

CHAPTER 5

MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY COHESION

The relationship between crime and migration is complex, and is the subject of an upcoming ISS monograph.¹⁰ The topic is likely to receive more attention as political instability and food shortages in other countries in the region result in increased immigration, most of which will occur under duress and without much planning.

As the monograph argues and this survey suggests, new migrants, both domestic and international, may be especially vulnerable to becoming both victims and perpetrators of crime. People new to an area are, at least initially, seen as 'outsiders', and their struggle to make a living and find a place for themselves in their new home often brings them into conflict with the locals. Some new migrants, especially young men, seem willing to take risks and engage in behaviour that they would never undertake in their places of origin, particularly if they see their stay as temporary. As these people find a place for themselves in the local structures of power and the economy, the period of transition can be quite volatile for all concerned.

Many parts of inner Johannesburg show rapid turnover of residents, and this flow of people can be expected to create a kind of chronic community instability. Of those households polled, 68% said they had been living in their present location for less than five years. The period of residency varied quite a bit by the sampling area – in some areas, as much as 42% of all residents polled had lived in the household less than one year. Aggravating this condition was the fact that most were tenants, without long-term property interests in the area. Less than a quarter of the respondents reported owning the place where they were living. Those that posit social cohesion as a major factor in preventing crime¹¹ would see this as key to the area's crime problem.

As was discussed above, the area is also home to a large number of foreign nationals of dubious immigration status. Tours with the local police reveal that many immigrants carry Section 41 refugee visas, granted to those who are lodging a claim of political persecution in their home country, regardless of their country of origin. While these visas allow residence they do not allow

the recipient to legally seek work, a paradox that seems to necessarily lead to illegal conduct for all but the most affluent. These documents are often crudely altered and forged, and those who have looked into the issue closely find that most of the immigrants are economic, rather than political, refugees.¹² Knowing that their very presence here may be deemed illegal by authorities at any time keeps these migrants marginal, and may facilitate their entry into other forms of criminality. Xenophobic violence against, and criminal targeting of, illegal migrants (who are unlikely to report the offence to the police) has been reported in many studies.¹³

This situation was even more extreme in the residential hotels polled in the follow-up survey. Fifty-eight percent had been in their present household less than a year and 93% less than five years. Thirty-six percent were foreign nationals, and 66% had only arrived in the country in the last two years. For most, Hillbrow is seen as a launching pad for immigration to other parts of South Africa, with 83% stating their desire to move elsewhere in the country. Thus, residential hotel residents are even more transient and less stable than the rest of the area's population.

The tensions between all these recent arrivals and longer-term residents may be aggravated by the extremely cramped conditions in which many residents live. Respondents were interviewed in a variety of housing types, but most were flat dwellers: 37% lived in single room flats, and 56% in multiple room flats. A quarter of the households contained only one or two people, while nearly half contained four or more residents, and 13% contained six residents or more. Of single room residences polled, 64% housed three or more people. Thus, nearly a quarter of the households polled contained three or more people living in a single room.

This is, indeed, high density housing, and it can be extremely difficult to ignore cultural differences under such conditions. The cuisine, hygiene, musical tastes, business practices, religious rituals, and romantic behaviour of new migrants can clash with local conditions.

Community cohesion

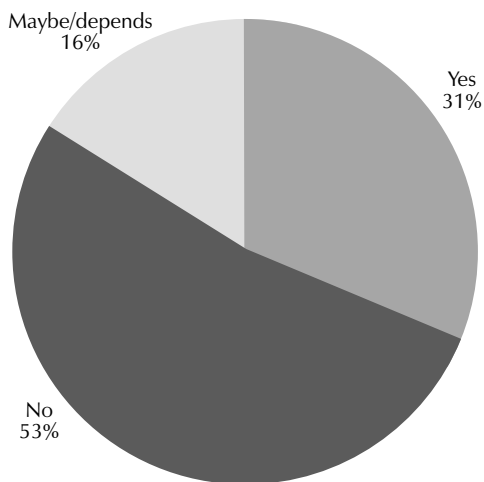
As indicated above, theorists have hypothesised that it is community pressures, rather than the threat of incarceration, that keeps most people within the bounds of the law. Of course, this pressure is lacking where there is very little sense of community identity and where most people live in a state of

anonymity. Community cohesion also allows collective action to prevent crime in both formal and informal ways. For example, if neighbours do not know one another well, then they cannot tell whether the person seen entering next door is likely to be authorised or not.

