

Vigilante violence and “forward panic” in Johannesburg’s townships

Mark Gross¹

Published online: 1 June 2016

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2016

Abstract Vigilante violence tends to take place in areas or situations in which the state is unable or unwilling to provide for the safety of certain groups. Crime control vigilantism can be understood as an alternative means of controlling crime and providing security where the state does not. The violent punishment inherent in vigilante activity is generally with the ultimate goal of providing safety and security, and thus should theoretically “fit the crime” and not be excessive. However, in many acts of vigilante violence this is not the case, and vigilantism takes on an extraordinarily violent character. This article examines vigilante violence in three South African townships through the micro-sociological perspective of violence developed by Randall Collins (2008), “forward panic.” Forward panic is a process whereby the tension and fear marking most potentially violent conflict situations is suddenly released, bringing about extraordinary acts of violence. Based on data from eighteen interviews gathered from the Johannesburg townships of Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South, I analyze respondents’ accounts and experiences with vigilante violence using the framework of forward panic. The data confirm that many acts of vigilante violence in South Africa’s townships can be clearly categorized as episodes of forward panic and that although Collins’s conception of forward panic focuses on the individual, the conditions that create the emotional potential for forward panic in an individual can be structural and thus create the potential for forward panic in entire groups or parts of communities.

Keywords Community justice · Emotions · Informal social control · Policing · Security · South Africa

✉ Mark Gross
mcgross@umd.edu

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Maryland-College Park, 3834 Campus Dr., College Park, MD 20742, USA

Informal methods of social control have recently received a great deal of attention in the field of sociology. Research from the United States has demonstrated that a community's ability to identify problems, to act collectively, and to engage in informal social control is a significant indicator of the crime differences between neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods marked by poverty and instability, whereby those neighborhoods that employ informal social control tend to have less crime (Drakulich and Crutchfield 2013; Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson et al. 1997). The capacity for, and prevalence of informal methods of social control are important indicators of how the state and its institutions, particularly those charged with maintaining social control, namely the police and justice systems, are perceived and experienced (Drakulich and Crutchfield 2013; Silver and Miller 2004). The types of tactics employed by the state are both an indicator of and have implications for, the real or perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of the state in providing social control. This article explores one form of informal social control: violent vigilantism in townships (communities historically designated for non-whites) in Johannesburg, South Africa and in particular why these forms of vigilantism are often marked by excessive and gratuitous violence.

Background

According to Weber, “the modern state can only be defined sociologically in terms of a specific means which is peculiar to the state, as it is to all other political associations, namely physical violence” (Weber 1919, p. 310). In other words, the defining attribute of the state is that it has sole authority in exercising violence legitimately, typically through institutions like the police and military. Additionally, non-state entities can also exercise legitimate violence, although their source of legitimacy is the state (Weber 1919). Examples of such non-state entities include private security organizations, and even armed private citizens, who are sanctioned by the state to operate and employ violence within the bounds of the laws of the state, at least in theory (Kleck 1988; see Pinker 2011; Shearing and Stenning 1983). Under Weber's conception, if violence is not sanctioned by the state it is necessarily illegitimate. The illegitimate use of violence is manifested primarily through violent criminal activities like muggings, rape, and murder (Pinker 2011; Weber 1919). This distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence, however, assumes that the state has the ability to consolidate legitimate violence within its institutions. Hypothetically, institutions that employ legitimate violence are subject to control through political processes. However, in many situations, this is not the case: Latin America and Africa offer numerous examples of militaries breaking free from the regulation of the political process and the state. Typically, when the state does not have control of its institutions that are meant to maintain social control and formal methods of social control erode, the legitimacy of the state is under question, as in the conditions of revolution (Goldstone 1991; see Malesevich 2010; Skocpol 1979).

To be perceived as legitimate, a state must also be able to limit the use of illegitimate violence within its boundaries. Typically this occurs through processes of deterrence via threat of punishment by the state, i.e., corporal or capital punishment (North et al. 2009). If the state is unable to deter or punish properly those employing illegitimate violence, its own monopoly on violence is undermined. The inability to prevent

illegitimate violence theoretically results in a deterioration of social control, increases in crime, as the typical deterrence to such activity is largely absent through formal systems (Kreager et al. 2011). In situations where states are unable to contain violence within their institutions and illegitimate violence in the form of crime is widespread, new methods of informal social control and deterring crime may become possible and necessary.

