

**Visible and Vulnerable:
Asian migrant communities in South Africa¹**

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Abstract

Recent Asian migrants to South Africa, while spared the worst of the xenophobic violence which erupted in May and June of 2008, remain highly visible and vulnerable. Communities of Chinese, Pakistani and Bangladeshis, still relatively small, have grown rapidly in the past decade. New migrants tend to settle in areas historically occupied by Indian and Chinese South Africans, the descendents of earlier generations of migrants. Confusion with these older, localised communities as well as a slightly higher socio-economic standing as small shopkeepers and entrepreneurs have buffered them from the worst expressions of xenophobia; however, they are targeted by corrupt officials and criminals for extortion, robbery and hijacking because of their vulnerability as small, independent retailers and their high visibility.

Key Words

Asian migrant communities, South Africa, Chinese, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, migration, xenophobia

Introduction

During May and June of 2008, xenophobic violence erupted across South African townships and left in its wake over sixty deaths. Hundreds of other migrants and local residents were attacked and raped, their houses and shops looted or destroyed, and thousands were internally displaced. At the time, the primary media focus was on black African migrants that suffered during this period, but lesser known communities of migrants, although largely unscathed in these attacks, have also been victims of episodic xenophobic violence, particularly in the last decade. This research highlights the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Chinese migrant communities' recent experiences of xenophobia attacks in South Africa.

Currently, there are at least 350,000 people of Chinese descent (Park 2009), and approximately 70,000 – 100,000 Pakistanis, a further 55,000 – 60,000 Bangladeshis, as well as a large influx of new migrants from India in South Africa; this paper focuses only on the first three communities. For a variety of reasons, these Asian migrants to South Africa appear to fly under the 'radar' of most migration and refugee groups; those involved in the protection and the study of migrants seem to focus little, if any, attention on Asian migrants.

To the average South African (and most other outsiders), new Asian migrant communities blend in seamlessly (and are often confused with) older communities of Indian and Chinese South Africans, who migrated to South Africa in the mid- to late 19th and early 20th centuries. Cases of 'mistaken identity' are often exacerbated by the fact that large numbers of the new migrants tend to settle in or near areas where South Africans of Asian descent have historically congregated in Gauteng province.

Even in places where there were few Asians in residence prior to the past few decades, such as in the Free State province or in the traditionally Afrikaner communities of Brakpan and Boksburg, east of Johannesburg, we would argue that historical memories of the existing Asian South African communities, both positive and negative, have an impact on the reception given to these new migrant communities. Widespread ignorance amongst South Africans regarding migrants, migration, and Asia, in general, as well as very limited levels of interaction also contribute to the confusion between Asian South Africans and new Asian migrants.

While it is clearly the black African migrant to South Africa who suffers the worst of violent xenophobic attacks, these diverse populations of Asian migrants are increasingly vulnerable not only to episodic violence, but more often to regular harassment and crime. Asian migrants may not bear the brunt of South African xenophobia at the moment; however, preliminary research indicates that they have been identified by corrupt government officials and criminals as potential targets for extortion and crime. This brief paper will attempt to answer two primary questions:

- Why were Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Chinese migrants NOT targeted in the same ways as the Black African migrants in the May-June 2008 xenophobic attacks?
- In what ways are Asian migrants targeted and does this constitute xenophobia?

Methodology

The research method utilised was primarily qualitative. We conducted a small number of interviews based on a questionnaire with Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians, and Chinese migrants. We also conducted a focus group with migrant traders, mostly Pakistani, at the Oriental Plaza. The total sample size was about

thirty. Finally, we incorporated research from interviews with the Chinese ambassador to South Africa, the Chinese Consul General in Johannesburg, and representatives from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani High Commissions conducted in mid-2008.²

Research was carried out in the Fordsburg/Mayfair areas of Johannesburg as well as the East Rand (Brakpan, Benoni, and Boksburg) for the South Asian migrant communities and in Cyrildene and First Chinatown (Commissioner Street in the central business district) for the Chinese migrants. Research conducted in 2008 also covered the Free State province, which lies south of Johannesburg and the Gauteng Province.

The respondents in the latest round of field research were all male. The lack of female respondents is indicative of three issues that we encountered: a gender disparity in Asian migrant populations, a language barrier, and traditional gender norms. The vast majority of the South Asian migrants are male. This is typical of most new migrant groups: young, single men tend to land first and then, if successful, they will return to the sending country to collect or find wives and children. Language is also a barrier to effectively interviewing more of the newer immigrants and female immigrants within both the Chinese and South Asian communities as many speak little to no English and neither of the researchers can speak Urdu, Bengali, Mandarin or any of the other languages of the sending regions.

Thirdly, gender dynamics in traditional South Asian migrant communities as well as Chinese communities tend to operate such that women are often 'shielded' from unnecessary exposure to the 'outside'. The impact of such dynamics were felt by these researchers, even where we specifically searched for female respondents. Almost all of the shops and other businesses in the South Asian communities of Johannesburg were run by men, at least in the 'front' of the business, while small China shops were typically operated by young couples. However, even when faced with a group of all-female researchers, the husband/male typically spoke on behalf of the family.

Migration Patterns

South Africa is the only country in Africa that is home to three distinct communities of Chinese: the Chinese South Africans or local Chinese, the Taiwanese, and the mainland Chinese. The local Chinese are descended from independent immigrants who arrived in South Africa as early as the late 1870s. Small numbers of Chinese continued to immigrate to South Africa in the early to mid-1900s, despite legal restrictions on immigration, trade, and residence. The Immigrants Regulation Amendment Act (1953) ended any new migration from China for almost two and a half decades, until the 1970s, when the apartheid government eased their implementation of immigration policy in order to attract foreign investment from Taiwan.

From the late 1970s and through the early to mid-1990s, approximately 30,000 Taiwanese arrived in South Africa. The first wave of Taiwanese were industrialists and their families, lured by generous incentives for investors willing to start up manufacturing factories, mostly in the textile sector, in and around the former homeland areas. Following the industrialists were smaller entrepreneurs and students; these latter groups settled in the cities of South Africa. Of the 30,000, most took South African citizenship, as both the Republic of China (ROC-Taiwan) and South Africa allowed this at the time; since the late 1990s, however, more than two-thirds of the Taiwanese have left South Africa. With South Africa's recognition of the

People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1998, the termination of incentives (after their initial 10-year run), increasing labour problems at their factories, and the influx of inexpensive Chinese consumer goods into South Africa's markets, many of the Taiwanese factories simply could not remain competitive. At present there are an estimated 6,000 Taiwanese remaining in South Africa, congregated in Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Cape Town.

In terms of early Indian immigration, while a small number of slaves arrived in the Cape in the 1650s, the first concentrated arrival of Indians in South Africa dates to 1860 (Joshi, 2008: 3). During the period 1860 to 1911, approximately 140,000 Indians were brought to South Africa as indentured labourers. Although mainly contracted to work on the sugar plantations in Durban, they were also employed on the railways, dockyards, municipal services as well domestic service (Desai, A and Vahed, G 2007). Free Indians or passenger Indians, as they are sometimes called, arrived a couple decades later, from the 1880s (Bhana, S and B Pachai (eds)1984 and Swan, M 1985). Through the 20th century the white minority government's of South Africa expressed a desire for both the repatriation of Indians and the stopping of further immigration. While the former did not have much success, the latter policy worked. It was only in the early 1990s that Indians and Pakistanis started arriving as 'new immigrants' in South Africa (Desai, A and B Maharaj 2007). Excluding the new immigrants, there are just over a million Indians living in South Africa. Most are concentrated in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Prior to the end of apartheid, in the late 1970s and 1980s, small numbers of migrants began arriving in South Africa from China and the Indian subcontinent. Larger numbers of migrants began coming into South Africa around the transition in the mid-1990s, and the vast majority have landed on South Africa's shores in the past 5-10 years. Typical of global and historical migration patterns, our research also indicates that more educated and more resourced migrants came out first, followed by relatives and friends from the same villages or towns, and increasingly others without direct contacts in South Africa. These latter appear to make decisions about migrating based on information about South Africa, principally about the business opportunities and relatively lax border controls, gleaned from various sources; in other words, they are not, strictly speaking, part of the typical chain of migration patterns of the past, with direct links to previous migrants.

The vast majority of the newest Chinese arrivals to South Africa hail from two or three districts of Fujian province. They come from areas that have experienced tremendous social and economic upheavals due to China's shifting economic policies. These policies have resulted in vast waves of migrant labour leaving these areas for China's mega-cities. South Africa is only one of many receiving countries of those chose to leave China. The remainder of Chinese migrants in South Africa come from all over the country, well beyond the historical coastal sending regions of Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Fujian.

While further research would be required to confirm this, it would also appear that the vast majority of Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants to South Africa hail from two or three regions of those countries where poverty and high population densities push people out to seek opportunities elsewhere. For example, one Bangladeshi informant reported that more than 50% of the Bangladeshis in South Africa come from the greater Noakhali district.

While many of these newcomers claim that they are in South Africa temporarily, our research indicates that the vast majority of Pakistanis, at least those here for longer than 7 years, are not returning home, but becoming South African citizens, with no

specific plans to return to their home country. Many of the Chinese interviewed, indicated that whilst continuing to send remittances to family members in China, they have also been in South Africa longer than they had originally intended. While they might harbour dreams of returning home, until they can make enough money to repay their debts or as long as they are earning more in South Africa than they might earn in their home country, they cannot or will not leave.

Many of the immigrants are related either through family or social networks. One Bangladeshi informant reported that he had one brother, seven brothers-in-law, and over 70 cousins scattered across South Africa, living in areas as diverse as Johannesburg, Umtata in the Eastern Cape, and Ficksburg and Clocolan in the Free State. While a few of the cousins had been in South Africa for as long as 20 years, most, like himself, had only been in South Africa a few years. Another Chinese informant reported that she had brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins operating small shops in small towns in the surrounding 100 kilometre-range from her own.

Significant push factors for all Asian migrants that contribute to leaving their home countries would be population pressures, and, in the case of the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, political strife. China has a population of approximately 1.3 billion; Pakistan, over 180 million; and Bangladesh, close to 160 million. They leave behind towns and cities that are largely overcrowded, congested, and polluted. A couple of the Pakistani respondents mentioned that they were forced to leave, because of legal or political troubles.

Research also revealed that for several of the young men, spending some time overseas seems to have become a rite of passage in certain migrant-sending areas. Literature on Chinese emigration also refers to *qiaoxing* or a 'culture of out-migration' from specific regions of China; *qiaoxing* refers to specific emigration villages and towns where a migration culture has emerged and where many local people view their emigration as their common destiny (Li 1999). With economic circumstances in their hometowns difficult, they are encouraged to 'go out' and seek their fortunes overseas. Similarly so for the Pakistani respondents, who also seemed to be seeking adventure and freedom; for example, several of the young men we interviewed mentioned the freedom from close/tight-knit family scrutiny and pressure as a benefit of living so far from their families.

Some of the pull factors to South Africa included the relative ease in entering the country, numerous economic opportunities, and low start-up costs of doing business here. Almost all the respondents mentioned the temperate weather conditions as one of the main elements they liked about Johannesburg. Several respondents also indicated that South Africa was more relaxed; things generally worked here; the roads were better, and the traffic, less; and while corruption exists, there are laws in place, too. While parts of Johannesburg might appear to most South Africans as the busiest and most crowded place in the country, for migrants leaving Karachi, Lahore, Shanghai or Fuqing, it is a relatively relaxed and orderly environment replete with possibilities.

For many of the Muslim respondents, the value of practicing their religion freely, without hassle or intimidation, was a significant plus factor. Most of the Muslims we interviewed spoke about the ease with which they could practice their religion without being discriminated against, numerous places of worship and restaurants that served *halaal* foods as adding to the perks of living in Johannesburg. "Johannesburg feels like a modern-version of Pakistan" said one respondent (Interviewee Y2).

Legal Status of Asian Migrants

While there is virtually no way to confirm the numbers of 'legal' and 'illegal' Asian migrants, our research indicates that quite a large proportion of them entered the country illegally but now have tenuous legal claims on their continued residence in South Africa.³ According to one key informant, between 25 to 50% of the immigrants from these countries (Pakistan and Bangladesh) are in South Africa without official documents; however, another Bangladeshi informant reported that at least 75% of Bangladeshis were in possession of 'legal documents'. He reported that some carry South African passports, some have permanent residence, and some have applied for political asylum and have received temporary work permits.

The numbers of mainland Chinese in South Africa have been equally difficult to ascertain. The PRC government officials acknowledged in 2008 interviews that there were between 180,000 and 200,000 Chinese in the country legally; more recently the embassy was heard reporting that the total number of Chinese in South Africa was approximately 300,000. Notwithstanding the approximately 10,000 local Chinese and the 6,000 Taiwanese, and the 200,000 *legal* mainland Chinese, this still leaves approximately 100,000 (and perhaps more) Chinese immigrants whose legal status is questionable. Most of these have either entered the country legally and overstayed their visas, forfeiting their security deposits at the South African embassy or consulates in China, or they have entered the country illegally through one of the land borders and applied for a change in status, typically, applying for asylum after their arrival. This is also the case for Pakistan and Bangladeshi migrants.

Although the acquisition of forged documents can be costly and dangerous, and ultimately provide little security for the Asian migrants, the process also appears to be relatively straightforward and easy, with numerous 'snakeheads' or migration brokers from within these communities on hand to assist. One Pakistani informant surmised that his people chose to come to South Africa because 'illegal immigration to South Africa is very easy. South Africa's land borders are very porous (Rugunanan 2009). The majority enter South Africa through neighbouring countries, primarily Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho. The Pakistani informant stated: "Human smugglers are very active at these borders. Fake passports are issued here." Our preliminary interviews with both Chinese and South Asian migrants would seem to corroborate the view that South Africa is a destination of choice, in part, because it is fairly easy to enter the country.

One solution for a small number of migrant men has been to marry local South African women, said one of our informants. Another is to work through an 'immigration broker' to facilitate these processes; however, many of these brokers use extra-legal means. Almost everyone we spoke to responded that they held asylum papers or temporary visas of one sort or another.

Amongst those Asian migrants with networks and skills, the proportion of 'legitimate' visas is higher; however, based on interviews, the vast majority of Chinese, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants appear to have received their asylum documents, temporary visas, and work permits, whether knowingly or not, through extortion and bribery often via an immigration broker. They hold these paper documents or stamps in their passports but likely not linked to the national Home Affairs computer database, making them vulnerable to both honest and corrupt police and Home Affairs officials.

Occupation and Settlement Patterns

The largest concentrations of the more educated and professional migrants, particularly those who arrived prior to the last decade, can be found in Johannesburg and other large cities, settling in or near areas that have historically been occupied by Chinese and Indian South Africans. Increasingly, however, large numbers, particularly amongst those migrants who have arrived more recently, who are less educated and have fewer skills and fewer networks are moving into small towns and townships⁴ throughout the country, in peri-urban and rural areas. They tend to be 'driven out' by market saturation, their inability to compete with established businesses, and high costs of living in urban centres and suburbs. Less economic competition and lower operating costs are the main draw cards of the small towns and townships.

Field research in the Free State conducted over the past 18 months indicates that almost every major town, secondary town, and even the smallest settlements had at least one Chinese shop (usually along the main road). For every Chinese shop, anecdotal evidence suggests that there were at least one or two either Bangladeshi or Pakistani shops, also along the main road and another one or two in the adjacent black township, although further research would be required to verify this last claim. According to one of our respondents, one can now find Bangladeshis all over South Africa, in small towns around the country.⁵

A small proportion of these new migrants are educated professionals. For example, one respondent claimed that there are between 150 and 200 Bangladeshi medical doctors in South Africa, employed by the South African government.⁶ In most of the major metropolitan areas of the country, one can find wealthy Chinese businessmen, senior managers of Chinese state-owned and private companies, and other educated professionals. There are also a small number of highly successful Pakistani businessmen and a few large Pakistani overseas enterprises, including MAC washing powder. However, the vast majority of the immigrants are engaged as entrepreneurs in small retail businesses. One Bangladeshi informant reported that at least 80% of all Bangladeshis in South Africa were young men engaged as small shopkeepers. Another informant claimed that most Bangladeshis are mainly engaged in small grocery stores or 'tuck shops' in black townships adjacent to small towns.

The Chinese, too, are generally engaged in small retail businesses: general dealers, grocery shops, 'textiles' shops (which sell everything from adult and children's clothing, blankets, clocks and watches, toys, shoes and other 'leather' products), and small electronics/housewares shops can be found along the main roads of small towns across the country. The exception to this trend occurs in Johannesburg, where close to a dozen Chinese wholesale/distribution centres house hundreds of shops and stalls, which wholesale many of these same items to retailers of various ethnic groups from across southern and central Africa, placing them in a commercial stratum above and apart from most black South Africans (Park 2009).

Pakistani retailers seem to focus on cell phone accessories and repairs, computer services, medical supplies, and linens, leather, fabrics, and housewares. At border areas and in rural areas, Pakistanis are also running large grocery stores such as outlets of 'Cash 'n' Carry'. In Johannesburg's Oriental Plaza, it is estimated that one third⁷ of the retail shops are now operated by foreigners, mostly from Pakistan, who are renting from Indian South African owners. Together with the Somali and Ethiopian traders, these three groups now appear to dominate the low-end retail consumer market across the country.

One possible explanation for why Asian migrants are not targeted in the same way as black African migrants might be that they present a less direct threat of competition for resources or jobs. For example, in Johannesburg, the Chinese occupy different socio-economic strata, selling wholesale to retailers. This was not initially the case, as earlier Chinese migrants in Johannesburg's CBD experienced clashes with black South African hawkers; however, the Chinese seemed to have learned from these early encounters and have since removed themselves from potential direct competition (Park 2008b and 2008c). Where Asian migrants (as well as Somali and Ethiopian migrants) have been targeted, they are located in the townships and the informal settlements; in these cases, it may be perceived that they are competing (and often out-competing) with local businesses. As Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants become more settled in South Africa, it is likely that they, too, will begin to move away from retail and into more diverse occupations, thus further decreasing economic competition with locals.

In the Free State, because Chinese and Indians were not legally permitted residence in the province until 1986, when the laws first established in 1891, were finally overturned for the benefit of Taiwanese investors. (Park and Chen 2008: 31). The new Chinese and South Asian migrants entering the province as shopkeepers have not replaced existing Chinese or Indian shops; neither have they displaced white or black locals from existing businesses. Rather, in most instances, migrants have started up new businesses in places where they saw potential gaps (e.g. in the townships and former black locations) or they purchased existing businesses from white South Africans (often Portuguese, Greek, or Cypriot South Africans) who were moving away or moving on to larger premises/bigger businesses. In Johannesburg, the same phenomenon occurs, where many Asian migrants have established new businesses and created a small number of jobs. Rather than competing against locals, then, these new Asian migrants are creating a limited number of opportunities for them and/or other migrants.

This is not to say that there are no racial tensions between Asian migrants and locals. Several respondents stated openly that many from their own communities were racist. Research by Joshi (2008) on Pakistanis in Ladismith corroborates these views. Preliminary research currently being conducted by Park on African perceptions of the Chinese in South Africa indicates that South Africans find the labour practices of most Chinese deplorable; there were many complaints about both low wages and poor work conditions. However, these same perception surveys indicate that many of these same South Africans also find that Chinese contribute to local development, provide access to inexpensive consumer goods, and provide some jobs. In other words, African perceptions of and attitudes toward Chinese seem fairly balanced.

One potential source of increased racial and xenophobic tension lies in the preference of most Asian migrant businesses to hire non-South African blacks, most frequently Zimbabweans and Malawians. While complaints are lodged against the Asian migrant employers, it is the Zimbabwean and Malawian migrants who typically bear the brunt of these tensions and jealousies. Numerous respondents from all three communities mentioned their frustrations with black South African workers (variously described as lazy and difficult) and with South African labour laws (regarding minimum wages and standard working hours); all respondents also stated their clear preference for working with Zimbabweans and Malawians, who were much more willing to work hard (for less pay). This clear preference for non-nationals at a time when unemployment rates among South Africans is increasing, can only serve

to exacerbate tensions between migrant groups and South Africans, with growing xenophobic sentiments targeted at those perceived to be 'stealing' local jobs.

Crimes against Asian migrants

Given that their tenuous legal status is known to many government officials in the country, Asian migrants are extremely vulnerable to corruption. Chinese friends and colleagues complain regularly that they are stopped by local police fishing for bribes. The Chinese Consul-General reported that he receives a dozen calls every day from Chinese nationals complaining about traffic police, South African Police Service (SAPS) officers, and immigration officers all attempting to extort bribes from Chinese. He has also received several reports of Chinese nationals being robbed by people with police badges. In response, the Consul-General has lodged complaints with the Gauteng Police Commissioner and police station managers. He reported that corruption and crime were his biggest worries and that this has resulted in many wealthy Chinese people leaving South Africa.⁸

According to one Bangladeshi informant, "Even those with proper documents are harassed." Another Pakistani shopkeeper said of the local officials (both police and Home Affairs), "These people are 'troublers'; they only know how to make trouble for us." One of our respondents went so far as to argue the following: "We are their personal ATMs! They hassle us whenever they need cash." Joshi produced similar findings relating to constant police harassment and corruption against the immigrants (2008: 15). Majodina states that "police routinely confiscate and destroy refugees' documents in order to justify arresting them" (in Nduru 2005).

The other principal problem for Asian migrants in South Africa, particularly those engaged in shopkeeping, is crime. Many South Africans are aware that migrants often do not use the formal banking system, carry and keep significant quantities of cash, often have insufficient security systems, and seldom report crimes; thus they are vulnerable to robberies, break-ins and lootings. They are, in the words of one of the informants, 'soft targets'. The Free State research also revealed several reports of car hijackings which took place along the road after weekly or monthly stock purchases had been made in Johannesburg; in other words, criminals were targeting shopkeepers after they stocked up at large warehouse/distribution centres.

One informant reported (in mid-2008) that in the past six months there had been a marked increase in murders, robberies and robbery attempts, lootings and beatings against Pakistanis. He reported that over the past several years increasing numbers of bodies of deceased Pakistani migrants have had to be transported back to Pakistan. A Bangladeshi informant reported that in 2007 in the town of Delareyville in the North West Province about 70 Bangladeshi shops were looted, the shopkeepers beaten.⁹ He said, 'I hear, every day, that some shop was broken into, looted.' The difficulty is that many of these incidents are not reported, perhaps because of the tenuous immigration status of the migrants, and perhaps due to a general lack of trust in the police and other officials. Even fewer of these cases ever get national news coverage. While it is difficult to distinguish between opportunistic crimes and xenophobic attacks, it would appear that crime is taking its toll on the lives of these most vulnerable of the Asian migrants.

While respondents report that the majority of cases of extortion, robbery and hijacking are perpetrated by black South Africans, there is also ample evidence of increased migrant-on-migrant violence, mostly in the large cities and often involving organized criminal syndicates, popularly referred to as Chinese triads and the Pakistani mafia. While the Chinese Consul-General and others claim that there are

no organized Chinese triads operating in Cyrildene, the new Chinatown has been a site of a high crime levels since its formation, including hijacking, extortion, and pirating of copyrighted materials.¹⁰ A Pakistani informant also spoke of a Pakistani mafia, reportedly engaged in pirating DVDs and selling drugs; however, he was hesitant about going into any details. Preliminary interviews also indicated that politics of the 'homeland' have also migrated to South Africa, sometimes manifesting in violence.

Finally, fierce business competition between Asian migrant groups is also starting to result, in some instances, in violence and intimidation. For example, in one small Free State town, a Chinese informant reported that she and her mother had been harassed and intimidated by local thugs, hired by an 'Indian' (probably Bangladeshi) competitor in the adjacent township. There are also numerous unofficial reports of beatings and even murders, with police investigations often pointing to business competitors from the same ethnic community.

Inter- and Intra-Group Tensions

While there were some legitimate fears on the part of new Asian migrants about another outbreak of xenophobic violence that might affect them more directly, our interviews revealed that their day-to-day concerns and tensions had less to do with xenophobia and more to do with intra-community relations. For example, several of the Pakistani respondents spoke of tensions within the Pakistani community and between the Pakistanis and local Indian South Africans. Our research indicated a range of views.

Almost all of the individual Pakistani interviewees claimed that the Indian South Africans disliked them and/or were jealous of their business successes. One informant claimed that they are called names by the local Indian South Africans, including, 'dirty' and 'Paki'. He also claimed that the Indian South Africans sometimes called the authorities on the new migrants to report about their questionable legal status, the lack of hygiene at restaurants, or non-compliance with other laws. These claims are corroborated by Joshi's research (2008).

A number of Pakistani interviewees also accused Indian South African employers of exploiting desperate and destitute Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants. Tensions have been further exacerbated around the issue of competition over local Indian women. Pakistanis have been accused of 'stealing local women' and marrying them simply for legal documents. One Pakistani informant admitted that a few 'bad eggs' had married and then abandoned these Indian South African women, contributing toward their bad reputation in this regard.

While one might assume that their common religion, Islam, would serve to unite locals and migrants from different communities, research seems to indicate otherwise. One of Joshi's respondents commented: "locals are not friendly, but in the name of Islam we meet ..." (2008: 17). One observer spoke of the "fragmented nature of the Muslim community," depicting the relationship between the local Muslims and newcomers as "not hostile, but not highly friendly" (Rawoot 2009). Interestingly, This same informant observed that apartheid caused this "segregated mentality" and that it had led to Indians trying to "protect their way of life" (Ibid.). These more negative views were, however, contested in a focus group with Pakistani and Bangladeshi traders at the Oriental Plaza.¹¹ The participants indicated that there was mutual respect for all traders and that a professional business relationship existed amongst all the traders. The foreign traders were full of praise with regard to

the protection received and pro-active efforts by the (mostly Indian South African) management of the Oriental Plaza during the xenophobic attacks of May 2008.¹²

Ongoing research on the Chinese in South Africa has revealed simmering tensions between groups of Chinese. Some of the earlier tensions, in the 1980s and 1990s, revolved around language, culture and reputation. The Chinese South Africans were concerned about the negative impact of new Chinese migrants on their hard-won respectability. Newspaper reports during that period seemed to focus on only the most negative activities of the new Chinese migrants: overfishing, abalone smuggling, rhino horn and elephant tusk trade, poor labour practices of Taiwanese textile factories, and tensions with black hawkers. The Chinese South Africans viewed themselves as having held on to 'real' and traditional Chinese values while the newcomer Chinese from Taiwan and Hong Kong were overly materialistic and avaricious; in turn, they were criticised for their inability to speak Chinese, a skill lost to many Chinese South Africans over the generations in this country.

Newer fissures, revealed in more recent research, seem to exist between those Chinese who are more settled and adapted to life in South Africa and the most recent migrants from Fujian province. The more established Chinese (including, now, Taiwanese and some of the mainland Chinese as well as the Chinese South Africans) look down on the lower classed 'peasants' from Fujian, who are also alleged to be involved in criminal activities.

Our preliminary interviews with South Asian migrants seem to reveal similar divisions. The lines can be drawn along several different axes including generation/time in South Africa with established/settled migrants aligning themselves against the newcomers; established locals in this instance are the 'insiders', while the newer South Asian migrants are the 'outsiders'. We also found evidence of religious differences and factions with the various Islamic communities, and divisions about country-of-origin politics (for example, around the Kashmir conflict), class and educational level, as well as ethnicity and language. Based on such a small number of interviews, it is difficult to make any broad generalizations about the nature and level of tensions within these communities. At this stage of our research, we can only surmise that intra-group tensions affect these communities and may be as significant as inter-group tensions.

Conclusion

In an earlier unpublished paper, Park made the argument that the relative size of the migrant communities, economic niche and class position, residential proximity, state-to-state economic and political ties, as well as race and legacies of apartheid should be considered in any attempt to understand why Africans (and not the Chinese) were the primary targets of xenophobia (2008b:2). While we have not explored all of these facets in this paper, we believe that the general argument still holds for the broader question: why Africans and *not* Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Chinese?

To some extent, the ways in which xenophobic violence has played out in South Africa is counter-intuitive: if black South Africans are going to target the foreigner, wouldn't the foreigners be identified as those *most different* and most 'other' from themselves? And yet, it was clearly evidenced in May-June 2008 that the black African foreign national continues to bear the brunt of xenophobic sentiment and violence in South Africa. This paper bears out the notion, in particular, that the lack of residential proximity and the lack of direct competition (real or perceived) acts as a buffer between the most violent manifestations of South African xenophobia and the new Asian migrants.

While apartheid is long over, the impact of separate development and the Group Areas Act can still be felt across the country. Ethnic groups remain separated, now primarily because of socio-economic reasons rather than by legal fiat or political force. Asian migrants tend to live and work in areas separated from the vast majority of poor black South African, in areas still occupied by those who look like them. The newest Chinese migrants tend to gather in or near existing Chinatown areas of Johannesburg, while Chinese South Africans and other more established Chinese migrants spread out throughout the city in middle class areas and gated communities. New Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants settle in existing Indian or Muslim areas. When they are imbedded within poor black areas, usually townships or informal settlements, they, too, become more vulnerable to periodic flare-ups of xenophobic violence.

Furthermore, pre-existing apartheid-era notions of race, of Chinese and Indian South Africans positioned in a stratum above black South Africans and the conflation of resident and migrant Asian groups also served, in this instance, to protect the new Asian migrants from the worst of the xenophobia. In some ways, this study bears out some of the claims that what we witnessed in South Africa in May-June 2008 was not straight xenophobia but a particular racialized version of it, variously called 'Afrophobia' or 'Negrophobia'. There were, as well, undeniable class aspects of the violence, with only the most impoverished and most vulnerable living in townships and squatter areas being attacked. However, our preliminary research has also shown that these Asian migrants remain both visible and extremely vulnerable to high levels of crime and corruption. We would argue that they also remain vulnerable to more violent expressions of xenophobia, depending on the changing mood of the country's citizens toward the various migrants entering her doors.

In spite of this, one of the most interesting findings of this research was the high degree of contentment with their lives and the high levels of adjustment amongst many of our Asian migrant respondents. They perceive South Africa to be a land of opportunity and aside from the crime, are very happy to make this their future home. While many still felt like outsiders, still not completely embraced as equals, quite a few had managed to establish comfortable niches within the city. Therefore, a simple binary formulation of insider-outsider cannot be applied here; rather, there were arenas in which some of the migrants felt at home; others in which they felt less comfortable; and some where they felt completely excluded and extremely vulnerable.

Notes

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Atlantic Philanthropies, South Africa, of this research project. This preliminary research project formed part of a larger study dealing with civil society responses to xenophobia in South Africa. A version of this paper, with policy recommendations, has been submitted to the funder as part of a larger report; it is currently under review.

² More recent attempts to re-interview officials for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani High Commissions have been unsuccessful.

³ We must also acknowledge that there are severe problems of backlog and corruption within the South African Department of Home Affairs and with the legislation around migration. Here, due to space limitations, we focus primarily on the information gleaned from our research.

⁴ During apartheid most towns permitted only white residents while all 'non-whites' were forced to live in outlying 'townships'. While apartheid has officially ended, these residence patterns remain largely unchanged in most parts of the country.

⁵ Based on media reports, it would appear that Somali and Ethiopian traders are also rapidly moving in to fill perceived market gaps in impoverished communities around the country.

⁶ Based on an off the record telephonic interview with anonymous source at Bangladeshi HC, April 2008

⁷ A Sukhool, Interview with authors, 11 November 2009.

⁸ Comments from an interview with an anonymous source, April 2008.

⁹ We have not been able to confirm this report.

¹⁰ Based on various news sources.

¹¹ Interview with management and owners of retail outlets at Oriental Plaza with author, 11 November 2009.

¹² It should be noted that the focus group was conducted on the premises of the Oriental Plaza, in a room made available by the management of the Plaza; both the location and the circumstances may have influenced the participants to be more generous about their views of Indian South Africans than they might really feel.