Despite the high level of transience in the area, a surprisingly positive response was had to questions aimed at gauging community cohesion. One possible explanation lies in the high levels of unemployment and the need for cooperation to survive in an otherwise hostile environment. Most people (79%) could name at least one other person living next door to them, a figure that many affluent suburbs might find hard to beat. This figure varied quite a bit between survey areas, however, from 98% to 67%.

While many people may be on a first name basis with the people next door, they were fairly evenly divided in their response to the question “If you had children under ten in your household, would you leave them with your neighbours overnight?” (Figure 5.1). This figure also varied sharply by survey area, from 14% answering “yes” in one area, to a high of 53% in another.

Figure 5.1: If you had children under 10 in your household, would you leave them with your neighbours overnight?



This may reflect a general concern with the safety of children, rather than a direct mistrust of neighbours. Most people think no children under the age of 12 should be allowed to play unsupervised in the neighbourhood (75%), and 88% felt that no child under the age of 17 should be allowed to go out at night with friends. Taking the trust issue out of the child context, nearly two-thirds (65%) said that they knew someone in their neighbourhood who was not a relative who could lend them R100 without interest. This suggests that the inner Johannesburg community is viable and does provide a safety net for its members.

One bastion of community cohesion internationally is religious and volunteer groups. These groupings bring together neighbours of diverse backgrounds, provide social and even financial support, and create a sounding board for issues of concern to the community. In inner Johannesburg, the majority of those polled said they attend a religious or volunteer group in their area at least once a week.

It is possible that these lines of trust could be used for crime prevention purposes but this approach is not presently being utilised. Where people are willing to lend each other money and volunteer their time, there is great potential for collective security action. Recall that 88% responded “no” when asked if their community formed groups or hired people for mutual protection. Only 41 people said their community had a neighbourhood watch, and only 2% had heard of the local community policing forum. That the public could provide a useful source of information to the police is indicated by the remarkable 27% of those polled who said they could name someone in their neighbourhood who makes their living off crime.

Perpetrators or victims?

Recall that when asked who they think commits most of the crime in their area, 63% of the overall sample mentioned “foreigners”, as did 39% of foreign nationals. What is interesting is that the victims of crime also appear to be, disproportionately, international immigrants.

Figure 5.2 compares the levels of criminal victimisation experienced in the last year in inner Johannesburg as reported by the survey respondents. Note that foreign nationals are more likely than average to experience victimisation in every crime category, especially robbery.

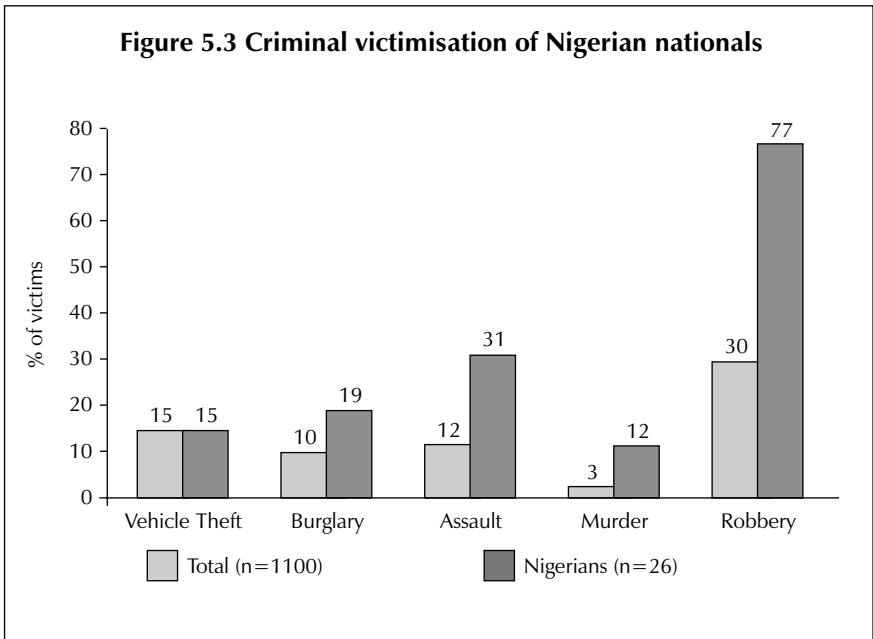
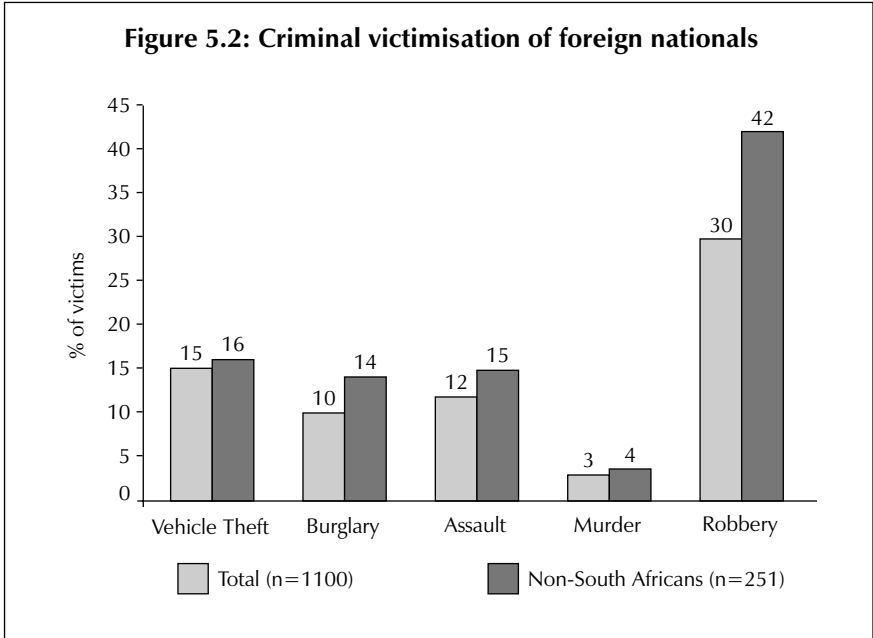


Figure 5.3 shows victimisation levels for one of the most stigmatised national groupings, Nigerian nationals. While there were only 26 Nigerians in the initial survey sample, more than three quarters of them reported being robbed in the last year, and they were more than twice as likely to be assaulted than average. Ninety-two percent said they felt very unsafe walking during the night, and 81% felt a bit or very unsafe during the day, compared to 48% of the population as a whole. Contrary to what many might expect, 20 of the 26 said they would be willing to have their homes searched once a month if this would reduce crime.

Residential hotels: the follow-up survey

Many new migrants to inner Johannesburg (including students at the nearby educational institutions) find their first accommodation in Hillbrow's residential hotels, where medium-term rates can be negotiated without long-term commitments. For this reason, the hotels give special insight into the problems of areas of rapid turnover. Because previous qualitative research indicated that the residential hotels contained a large proportion of foreign migrants (in the survey, 36% of respondents reported being foreign), special interview schedules were devised for them, and an extra set of questions was generated for Nigerian nationals in particular (who comprised 22% of respondents). Additionally, as many of the residential hotels are well known for prostitution, questions aimed at this group were asked of all female residents (35% of respondents, 27% of whom admitted engaging in prostitution).

When asked why they chose to reside in a residential hotel, most residents mentioned factors related to Hillbrow, with 20% saying "location" was the deciding factor, 21% citing their social connections to the hotel, and 8% reporting opportunities for prostitution as their main motivation. A large chunk complained of nowhere else to go (17%), but few cited price as a deciding factor. Most residents pay by the month, with 57% saying the monthly rental was less than R1,000, and 17% between R1,000 and R2,000. None cited prices of over R2,000 a month. Less than a third were compelled to pay all of this, with 55% paying between 10% and 50%, with the rest being covered by roommates. Just over a quarter of hotel residents lacked cooking facilities in their rooms, although nearly all had their own bathrooms.

A quarter of all residents polled claimed that drugs were sold in their building, and every hotel in which surveys were done contained some respondents who said they knew drugs were available. Of these 50 people, 12 respondents

claimed any drug could be bought in their building, 28 specified dagga, 30 specified Mandrax, 27 specified crack cocaine, and one specified ecstasy. Ninety-one percent of the respondents said they thought that the legalisation of drugs would not improve the situation in Hillbrow.

With regard to prostitution, 75% said that women sold sex in their building. As was revealed in later questions, few of these women were responsible for small children, and less than a fifth of respondents (17%) said that children under 12 were left unsupervised in the hotel. It seems that the majority of hotel residents were willing to concede that some illegal activity takes place in their building.