This article explores the use of vigilante violence as a method of informal social control and crime deterrence in the absence of fully functioning police systems in townships around Johannesburg, South Africa. Drawing on interview data collected from individuals involved in vigilantism or informal policing, I utilize Collins's (2008) micro-sociological theory of violence and his concept of "forward panic" to understand particularly violent episodes of vigilante violence. This article thus advances micro-sociological perspectives and forward panic in particular as a tool to examine and to understand particular episodes of gratuitous violence and also contributes more generally to knowledge of informal social control, particularly in situations where informal social control methods are violent. Using a micro-sociological approach of this kind allows for an examination of how emotional forces interact with structural inequalities and inefficiencies in policing, that more macro approaches do not allow. Additionally, research in the South African context can shed light on how informal social control is employed in other settings experiencing substantial political, economic, or social transitions.

Vigilantism and the state

Classic and popular examples of alternative methods of deterring crime in the absence of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence can be found in the different manifestations of vigilantism that have occurred in nearly all societies at one point or another (Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gatz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). Vigilantism remains a largely understudied area and academic definitions of "vigilantism" have varied widely (Abrahams 1998; Senechal de la Roche 1996; Godoy 2004; Kirsch and Gatz 2010; see Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974). Multiple forms of vigilantism exist, differing in levels of organization, the types of participants, motivations, or targets (see Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974 and Senechal de la Roche 1996 for typologies on collective violence and vigilantism.) Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974) distinguish between types of vigilantism by their purpose (crime control, social group control, and regime control) and their participants (private or public). Johnston (1996) provides what is now considered a classic definition of vigilantism as "a social movement giving rise to premeditated acts of force—or threatened force—by autonomous citizens. It arises as a reaction to the transgression of institutionalized norms by individuals or groups—or to their potential or imputed transgression. Such acts are focused upon crime control or social control and aim to offer assurances (or "guarantees") of security both to participants and to other members of a given established order" (p. 232).

The type of vigilantism discussed in this analysis is the most common form of vigilantism, "crime control vigilantism." That is, vigilantism by private actors directed at "people believed to be committing acts proscribed by the formal legal system. Such acts harm private persons or property, but the perpetrators escape justice due to governmental inefficiency, corruption, or the leniency of the system of due process"

(Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974, p. 548). While in their typology of vigilantism, Rosenbaum and Sederberg consider lynching a form of vigilantism, albeit distinct from crime control vigilantism (in that it is done by private actors but aimed at social group control), Senechal de la Roche (1996) differentiates explicitly between vigilantism and lynching as distinct forms of collective violence. More recent work has further distinguished lynching in the US context as a form of racial terrorism aimed at racial control and domination, rather than vigilantism. Indeed, dissimilar from crime control vigilantism, many victims of lynching were never accused of any crime (Equal Justice Initiative 2015).

Not surprisingly, the relationship between vigilantism and the state is often antagonistic. According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974), vigilantism arises in situations where discontent with the government's formal goals and achievements is high and "the potential for vigilantism varies positively with the intensity and scope of belief that a regime is ineffective in dealing with the challenges to the prevailing sociopolitical order" (p. 545). More specifically, crime control vigilantism arises where the government is perceived to be incompetent in protecting persons and property. Referring back to Weber's monopoly on violence, discontent with the state is high when the state claims a monopoly on violence (goal) but is unable to enforce it or contain violence solely within its institutions (achievement).

Abrahams (1998) more critically focuses on the relationship between the state and vigilantism. He argues that state inefficiencies in securing a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence result in "frontier zones," areas on the edges of the power and authority of the state, where illegitimate forms of violence are present and as a result vigilantism is able and likely to emerge. In many cases frontier zones are the physical frontiers of states, such as state borders, unsettled areas, or contested borderlands as in the popular examples of the American West in the nineteenth century including San Francisco and Montana (Abrahams 1998), or the "minutemen" on the contemporary US-Mexico border (Chavez 2008): areas where "government's formal apparatus of rule enforcement has not yet effectively extended" (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974, p. 549). In many other cases, however, frontier zones are areas well within the geographic boundaries of the state but "where the state is viewed as ineffective or corrupt, and [vigilantism] often constitutes a criticism of the failure of state machinery to meet the felt needs of those who resort to it" (Abrahams 1998, p. 9). In locations or situations in which the state is proven or perceived to be unable to satisfy demands for law, order, and safety, vigilantism becomes a predictable and even "natural," response (Abrahams 1998, p. 52).

