles of the Interviewed sample: All the participants were witnesses of the violence against foreign-owned spaza shops during the 2015 attacks in Soweto.

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Appendix B: Discussion Guide

Interview Guide: Soweto residents’ perceptions on violence against black foreign shop owners in the 2015 xenophobic attacks

Research sub-questions:

- What do Soweto residents perceive as the cause for the attacks against foreign shop owners?
- What reasons do Soweto residents provide when explaining why certain foreigners such as Somali shop owners are targeted more than others?
- What do Soweto residents perceive to be possible solutions for xenophobic violence against foreign shop owners?

Demographic Information (Interviewer to record)

<table>
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*A pseudo name will be used throughout the interview to identify Participants

Ice breaker: Please tell me about yourself

Probe: Ask about family

Community life and personal background

1. How long have you been living in Dobsonville?

Probe: What is it like living here in Dobsonville?

Probe: Is there crime in the community?

Probe: How is unemployment in the community i.e. percentage?

Probe: How have things changed from the time you started living here until today?

Probe: Has life become better or has life changed for the worse? Why?
2. Are you employed?

_Probe:_ If employed, what do you do for a living?

_Probe:_ If unemployed how do you make a living?

_Perceptions about foreigners_

3. What do you think about foreigners in South Africa?

_Probe:_ Why do you say that? Probe for reasons

4. How do you feel about black foreigners from other African countries living and working in South Africa?

_Probe:_ Why do you say that? Probe for reasons

5. What do you think about white foreigners living and working in South Africa?

_Probe:_ Why do you say that? Probe for reasons

6. What do you think about Chinese foreigners living and working in South Africa?

_Probe:_ Why do you say that? Probe for reasons

_Feelings regarding foreign-owned shops_

7. How do you feel about foreigners with spaza shops in Soweto

_Probe for reasons:_ What do you like / dislike them?

8. Do you think that foreigners should be allowed to own spaza shops in townships such as Soweto?

_Probe:_ If answer is no, exactly why do you feel like that?

9. Do you feel that foreigners dominate the spaza shop business in Dobsonville?

_Probe:_ Has this changed the way that people make a living in the community?

_Events of January 2015 xenophobic attacks in Soweto_

10. Tell me what happened during the attacks on foreigners in Soweto?

_Probe:_ Tell me exactly what you saw.

11. How far were you from the violence?

12. What was the mood like in Dobsonville before the attacks?

13. Do you know what started the attacks or where they started?
14. Who was targeted during the attacks?

_Probe:_ Which foreigners were attacked (nationalities, women/men)?

_Probe:_ Why do you think these foreigners were attacked while others were not?

_Probe:_ Where were the foreigners when they were attacked (in their homes, place of business, spaza shop)?

_Probe:_ Did the attackers steal/destroy property owned by foreigners?

_Probe:_ Which property was destroyed/stolen during the violence?

_Probe:_ Can you describe the kind of people that were looting and attacking spaza owners i.e. gender, age?

_Probe:_ What types of weapons did they use to attack the foreigners and their businesses?

_Probe:_ What were they saying when they were attacking the foreigners?

15. What was the mood after the attacks?

_Probe:_ How did the community feel about the events that occurred?

_Probe:_ How did they make you feel?

**Justification for violent attacks against foreigners**

16. Tell me, what do you think of violent attacks, such as looting and damage to property of foreign-owned spaza shops?

17. According to you, why do you think the attacks in 2015 happened?

_Probe:_ Why were these people targeted?

18. Do you think the victims of the attacks were targeted because they are foreigners or do you think the attacks were based on criminal elements i.e. stealing stuff from the shops?

**Questions related to the prevention of violence against foreigners**

19. What do you think would stop violent attacks on foreign spaza shop owners?

**Questions related to economic competition**

20. Do you think South African shops are struggling?

_Probe:_ Why do you think South African spaza shops are struggling?

21. What competitive advantage do you think foreigners have over South Africans?
Appendix C: Pilot Study

Changes to the Initial Interview Questions

The initially planned interview questions, as well as the changes made to them after the pilot study, the individual changes and modifications of questions are demonstrated below:

1. How long have you been living in Dobsonville?
2. Are you employed?
3. What do you think about foreigners in South Africa?
4. How do you feel about black foreigners from other African countries?
   Change: Q4 was rephrased: How do you feel about black foreigners from other African countries working and living in South Africa? (The question was expanded to provide the context, this was similarly done for Q5 and Q6)
5. What do you think about white foreigners?
   Change: Q5 was rephrased: How do you feel about white foreigners from other African countries working and living in South Africa?
6. What do you think about Chinese foreigners?
   Change: Q6 was rephrased and modified: How do you feel about Chinese foreigners from other African countries working and living in South Africa?
7. How do you feel about foreigners with spaza shops in Soweto?
8. Do you think that foreigners should be allowed to own spaza shops in townships such as Soweto?
9. Do you feel that foreigners dominate the spaza shop business in Dobsonville?
10. Tell me what happened during the attacks on foreigners?
11. How far were you from the violence?
12. What was the mood like in the township before the attacks?
   Change: Q12 was rephrased and modified: What was mood like in Dobsonville before the attacks? ('Township' was replaced with Dobsonville to provide context)
13. Do you know what started the attacks or where they started?
14. Who was targeted during the attacks?
15. What was the mood after the attacks?
16. Tell me, what do you think of violent attacks, such as looting and damage to property of foreign-owned spaza shops?
17. According to you, why do you think the attacks in 2015 happened?
18. Do you think the victims of the attacks were targeted because they are foreigners, or do you think the attacks were based on criminal elements i.e. stealing stuff from the shops?
19. What do you think would stop violent attacks on foreign spaza shop owners?
20. Why do you think South African spaza shops are struggling?
   Change: Q20 was re-ordered: Do you think that South African shops are struggling? Why? (Starting the question with 'why' a form of bias by the researcher was and might have influenced the participants into believing that South African shops are struggling)
21. What competitive advantage do you think foreigners have over South Africans?
Appendix D: Ethical Clearance

From: Dr S Graham
To: B Shoke (200831757)
Cc: Dr K Batsai, Dr P Rugumanan
Date: 15 June 2017
Re: Research Ethics Committee and Higher Degrees Committee Proposal Approval

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Title of Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Dr K Batsai and Dr P Rugumanan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics Approval #</td>
<td>02-071-2017 (15 June 2017)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approval Date</td>
<td>15 June 2017</td>
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The Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee has approved your proposal and has sent you an independent letter of approval with associated comments.

In addition, the Faculty of Humanities Higher Degrees Committee (Humanities) approves your proposal if it is a Masters dissertation and recommends your proposal to the Senate Higher Degrees Committee if it is a Doctoral thesis.

Kindly provide a signed copy of your final, corrected proposal to Ms Aadeshnee Reddy at the Faculty of Humanities as soon as possible.

Warm regards

[Signature]

(DR S GRAHAM)
CHAIR: FACULTY OF HUMANITIES HIGHER DEGREES COMMITTEE (HUMANITIES)

(PROF T. GUSE)
CHAIR: FACULTY OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet

Dear participant,

My name is Boitshoko Shoke; I am currently registered for the course: Masters in Sociology by Dissertation at the University of Johannesburg. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on violence against foreign shop owners in Soweto. It is hoped that this study will contribute significantly to develop interventions to prevent future xenophobic attacks on foreign shop owners. I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you. If you are interested in taking part in the study, I will arrange for an interview with you at a time and place that suits you and the interviews will take approximately one hour. If you feel at any time within the process of the study that you wish to withdraw you may do so as well as to refuse answering a question you feel uncomfortable with answering it.

Information gathered will be shared with my supervisor: Prof Kezia Batisai, who can be contacted at keziab@uj.ac.za. Furthermore, the information gathered will be kept for two years following any publication or for six years if no publication emanate from the study. Please be alert that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. You are also kindly requested not to divulge any information regarding your participation in this study to anyone.

The interview will include sensitive issues; there is the possibility that you may experience some feelings of emotional distress. Should you therefore feel the need for supportive counselling following the interview, I have arranged for this service to be provided free of charge by the Mould Empower Serve (011 982 1072) within the Ipelegeng Community Centre.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I will answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on 076 036 2435. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study; an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

Boitshoko Shoke
Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

I hereby consent to participate in the research project. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

Name of participant: ____________________________

Date: _______________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________

Thank You

Boitshoko Shoke

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