The majority of people in every building had been present during at least one police raid. A third of these people felt the raid had achieved its objectives, but 15% cited various forms of corruption as responsible for limited success. Eighty percent said there had been a Crackdown operation in their area, and 36% felt this had been successful. Sixteen percent of respondents admitted to having been arrested at some point themselves, and 21% claimed that the police had asked them for money in the past. It appears that most residents feel that police efforts to reduce criminal activity have had limited success, and a number have had direct experience of the corruption some blame for this failure.

Foreign hotel dwellers

A wide range of foreigners were found in the hotels, although young Nigerian men made up by far the single largest grouping (62%), and 92% of these Nigerians described themselves as belonging to the Ibo ethnic group. Ninety percent of all foreign nationals were male, including all of the Nigerians. Two thirds arrived in this country some time within the last two years, with over a third being here less than a year. Only 10% had been to South Africa prior to moving to Hillbrow, but 70% knew someone who was residing here at the time.

These people were drawn to South Africa by a variety of factors, but most related to business or job opportunities. While 14 of the 72 foreign residential hotel residents polled said they would be arrested or killed if they returned to their country of origin, this response might have been motivated by a desire to remain consistent with claims to political asylum. Ten of 45 Nigerians, two of four DRC nationals, and one of two Sierra Leone expatriates made this claim.

Despite many gripes, most of these foreigners were quite happy with what they had found in South Africa. In fact, 43% said their opinion of their prospects here had improved since they had arrived, compared to 33% who said it had stayed the same and only 22% who said it had got worse. A surprising 73% said they would recommend South Africa to their countrymen as a good place to stay, and a quarter said they intended bringing members of their family over. While 11% wanted to leave the country as soon as possible, the majority (58%) wanted to stay in South Africa for as long as they could, but were not sure how they would achieve this goal. Only 5% said they had the intention of applying for citizenship or permanent residency, but 75% said they were, or intended to become, married to a South African.

This is not to say immigration does not have its down sides. A remarkable 62% said they had been physically attacked by South Africans for being a foreigner, and 43% said they had been asked for bribes by South African authorities. Only two people admitted to having been deported. Two thirds claimed they possessed a tertiary qualification, and nearly three quarters felt they had job skills that were not being utilised in South Africa.

This picture of foreign migrants supports previous research findings in many ways while challenging them in others. The group is indeed largely young and male, motivated primarily by an interest in economic gain. But, contrary to previous studies that suggested most immigrants are here for short-term income generation,¹⁴ most of the Hillbrow respondents wanted to forge long-term ties with South Africa. And while they are subject to a wide range of abuses, the bulk of the immigrants were positive about their experience in this country.

Women in the residential hotels

Hillbrow is a dangerous place, and, given that most people are recent arrivals to the area, it is hard to fathom why women would chose to reside there. Twenty percent of the hotel residents polled cited business or job opportunities, but 27% candidly admitted to engaging in prostitution. These sex workers appear to have been motivated primarily by prospects for economic gain, as 47% said being unemployed and staying at home prompted them to take up streetwalking. An additional 21% said they had been abandoned by a man and left with small children. None said they had been addicted to drugs prior to taking up sex work. Despite an element of choice in taking up sex work, 79% said they would give up sex work if offered a job in a fast food restaurant.

A surprising 87% of the female hotel residents said they had a home elsewhere that they could return to at will. Twenty-one women said they kept their children in a household they maintained outside Hillbrow, while only four said they kept their children with them in the hotel. The majority of the women (61%) had someone else pay their rent, with nine women citing a Nigerian as their keeper. This confirms a trend noted by the author in previous qualitative work.¹⁵

The vast majority (86%) claimed to have a boyfriend or husband, about a quarter of who were foreign nationals. Nearly all claimed to love this person, although over a third admitted at least occasional beatings by their intimate partner, and nearly a fifth claimed that this abuse was regular.

Thirty percent said they would simply return home if their present building were to be shut down, with just under a quarter saying they would seek another form of accommodation in Hillbrow and 14% saying they would simply go to another residential hotel nearby.

While the sample size is small, the trends are striking. In contrast to its reputation for turning runaways into sex workers, this survey suggests that many of the women living in Hillbrow are, in fact, here by choice. They have homes and families to return to, but have chosen to brave the dangers of inner Johannesburg as an alternative to unemployment.