Operating in frontier zones where the state's monopoly on violence is unclear, the primary goal of vigilantism according to Rosenbaum and Sederberg is "deterrence: their tactics consist of threats and sanctions.... The range of vigilante activities seems to extend from subtle and restrained used of force to acts of brutal compulsion and retribution. Violent force may not be used on all occasions, but its future utilization is always implied" (1974, pp. 27–28). Thus according to this conception, violence (that is, criminal violence) is central to vigilante activity even if, seemingly paradoxically, the ultimate motivation of vigilantism is a desire for law, order, and safety (Abrahams 1998). To stress the centrality of violence in vigilantism is not to imply that any and all forms of violence are employed or acceptable. Just as state sanctioned forms of punishment should hypothetically be in proportion to the crime committed, in order

to be considered just (Felson 2009), so too should violent vigilante punishment (Harris 2001; Zimring 2004). Vigilante actions that are either “too weak” or “too harsh” can both be deemed illegitimate and thus be rendered ineffective as a means of achieving their goal of controlling crime or providing order and safety (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974). Regarding effective forms of punishment, Durkheim asserts that punishment however must not be “a gratuitous act of cruelty” and the “criminal should suffer in proportion to his crime” (Durkheim [1893] 2013, p. 63; see also Pinker 2011). Herein lies the primary social control potential of vigilante activity and social control violence more generally (Senechal de la Roche 1996; Kreuzer 2008). Since the ultimate goal of crime control vigilantism is to provide or to restore order in the absence of state mechanisms to do so, vigilante violence, in theory, should be calculated and controlled. Yet, vigilante actions frequently become extremely violent and gratuitous (see Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gatz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). If the motivations and goals of vigilante violence are undermined by excessive violence, why then do some instances of vigilante action take on incredibly violent and brutal forms?

Forward panic and a micro-sociological perspective on violence

Collins’s (2008) theory of violence, in which he focuses on micro-sociological factors, rather than structural conditions, provides one plausible explanation for why crime control vigilantism often becomes excessively and gratuitously violent, which potentially undermines the ultimate social control and crime deterrence goals of the activity. Collins argues that, contrary to what most macro explanations assume, violence is not easy and if a situation is to result in violence it must overcome the “emotional field” of tension and fear surrounding all potentially violent situations and if that tension and fear is not overcome, then violence will not result (2008). Although different pathways exist to circumvent or overcome the tension/fear surrounding confrontational and potentially violent situations, “forward panic” is particularly useful for understanding vigilante violence as it is frequently involved in instances of crowd/collective violence. According to Collins, forward panic “starts with tension and fear in a conflict situation. [Where] the tension is prolonged and built up ... [and is] striving toward a climax” (Collins 2008, p. 85). In situations marked by forward panic, when the opportunity comes to overcome the tension/fear, emotions and actions erupt forcefully, overpowering the actors, “carrying them on to actions that they would normally not approve of” (Collins 2008, p. 85). Furthermore, violent conflicts in which forward panic occurs often result in actors entering an “emotional tunnel of violent attack” and a “moral holiday,” in which behavior that is not normally socially acceptable is possible and permissible (Collins 2008, p. 87). These situations often result in unstoppable frenzies centered on rage, in which incredibly violent acts and “overkill”—the carry-over of violent acts well past the point of victory—occur frequently. When this occurs, violent acts like vigilantism tend to spiral out of control and resemble atrocities more akin to lynchings—rather than targeted and calculated instances of punishment or justice. In these situations violence is taken above and beyond what is “necessary,” and the potential of these acts of vigilante violence in providing law, order, and peace, which is their ultimate goal, is likely undermined (Kreuzer 2008; Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974).

Studies employing Collins's micro-sociological theoretical perspective of violence are limited and those focusing explicitly on forward panic are limited even further (Klusemann 2010; Levine et al. 2011; Mazur 2009). Klusemann (2010) engages Collins's micro-sociological approach to violence in his study of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in which over 7000 Bosnian-Muslim men were killed by the Bosnian Serb Army. Using a range of data, Kluseman argues that although macro conditions may motivate a massacre, emotional dynamics are critical to understanding where and why extreme atrocities occur and that micro interactions and emotional momentum are necessary for the situational turning points that ultimately lead to atrocities. While Kluseman utilizes Collins's broader micro-sociological theory, he does not explore the concept of forward panic directly.

Given that Collins's theory straddles the sometimes-blurry lines between social, psychological, and even biological, it has drawn substantial criticisms from both the social and the "hard sciences." From within sociology, Felson (2009) contends that Collins's theory is unconformable, relies too heavily on "anecdotes" and ignores the more relevant quantitative literature. Additional heavily critical reviews were published in *Nature* and *Science* immediately following the publication of Collins's (2008) work. Laitin (2008) and Wilson and Daly (2008) criticize Collins's theory as being vague, relying too heavily on metaphors, ultimately being too informal and not measurable, and thus not really explanatory.

The only study (to my knowledge) that focuses directly on forward panic does not interrogate the concept from a sociological perspective, but in efforts to address the criticisms outlined above, centers on a "hormonal interpretation" of forward panic, replacing "Collins's metaphors with tangible and measurable hormonal mechanisms" (Mazur 2009, p. 435). In his study, Mazur documents the "*real* behavioral mechanisms... based on the hormones testosterone and cortisol" [emphasis mine] underlying forward panic, concluding that forward panic is the result of the changes in hormones that occur during confrontation situations.

To address the criticisms outlined above I first provide a clear sociological definition and operationalizing of forward panic based on Collins's work (2008, 2009, 2012). I then apply this operationalization to vigilante violence in South African townships to understand why episodes of vigilante violence are often marked by extreme and gratuitous violence. Furthermore, I contribute to the ongoing discussion of micro and macro causes of violence, arguing that the micro-level processes of forward panic described by Collins can occur on a larger scale if the pre-conditions for forward panic pervade the macro-level processes and structures of a community. Whereas others have argued for shifting Collins's micro-sociological theory to the psychological or biological (Laitin 2008; Mazur 2009; Wilson and Daly 2008), I offer a purely sociological operationalization of forward panic. I then link the literature on vigilante violence and forward panic in a brief discussion regarding the social control potential of vigilantism in cases of forward panic.

The stages of forward panic

To develop a more clear and precise understanding of forward panic as a sociological process, I find it helpful to break the concept into stages, as it is typically a sequential process. The first stage, the build up of tension or fear is a period of tense standoff

between two sides threatening violence; this could include actual fighting, violent confrontations, and threats (perceived or actual) of violence. Nearly all potentially violent confrontations require some level of tension or fear as a necessary precursor to the violence. In forward panic, however, this tension or fear is prolonged over a period of time, building so as to erupt eventually in an emotional rush. This period of tension/fear typically occurs in the events immediately before a violent episode, for instance in a police chase before an act of police brutality against the automobile's driver (Collins 2008). However, in his discussion of crowd violence and ethnic riots, Collins argues that this tension/fear can be the result “*structural* conditions in the background, more long-term in nature, which affect whether ethnic groups have an antagonistic relationship” [emphasis mine] (Collins 2008, p. 115). In reference to tension/fear specifically between ethnic groups, it is fair to assume that structural conditions could thus create antagonistic relationships between other groups as well (e.g., police and citizens, criminals and victims).

The second stage in the sequence is the sudden resolution in favor of one side in which the built up tension/fear in stage one is suddenly resolved or overcome in favor of one side, with that side gaining control. This process often occurs because one side has displayed a sudden weakness or vulnerability, for instance when one side runs away, has been caught, handcuffed, fallen down, or been isolated from support, etc. Both the “build up of tension/fear” and the “sudden resolution in favor of one side” refer to events and processes that occur prior to an outbreak of violence. The third stage, the rapid increase in numerical superiority of one side over the other, or “piling on,” is the process occurring immediately after a sudden resolution in favor of one side and consists of the numerical, physical, and emotional domination of one group over the other. This occurs immediately after the sudden resolution in favor of one side whereby, through the sudden display of vulnerability or weakness, participation by those who were previously bystanders is easier (i.e., one side has been caught or fallen down) and less risky (i.e., one side has been handcuffed), often increasing the ferocity of the dominating group. The fourth stage, the prolonged attacking of the weaker side even after the conflict is over and won, or “overkill,” refers to excessively violent or brutal attacks on defenseless individuals and attacks that go far beyond what is required for victory, as in the attacking or mutilating of dead bodies. According to Collins, those involved in overkill “fire more bullets than they need; they not only kill but destroy everything in sight; they throw more punches and kicks; they attack dead bodies” (Collins 2008, p. 94).

The stages of forward panic as it was originally conceptualized take place on an individual-level. In this article however, as indicated above, I conceptualize forward panic and its specific stages as potentially occurring in groups or communities that are subjected to the same micro-level process on the aggregate that spur forward panic in individuals.

The case of south African townships

While vigilantism is not unique to South Africa, South Africa provides an excellent context in which to explore the issues of vigilantism and forward panic, as vigilantism and “community justice” have a long and storied history in the country and continue to

be at the forefront of many discussions surrounding South Africa's high rate of violent crime (Bandeira and Higson-Smith 2011; Sekhonyane and Louw 2002). From the early part of the twentieth century until the present (Sekhonyane and Louw 2002), vigilantism has been an important and prevalent form of alternative justice, ostensibly providing communities a sense of social control and safety that the state could not, or would not, provide. Due to the racial and geographic inequalities in current and past infrastructural development and the role of the state police under apartheid, many of South Africa's townships—underdeveloped and often informal communities just outside of cities that have been historically reserved for non-whites—fall firmly under what Abrahams's (1998) would characterize as “frontier zones.”

The lack of a police presence in township during apartheid has largely gone unaddressed by the democratic government, resulting in vacuums of policing that are ripe for criminality and subsequently alternative forms of policing like vigilantism (Bandeira and Higson-Smith 2011; Buur 2010). Despite certain efforts made by the South African government to control crime and police poor black areas, many townships are “frontier zones” where vigilantes can emerge and operate. This is primarily a result of a lack of basic policing infrastructure, a general mistrust of the police, and a sense that the police are incompetent (which is often fueled by the infrastructural constraints).

Under apartheid the role of the police was more to keep white residents safe and to enforce apartheid's racist policies (Pillay 2000), thus black townships were “never policed in any detail from within, always at a distance and mainly from without” (Hansen 2006, p. 281). As a result, under apartheid some three-quarters of the country's police stations were concentrated in white areas, leaving roughly one-quarter of the police force to police roughly four-fifths of the population (Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Shaw 2002, p. 11). Since the fall of apartheid, there has been a rapid growth of informal settlements in urban areas, resulting in a large number of poor people living in unplanned communities that lack components of basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, and water. These infrastructural inefficiencies simultaneously create environments conducive for crime where essentials like street lights, telephones, or roads for police vehicles to drive on are unavailable (Lemanski 2004; Singh 2005).

Furthermore, as a result of the nature of the state's violent policing of non-whites under apartheid, many blacks simply mistrust the police, with the brutality and harsh oppression of the police force fresh in the collective memory (Buur 2006; Lemanski 2004; Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Steinberg 2008). This fact is coupled with a heightened sense of incompetence in the South African Police Service (SAPS). In 1996, 2 years after the fall of apartheid, only one-quarter of detectives had any formal training and only one in ten had more than 6 years experience serving in the SAPS (Gastrow and Shaw 2001). The police are often slow to respond, conduct poor detective work, and rarely follow-up on cases (Masiloane 2007). In fact, in 2003 it was estimated that only 6 % of crimes resulted in prosecution or conviction (Monaghan 2008, p. 85). Many also believe that the police force is riddled with corruption, which further compounds the existing mistrust and sense of police incompetence (Gastrow and Shaw 2001). Research done by Transparency International shows that 84 % of South Africans believe the SAPS to be corrupt and of the 74 % who had come in contact with the police, 36 % had paid a bribe (Pillay 2013). Together these factors create a situation in which the police are seen as corrupt, incompetent, and historically suspect, and as a

result are largely unwelcome in many townships. Steinberg (2008) describes the culmination of this as many township communities not giving “consent” to be policed by the state.

When this tenuous police-community relationship is coupled with some of the world’s highest crime rates (in 2012, South Africa had the ninth highest per capita homicide rate in the world at 31.0 and the highest rate of rape in the world in 2010, at 132.4 (UNODC Statistics 2013; UN Crime Stats 2015, <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Crime/Rape-rate>)), vigilantism becomes a predictable, and even “natural” response. Indeed, a 1999 Eastern Cape survey showed that nearly half of all respondents and 75 % of rural respondents supported alternative or traditional forms of justice and punishment, including vigilantism (Gastrow and Shaw 2001, p. 261). In 2013, almost 80 % of young South Africans feel that vigilante violence is an acceptable means of punishing alleged criminals (News24 2013). As a result of these common sentiments, new and expanding formal vigilante organizations (like PAGAD and Mapogo-a-Mathamaga) have been established all over South Africa. Often, vigilante violence emerges more spontaneously in seemingly sporadic episodes of what many term “mob justice” or “mob violence.” Both formal vigilante organizations and mob justice span from Cape Town to Johannesburg in places ranging from densely populated townships to rural villages and farmlands (Dixon and Johns 2001; Oomen 1999, 2004).

As noted above, acts of vigilantism all over the world have the potential to become excessively violent (Pratten and Sen 2008). Vigilantism in South Africa’s townships in particular has taken on this tone. Academic and journalistic accounts of vigilantism in South Africa’s townships are frequently filled with stories of incredibly brutal episodes of *necklacing* (the act of filling a tire with gasoline, putting it around someone’s neck, and lighting it), stonings, and mobs brutally beating or murdering innocent people (Bearak 2011; Buur 2008, 2010; