Tactical Cosmopolitanism and Idioms of Belonging: Insertion and Self-Exclusion in Johannesburg

Loren B. Landau  
Director  
Forced Migration Studies Programme  
Wits University  
loren.landau@wits.ac.za

Iriann Stella Marie Haupt  
Doctoral Candidate  
Forced Migration Studies Programme  
Wits University  
haupt.iriann@gmail.com

Paper Prepared for:

Immigration, Monitorities, and Multiculturalism in Democracies Conference  
25-27 October 2007  
Montreal, Canada
Tactical Cosmopolitanism and Idioms of Belonging: Insertion and Self-Exclusion in Johannesburg

Loren B. Landau and Iriann Haupt

Abstract Research amongst various immigrant groups in Johannesburg points to the emergence of distinctive ways of negotiating inclusion and belonging that apparently transcend ethnic, national or transnational paradigms. Confronted with new South African nationalism, a restrictive immigration regime and xenophobia, the reaction of immigrants takes the form of what we term ‘tactical cosmopolitanism’: a mish-mash of rhetoric and organizational strategies attempt to negotiate partial inclusion in South Africa’s transforming society without becoming bounded by it. However, this tactical cosmopolitanism is not a coherent philosophy, but rather a set of diverse practices that are transforming the city, the lives of its residents, and how they relate to people, place and institutions. This paper attempts to contribute to the emerging literature on cosmopolitanism ‘from below’, conceptualised not as a philosophy but as a practice and form of experiential culture. Drawing on recent data from surveys as well as interviews with migrants, service providers, advocates and local government representatives, this paper starts with outlining the forces that tactical cosmopolitanism has emerged to resist: a harsh immigration regime and even harsher set of social responses. We then sketch the specifics of this emerging form of belonging and provide a brief outline of its empirical manifestations. We end by raising a series of empirical questions that, when answered, will add depth to our discussion by speaking to the dimensions, prevalence, persistence and social importance of tactical cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: South Africa; Johannesburg; Immigration; Xenophobia; Cosmopolitanism

Scholarly accounts of contemporary cosmopolitanism are snared between two pairs of capstans pulling the concept in conflicting directions. Two of the pulleys are worked by philosophers who speak of what Beck and Sznайдer (2006) term, ‘the cosmopolitan condition’ (see, for example, Beck 1998; Appiah 1998). Some among this group celebrate the potential of transgressing nationalism while others fear that cosmopolitanism is threatening the communitarian bases of human society or is a nefarious, Trojan horse for elite, ‘western’, capitalist and consumerist values (see Walzer 1983; Carens 1987; Waldron 1992). In almost all cases, the philosophers ponder how we should respond to these opportunities/threats: policy response, a new ethics, and new ways of being in the world. The remaining pulleys are worked by prophets speculating on a new world of pastiches and hybridity on one end and others the reassertion of localised identities emerging in response to pressures of globalization (see Geertz 1986: 121; Smith 1995: 20; Featherstone 1990; Sassen 2002; Geschiere 2006). There are of course those working between these extremes, but rarely do those engaged with cosmopolitanism step down from generalization long enough to explore ‘actually existing cosmopolitanism’ (Robbins 1998) or ‘empirical-analytical cosmopolitanism’ (Beck and Sznайдer’s 2006:6; also Vertovec 2006). But it is only by doing so can we move beyond rhetoric, speculation,
and proselytising in ways that recognise how migrants, refugees, and other transnational actors are already forging new forms of cosmopolitanism. Through its focus on inner-city Johannesburg’s foreign-born population, we surface a kind of ‘cosmopolitanism from below’ (cf. Portes 1997) that is often lost amidst discussions of ‘elite’ cosmopolitanism (Söderström 2006: 555) and other debates over human rights, crime, or urban degradation/regeneration.

Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Urban Africa

Within the literature on migrant identities and practices, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are often conceptually indistinct and used interchangeably. For our purposes, we follow (Roudometof 2005: 121) in arguing that, ‘the presence of a cosmopolitan outlook (…) is conceptually distinct from the transnational experience.’ The transnational paradigm responded to the shortcomings of assimilationist and ethnic retentionist/pluralist theories arguing that migrants are ‘embedded in multi-layered transnational social fields’ and that, to truly understand migrants’ activities and experiences, their lives must be studied within the context of these multiple strata (Levitt and Vertovec 2003: 567). These social fields are characterised by ‘social relations . . . that join together particular places in two or more countries’ (Pries 2002:20). As the ‘transnationals’ re-configure the meaning of territories and boundaries and re-interpret their role as sources of belonging, they are often assumed to experience some sort of ‘conflict of loyalties’ (Caglar 2001: Lamont and Molnar 2002:185). Empirical cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is a state of being characterised by a high degree of (or even complete) national detachment from nations and the territories they inhabit. Friedman writes, that cosmopolitanism ‘in identity terms [is] betwixt and between without being liminal. It is shifting, participating in many worlds, without becoming part of them’ (Friedman 1994: 204 in Vertovec 2006: 3-10).

Qualifying the concept further, scholars classify cosmopolitanism in thick and thin forms. Thick or ‘rooted’ cosmopolitanism – sometimes referred to as ‘liberal nationalism’ (Bowden 2003: 240) – implies that it is possible to bring together loyalty to the nation or specific cultures and an ‘openness towards difference and otherness’ (Roudometof 2005: 122). Thin or ‘cool’ cosmopolitanism shows a high level of detachment that ‘allows for transcending the boundaries of one’s culture or locale’ and is characterised by an ‘ironic form of distance from current cultural attachments’ (Roudometof 2005: 113). For our purposes, we are not concerned with the compatibility of a nation and ‘other’ delocalised identity, but we build empirically on the notion of ‘thin’ cosmopolitanism, particularly the ways in which it allows strangers and outsiders a kind of distance from the world that they physically inhabit (cf. Simmel 1964)

In particular, this essay outlines a form of cosmopolitanism that is evident among foreign-born populations as they mix with South African citizens in townships and the country’s ‘forbidden cities,’ precarious.’ One of the best examples of work in this vein is Diouf’s (2000) discussion of ‘Vernacular Cosmopolitanism.’ For other empirically based work on cosmopolitanism ‘from below’ see for example Lamont (2000); Furia (2005) and Zachary (2004).
areas once off limits to South Africa’s black population (Landau 2005). In these, South Africa’s ‘deficit of belonging’ is most evident as long standing ascriptive and subjective categories of race, ethnicity, and nationality are being challenged by cities’ superfluity and heterogeneity (Götz and Simone 2003; Mbembe 2004). But we are only beginning to understand the importance of what is taking place within this city ‘shifting sands’ (Bauman’s 2000): residents’ social realities, their individual aspirations and trajectories, and the interactions of products of conflicting ascriptive and subjective categories of belonging (see Tomlinson, et al, 2003; Simone 2001; Landau 2006). Given the speed with which new social formations are being fashioned and remade by geographic and social mobility and displacement, it is unclear what forms of inclusion, solidarity or mutual recognition are possible and what forms of inclusion and belonging may already exist (c.f. Taylor 1992; Pollack, et al, 2000; Habermas 1998).

What we do know is that as citizens of all backgrounds are forging a new nationalism through their engagements with each other and the state, they confront a foreign born population that is making claims to the very territory on which the nation is to be founded. There is much to be done exploring the content of this nationalist project, but that is work another time. Instead, this paper documents reactions to two forms of national self-demarcation: a restrictive immigration regime and the hostile, occasionally violent xenophobia that characterises citizen-alien relations at sites across the country (see Erasmus 2004; Landau, et al, 2004). This reaction is the takes the form of what we term, ‘tactical cosmopolitanism’: a mish-mash of rhetoric and organizational strategies attempt to negotiate partial inclusion in South Africa’s transforming society without becoming bounded by it. What we describe is not a coherent philosophy or set of bounded behaviours, but a set of tactics and practices that are transforming how the city exists, the lives of its residents, and how they both relate to people, place, and institutions.

Methods

This essay draws on an ecumenical set of data in illustrating the emergence of tactical-cosmopolitanism in Johannesburg. Although Johannesburg is a uniquely prosperous and infrastructurally endowed city by African standards, as the region’s sole metropolis it shapes and is shaped by socio-economic dynamics throughout Southern Africa and the world, including migration (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004). It is also emblematic of how many of the country’s urban and peri-urban centres are shaped by the legacies of apartheid planning and social fragmentation and new patterns of migration. Where mining and agricultural areas where once most affected by international migration, border crossers are now concentrated in the country’s urban centres (see Figure One). The most important of these is Johannesburg and its surrounding townships (see Figure Two).
Figure One:
Distribution of Non-Nationals in South Africa (2001)

Gauteng Province, the heart of southern Africa’s economy and home to Johannesburg and Pretoria) has seen the fastest growth. Between the national censuses in 1996 and 2001, the province’s foreign-born population increased from 4.8 percent of to the total population to 5.4 percent, representing a jump from 66,205 to 102,326 people. While the overall increase may be slow and steady, the figures are considerably more dramatic in those areas that have become primary immigrant destinations. Balbo and Marconi (2005:3) report that international migrants now represent 6.2 percent of Johannesburg’s total population. Leggett’s survey (2003, n=1,100) in central Johannesburg found that almost 25 percent of residents were foreign born. New work by Kagiso Urban Management is finding that foreigners now make up the majority or close to it in neighbourhoods like Yeoville and Berea. For these and other reasons not discussed here, Johannesburg provides an apt laboratory for uncovering novel social forms in their early stages.

Most of the information reflected here stems from migration-related research in Southern and Eastern Africa—beginning with Johannesburg in particular—undertaken between 2002 and 2007. This includes new survey research complemented by formal and informal interviews with migrants, service providers, advocates, and local government representatives. The 2006 iteration of the migration survey, first undertaken in 2003, is a collaborative project among Wits University (Johannesburg), Tufts University (Boston), the French Institute of South Africa and partners in Maputo, Lubumbashi, and Nairobi. The 2006 Johannesburg sample, from which we draw much of the discussion here,
included 847 respondents in seven central Johannesburg neighbourhoods (Berea; Bertrams, Bezuidenhout Valley, Fordsburg, Mayfair, Rosettenville, and Yeoville). Of these, 29.9 per cent (253) were from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); 24 per cent (203) from Mozambique, 22 per cent (186) from Somali, and 22.4 per cent from South Africa (190). The remaining 1.8 per cent is from other countries mistakenly included in the sample. Overall, 59.7 per cent of the respondents were male, generally reflecting official estimates of the inner-cities demographic composition. These data are by no means representative of South Africa’s ‘migrant stock’ or of Johannesburg’s population as a whole. They nevertheless provide critical illustrations of trends and the possibility of new forms of socio-political organization and categories of belonging. By drawing on new quantitative and qualitative research and existing research from these areas, this essay open space for further empirical and conceptual investigations. As such, this paper should be seen largely as a conceptual and speculative intervention that begins to reveal a set of ever evolving dynamics that demand further empirical investigation.

The remainder of this paper proceeds through three primary sections. We begin by schematically reviewing the forces that tactical cosmopolitanism has emerged to resist: a harsh immigration regime and even harsher set of social responses. We then outline the specifics of this new form of belonging and provide a brief outline of its empirical manifestations: the rhetoric of claims to space, the fragility and fragmentation of migration associations; and efforts to elude ‘capture’ by South African socio-political institutions and other migrants. We end by raising a series of empirical questions that, when answered, will add depth to our discussion by speaking to the dimensions, prevalence, persistence and social importance of tactical cosmopolitanism.

**Documenting Xenophobia in Attitude and Practice**

Despite South Africa’s ambitions to overcome past patterns of exclusion based on arbitrary social categories, xenophobic articulations in Johannesburg and elsewhere, starkly contrast with the country’s commitments to tolerance and inclusion. West Africans (particularly Nigerians) are the archetypical antagonist and ‘other’, but South Africans remain ecumenical about applying the derogatory label *Kwere Kwere*. Almost all Africans from elsewhere on the continent are included in this category. Although attitudes vary, one can safely report a generalist discourse of nativist exclusion. A national 1998 survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), for example, revealed that 87 per cent of South Africans believed that the country was letting in too many foreigners (in Segale, 2004: 50). In Johannesburg, 64.8 per cent of the South Africans in the 2003 Wits survey thought it would be good if most of the foreigners left the country while many respondents openly support drastic measures towards this end. The prevalence of violence against foreigners in Johannesburg and elsewhere suggests that this is not mere sabre rattling (see Landau and Haithar 2007). Justifications for such sentiments include perceived connections between a non-national presence and the country’s most visible social pathologies: crime, HIV/AIDS, and unemployment (Crush and Williams 2003; Leggett 2003). Importantly, foreigners are often seen as derailing the
country's progress towards national self-realisation: to achieving the promises of freedom—prosperity, equality, security, and global eminence.

Anti-foreign sentiments are not only an organic or spontaneous response to street-level tensions, but have been shaped and legitimised by politicians and bureaucrats. The famously xenophobic (former) Minister of Home Affairs (1994-2004), Mangosuthu Buthelezi, has accomplished the most in this regard, although his efforts have been bolstered by others' active and passive support. In addressing a meeting discussion migration in the region, Buthelezi outlined a series of crises facing the country and then argued that, ‘South Africa is faced with another threat, and that is the [Southern African Development Community] ideology of free movement of people, free trade and freedom to choose where you live or work. Free movement of persons spells disaster for our country.’ Somewhat more subtly, Johannesburg’s Executive Mayor reflected a widely held sentiment in ‘State of the City 2004’ speech when he reported that, ‘While migrancy contributes to the rich tapestry of the cosmopolitan city, it also places a severe strain on employment levels, housing, and public services.’ The city is now, officially, ‘migrant friendly’, but such pronouncements come long after nativist sentiments have taken hold.

These sentiments have helped generate and legitimate a set of practices that effectively prevent non-nationals living in the inner-city from becoming full members of the urban community. While the Section 5(1) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, demands that all children have rights to school, a 2000 study on the Somali refugee community in Johannesburg found that 70 per cent the Somali refugee children of school-going age were not in schools (Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Although some schools have since opened their doors to foreigners, officials continue to blame immigration for their inability to meet public demand despite most of the city’s newcomers being South Africans. A similar pattern is reflected in migrants’ efforts to access health services, particularly emergency care. While Section 27 (1) of The Constitution states that everyone has the right to health care services and Section 27 (3) states that no one—regardless of nationality, documentation, or residency status—may be refused emergency medical treatment, a recent national study of refugees and asylum seekers found that 17 per cent of all respondents were denied emergency medical care (Belvedere 2003). If one could calculate this as a percentage of those seeking such care, the figure would be much higher. One refugee respondent, for example, overheard nurses talking about ‘foreigners taking government money and having too many babies,’ a phrase reflecting fears of a foreigner species taking root (Nkosi 2005). Another non-national reports staff describing their hospital as ‘infested’ with foreigners and that non-citizens were being denied full courses of prescribed medicines (Pursell 2005).

The police have also capitalised on foreigners’ unpopularity to bolster their reputation and bank accounts. A study conducted in late 2000, for example, found asylum seekers arbitrarily arrested and detained based only on their physical appearance; their inability to speak one of South Africa’s official ‘African’ languages (of which there are nine), or simply for fitting an undocumented migrant ‘profile’
(Algotsson 2000; Lubkemann 2000:58-59; Madsen 2004). Non-South Africans living or working in Johannesburg, for example, consequently report having been stopped by the police far more frequently than South Africans despite having generally lived in the city for shorter periods (see Table One). Although instructed to respect non-nationals’ rights, police often refuse to recognise work permits or refugee identity cards and some non-nationals report having their identity papers confiscated or destroyed in order justify an arrest. Not only does targeting non-nationals help police meet periodic arrest targets, but it is also a relatively easy, and socially acceptable, way to supplement officers’ income. Denied access to almost all formal banking service, poor immigrants must either stash cash in their residences or carry it on their bodies (see Jacobsen and Bailey 2004). Combined with their tenuous legal status, (often) poor documentation, and tendency to trade on the street (hawking or informal business), some police officers have come to see foreigners as ‘mobile-ATMs’ (Templeton and Maphumulo 2005). In the words of one Eritrean living in Johannesburg, ‘as foreign students we are not required to pay taxes to the government. But when we walk down these streets, we pay.’

Table One:
Percentage of Johannesburg Respondents
Stopped by Police or Military after Entering South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/RA/Not Asked</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illustrating the extraordinary practices included in South Africans’ idiom of exclusions, a joint operation launched by the City of Johannesburg and the Department of Home Affairs in September 2003 deployed helicopters and almost 1,000 private security officers in a thinly disguised effort to rid the city of unwanted foreigners in the name of crime prevention and urban renewal. After sealing an apartment block, officials confiscated four illegal firearms—modest by Johannesburg standards—and arrested 198 illegal immigrants. As unpalatable as these operations may seem in a country committed to curbing the arbitrary use of force, a senior city official proudly reported on their success to a public meeting called to help combat social exclusion. This is also not the only effort to rid the city of foreigners. Soon after South Africa’s first democratic election, Alexandra Township north of the city centre organised a campaign entitled ‘Operation Buyelekhaya’ (Operation Go Back Home) in an effort to rid the township of all foreigners (Palmary, et al, 2003:112). For a city whose officials publicly celebrates its links to the African continent, the willingness to accept or endorse policies that so evidently target other Africans again illustrates the degree to which non-nationals are accepted as a reified, sub-human other.

2 South African respondents were asked about being stopped by the police since coming to or while living in Johannesburg.
The South African imperative to exclude reaches its extreme in the country’s extensive and expensive deportation mechanisms. Most of those scheduled for deportation—including some with legal status to remain in the country and the occasional South African—are loaded onto trains that make weekly trips from Johannesburg to the border with Zimbabwe or Mozambique. Those claiming more distant origins are returned, albeit less frequently, by airplane. Despite its expense and the fact that many of the deportations take place without mandatory hearings, deportations show no sign of abating: in 1988, 44,225 people were deported; by 1993, that number had more than doubled at 96,515 (Maharaj 2004). The Department of Home Affairs’ Annual Report for 2003 indicates that 151,653 non-citizens were ‘removed’ during 2002. In the first nine-months of 2003, 41,207 Zimbabweans alone were repatriated (17,000 were deported in all of 2001) (Innocenti 2004). These numbers only continue to grow.

**Tactical Cosmopolitanism Defined**

As non-citizens encounter and attempt to overcome the opposition to their presence, they draw on a variegated language of belonging that makes claims to the city while positioning them in an ephemeral, superior, and unrooted condition where they can escape localised social and political obligations. The remainder of this paper explores the content of this fragmented and heterogeneous idiom—what we term tactical cosmopolitanism—and how it draws on pan-Africanism, South African human rights rhetoric, religion, and language of the global elites. In doing so, it illustrates foreigners’ agency in mitigate xenophobia’s effects by at once inserting themselves into city life and distancing themselves from it.

It is next to impossible to demonstrate that this is fundamentally different from other forms or conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as the practices we observe draw heavily on cosmopolitanisms philosophical foundations. But where cosmopolitanisms as a philosophy demands a general, universalised concern for other—even a norm of even limited reciprocity—we see a tactical use of the language of concern. Through evocations of universalism and efforts—rhetorical, organizational, and through daily practice—they help ensure that their various rights are at least occasionally extended to the individual in ways that transcend national or ethnic borders. What separates tactical cosmopolitanism from more coherent universalist philosophies (Rawls’ work, for instance), is the absence of a universally understood or articulated framework of recognition: a framework for determining the extent of concern and to whom it should be extended. Instead, like some other cosmopolitanisms, they code shift: shifting alliances and allegiances at a moment notice (Landau 2007). This cosmopolitanism—especially in its current form—constitutes a form of “experiential culture” (Lamont 2000:2) as well, but one that has risen from the need to achieve tactical targets rather than being the result of an appreciation of cultural diversity or philosophical consideration.

---

3 See Bowden (2003:236) for more on the tensions between individualism and universalism.
Following de Certeau, this form of cosmopolitanism is not one taken by the powerful or elite—the kind of cosmopolitanism so described by Sassen, Ong, and other global celebrants. Rather, it is a form of constant, and not always conscious, struggle against the harshness of city streets and hostile attitudes. As Beck (2004: 134) suggests, this is in some ways a ‘side effect of unconscious decisions’, but one made up of choices intended to help achieve other goals. As such, this is not a unified, counter-hegemonic movement that seeks to create an alternative, articulated order. Rather, this is a motley collection of actions undertaken by groups that are often fragmented by language, religion, legal status, and mutual enmity. And rarely do they control significant economic resources or organisational capital. They are, however, able to swiftly combine disparate segments of the population according to current necessity and do in ways not premised on their moral worth necessarily being realised through national membership (cf. Bowden 2003: 239).

In a paper of this sort it is only possible to illustrate with signs of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, as this is an ascriptive and inherently flexible category, it is difficult to prove its existence or firmly distinguish it from other forms of membership. Indeed, because of how people flexibly levy cosmopolitanism to resist South African hostility, it must by definition be compromised of multiple bases of belonging. There are four areas in particular where we see signs of cosmopolitanism; three that demonstrate a form of tactical cosmopolitanism. The first is linked to the composition of the population and their relations to people outside of South Africa. Given the high degree of ‘connectivity’, few can dismiss this group from a form of de facto, cosmopolitanism. The second is the rhetoric of self-exclusion and transient superiority that distances this group from a South African national project and cultural assimilation. The third is in the rhetoric they use to claim membership in South Africa – a varied mix of pan-Africanism and other liberation philosophies. The fourth, and most critical to the tactical component of our argument, is in how they organise to avoid the ethics of obligation to other migrant groups and their home communities. It is this mix of atomization and fluid association that is unique to this form of life: it is not an alternative way of belonging, but a use of cosmopolitan rhetoric and organisational forms to live outside of belonging while claiming the benefits of it.

Connectivity and de facto Cosmopolitanism

Many of Johannesburg’s foreign-born population have spent only a small percentage of their lives in South Africa and remain closely connected, socially if not materially, with family members and friends living outside of the country (see Table Two).
Table Two:
Percentage of Johannesburg Respondents with Member of Household in Community of Origin in a Third Country\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>Somali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Not Asked</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although they share such translocalism with South Africans—many of whom are also recent migrants to the city—their close family members are spread at locations across the world, mostly in Africa, but also in Europe and North America. Through these connections, they are developing multi-sited families, economies, and categories of belonging that transcend national borders and are, in some cases, so fluid that almost transcend territory all together. The frequency with which people are in contact with relatives and kin elsewhere suggests that these are, in Benedikt's words, nomads ‘who are always in touch’ (in Bauman 2000: 78; See Table Three).

Table Three:
When Johannesburg Were Last in Contact with Kin or Family in Community of Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within Last Week</td>
<td>43.10</td>
<td>66.30</td>
<td>32.30</td>
<td>63.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Last Month</td>
<td>24.50</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>30.60</td>
<td>14.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Months Ago</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Migrants’ cosmopolitanism is further evidenced by their engagement with politics across multiple sites. Of those we surveyed in 2006, 63 per cent of foreigners say they follow South African political affairs regularly or from time to time (77 per cent of South Africans responded this way) the vast majority (71 per cent) remain at least passively engaged with affairs in their respective countries. They are, de facto, incorporated into local processes, but, as we discuss below, remain unable or unwilling to accept substantive membership in South African society (cf. Soysal 1996).

While links to a homeland—real or imagined—are critical in establishing the population’s cosmopolitanisms, so too is the orientation to yet unknown destinations. When asked about future plans, just over 13 per cent of foreign respondents thought they were likely to return to their countries or communities of origin within the next two years; 16 per cent were planning onward journeys; and 13.4 per cent did not know. Among the Congolese, however, almost 30 per cent expected to be in a third country. Critically, journeys home or onwards often remain practically elusive for reasons of money, safety, or social status. This leaves large sections of Johannesburg’s non-national population effectively marooned in the city, but not necessarily planning to be here.

\(^4\) In this case, a third country is defined as one that is neither the respondents country of birth nor country of current residence.
Rhetoric of Self-Exclusion

In response to the violence, abuse, and discrimination many foreigners experience in Johannesburg, they have developed a rhetoric of self-exclusion that, borrowing from Said, fetishises their position as the permanent outsider or wanderer in such a way that ‘distances him or her from all connections and commitments’ (Said 2001:183; see also Malauene 2003; Simone 2001). So rather than striving to integrate or assimilate, non-nationals’ extended interactions with South Africans is leading, as Barth (1969) predicts, to a reification of differences and a counter-idiom of transience and superiority. Whatever the source of exclusion, only 45 per cent of foreigners we surveyed felt they were part of South African society: 38.6 per cent among Congolese, and 54.1 per cent among the Somali population who South Africans feel are the most self-isolating (95.7 per cent of South Africans felt they were ‘in’). One migrant from Lesotho who has lived in Johannesburg for four years reveals many dimensions of a discourse of non-belonging:

I don’t think any right thinking person would want to be South African. It’s a very unhealthy environment. South Africans are very aggressive, even the way they talk. Both black and white. I don’t know what’s the word, it’s a degenerated façade they are putting up…They are just so contaminated

Ironically, foreigners often brand South Africans with the same flaws levied against them: dishonesty, violence, and vectors of disease. Few trust South Africans (see Table Four) and the minority speaks of close relationships with them. All this is further complemented (and justified) by a sense that South Africans are uneducated or do not appreciate the opportunities they have for education (or other social services); are promiscuous (female promiscuity is particularly jarring); overly tolerant (especially regarding the acceptance of homosexuality); and unreligious. We will return presently to discussions of religion as this too serves as a powerful organisational bases with which to tactically engage the communities they live without becoming part of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>Somalia</th>
<th>Mozambique</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion/DK/RA</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clinging to the status afforded those belonging to the ‘mobile classes’ (see Baumann 2000), migrants hover above the soil by retaining loyalties to their countries of origin and orient themselves towards a future outside of South Africa. This emerges from a combination of both original intent (i.e., why people came to a given city), and a counter response to the hostility or exclusion they face when they arrive. Whatever its origins, many migrants deny ever having held aspirations of assimilation or
permanent settlement (i.e., total inclusion). Others claim they would refuse such opportunities were they available. For them, allochthon status is not a scarlet letter, but instead represents their own form of inclusion. From the data represented in Table Five, there is little sign of an assimilating agenda. While many more foreigners would like their children to learn English or another South African language, they remain wary of them ever considering themselves South Africa.

Table Five:
Percentage of Johannesburg Respondents Who Believe it is Better to Maintain Customs or Not Maintain Customs in South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Non National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is better for society if immigrants maintain their customs</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is better for society if immigrants do not maintain their customs</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/RA/Other</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rhetoric of Rights: Inclusion without Membership

Kihato’s (2007) work on migrant associations in the inner-city described Awelah, a new group that rose phoenix like from the ashes of an Ivorian association that had collapsed following struggles between two aspirant leaders. Unlike most of the city’s previous organisations that are based on ethnic or national foundations, Awelah offers up a new kind of Pan-Africanism. In the words of its founder, quoted at length in the paper:

> We want to shift our patriotism to the continent, not to a country. We Africans share a history together; we are bound together by a neo-colonialism. When you dig up these feelings all Africans have the same history. This is the link that we have got now, we are African even though we butcher each other but we are African. In our day to day living we are all confronted with problems of nationality, ethnicity and so on. But when you have this [broader African] perspective you do not see these problems anymore.

But there is more to this than a desire to build a community of all Africans as an end itself. Rather, the evocations of Pan-Africanism—drawn both from 1960s liberation philosophy, Mbeki’s notion of African Renaissance, and the rhetoric of Africa’s World Cup to be played in Johannesburg in 2010—are particularly designed to erode the barriers that separate foreigners from South Africans. In the founder’s words, ‘South Africans are our brothers and sisters.’ By helping South Africans to realise connections to their continental kin they undermine the legitimacy of any barriers to inclusion that South Africans may erect in front of them. Ironically, the foundation for such mobilization remains very much rooted in a transnational articulation of Ivorian identity as most of the new members come from there. Through this rhetoric and tactics—tactics we are only beginning to explore—migrants adopt a de facto cosmopolitanism that demonstrates a willingness to engage a plurality of cultures; openness to hybridity and multiple identities (cf. Hannerz 1990: 239). This is not, however, openness without
boundaries: but rather one that draws on multiple identities simultaneously without ever accepting the overarching authority or power of one. Moreover, given that South Africans are seen as a privileged community given their rights to the city, it is the migrants who ultimately have the most to gain from insinuating themselves into citizens’ families.

Elsewhere, migrant groups have used South Africa’s relatively liberally—if inconsistently applied—asylum laws and its Constitution to provide rights of residence and work. However, very few refugees use this language of rights to justify their position in the country. Rather, they call on norms of reciprocity—claiming a right to the city (and the country) based on what their countries did to assist South Africa during the Apartheid period. Nigerians, for example, will often claim (with some substantiation) that ANC activists were given full university scholarships in the 1970s and 1980s, opportunities that were not always available to citizens. Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, and even Namibians claim that they personally suffered from wars tied to South Africa’s anti-communist campaign and efforts to destroy ANC or MK strongholds within their countries. If they did not experience the war firsthand, than they were deprived by an economy that had been destroyed by years of fighting. Others plausibly argue that because South African business derives so many profits from investments in their countries—in the past and now—that they have a reciprocal right to South Africa’s territory and wealth. In this way, South Africa’s own transnationalism—past and present—serves as justification for transcending national residential restrictions.

By drawing on religion, African tradition, and almost any other rhetoric that is available, the ever expanding pool of Nigerian run, Pentecostal churches operating within Johannesburg’s inner-city appear to be fashioning creating an organisational form that at once bridges barriers with South Africans (and South Africa) while preparing people for a life beyond South Africa. Indeed, in many cases, the churches prepare people for a life beyond any material nation. Many of these offers up that ‘health and wealth’ promises seen elsewhere in evangelical communities, promises that offer an alternative to the material deprivation many migrants experience. Although there is not space here to reflect the diversity of testimonies and preaching included in even one five hour ‘mass’, almost all reflect the lived experiences of people in the city. In some instances, the preaching bares only the faint influence of biblical pronouncements, but is instead fabricated out of contemporary challenges and generalised evangelical Christian philosophy. The promises and guidance offered within such oration also bring in South Africans to the community, generating one of the rare common spaces between nationals and foreigners in the city.

With their strong links to communities in Nigeria, Ghana, and the United States, the churches also open further connections out of Johannesburg. Indeed, many of the churches founding pastors see South Africa primarily as a place where they can enter global discourse and influence the lives of people across the continent and beyond. In the words of the Nigerian Pastor at the Mountain of Fire

---

5 The discussion of Johannesburg’s migrant churches draws heavily from Lawrence Chamba Petkou’s work as part of an international project on the Religious Lives of Migrant Minorities.
and Miracles church, ‘Africa is shaped like a pistol and South Africa is the mouth from where you can shoot out the word of god’. And, consequently, anyone doing the work of God has divine right to South African territory. Others are exploiting the popularity and themes of Nigerian cinema by also producing DVDs that promote the triumph of good over evil. Unlike the rhetoric of the street, church ideology is potentially generative of community with social pressures and disciplines that may transform tactics into a counter hegemonic strategy. However, they presently remain far too fluid and many of their pronouncements to pragmatic and flexible to offer a coherent, stable alternative organisational form. Instead, the churches are often functional units, helping people to find jobs, transience boundaries, or find ways (physically or spiritually) out of Johannesburg’s hardships.

**Organisation and Atomization**

Migrants’ tactics, however well organised, do not represent the formation of a consolidated, subjectively accepted exile/migrant category. Mang’ana (2004) and Misago (2005) both report, for example, that even people from the same country are careful to avoid the mutual obligations and politics that come from close association with other ‘exiles.’ Although there are instances in which migrant groups assert a collective (usually national) identity, these are often based on instrumental and short-lived associations. Amisi and Ballard’s (2005) work on refugee associations throughout South Africa, for example, finds an almost universal tendency towards repeated reconfiguration and fragmentation. As Götz and Simone suggest, ‘these formations embody a broad range of tactical abilities aimed at maximizing economic opportunities through transversal engagements across territories and separate arrangements of powers’ (2003: 125). They are not associations founded on preserving identity, but rather use combinations of national, ethnic, and political affiliations for tactical purposes.

In many instances, even people from the same country carefully avoid close association with other ‘exiles’ or cling to multiple points of loyalty that allow them to shift within multiple networks. These act as resources provide the weak links needed to gather information while allowing them to shift affiliations and tactics at a moments notice (cf. Granovetter 1973). In doing so, they avoid capture by friends, relations, and the state while inadvertently reshaping the city’s social and political dynamics. This limits these networks ability to foster permanent inclusion, but also allows a flexibility of membership and opportunity, with people shifting alliances and allegiances to the degree that it is tenable given their documentation, language skills, and appearance. Somali traders may be a partial exception, but even among this more insular community, fragmentation, mistrust and other divisions often trump solidary ties.

Rather than integrating or assimilating, the form and rhetoric of organisation exploit their position as the permanent outsiders in ways that ‘distances him or her from all connections and commitments’ (Said 2001:183). As Simmel notes, these strangers are not fully committed to the peculiar tendencies of the people amongst whom they live. They can, therefore, approach them with a kind of scepticism,
‘objectivity’, and self-imposed distance. But they are also cosmopolitan for, as Hannerz (1990: 239) suggests they should, many demonstrate a great, personal ability to ‘make their way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting’ as well as through carefully developed skills for meandering or manoeuvring through systems of meaning and obligation.

**Potential Consequences of Tactical Cosmopolitanism**

The tactical cosmopolitanism hinted at above often results in action in mobilisations that are short lived, contradictory, and ineffective at achieving their stated objectives. Nevertheless, they occasionally elicit strong reactions from more strategic actors: the police, the business community, or frustrated South African citizens. It is in these counter-reactions to migrants’ tactical activity that their greatest power lies. So while Lee (2006) argues that tactical citizenship—a concept sharing a similar legacy to our notion of tactical cosmopolitanism—is simply a reactive and not transformative response, we argue that these reactions, counter-idioms, and forms of self-exclusion may be fundamentally transformative although not necessarily in intended ways.

Although it is possible that their current fluidity will preserve extraordinary levels of combinatorial freedom, it is likely that the repeated iterations of hybrid and novel mobilisation strategies and rhetoric will generate new categories of belonging that may eventually crystallise in ways that exert disciplinary powers of inclusion and exclusion. It is too early to tell what the nature of these will be, but it is unlikely that they will conform to existing modes of belonging although they are likely to resonate with aspects of them. Like the marginalised populations that developed Christianity, Islam, and other transcendent, deterritorialised membership, migrants in African cities may pioneer forms of membership that reshape how we understand our relationship to each other, space, and institutions. This may take on the form of ‘common norms and mutual translatability’ (Cheah and Robbins 1998: 12) that help overcome the legacy of Apartheid and national formation. However, it is unlikely that the outcome will conform so closely to the philosophers’ vision.

If Mbembe and Nuttall (2004:356) are right that Johannesburg, like cities everywhere, is a site of imagination—of collectively enacting shared or individual visions—then we are indeed witnessing a novel form of existence with dual categories, the post-national migrants on one hand and the modern citizens on the other, simultaneously representing ‘both resistance to domination and new hegemonic categories that perpetuate domination’ (Basch, *et al.*, 1994:268. See also Mandaville 1999). But the visible presence of uprooted tactical cosmopolitans threatens the nationalist project and give cause to question the necessity of national consolidation. Alternatively, it may serve to justify the aspiration of a modern nation state that has already ceased to exist in those regions that invented it.

As Montesquieu (1949: 3) notes, laws and institutions are shaped by:

> the climate of each country, to the quality of its soil, to its situation and extent, to the principal occupation of the natives, whether husbandmen, huntsmen or shepherds . . . [their] relations to each
other, as also to their origin, to the intent of the legislator, and to the
order of things on which they are established'

Given that South Africa’s institutions remain so malleable, the results will most certainly bear the results of the tensions between citizens and cosmopolitan.
Citations


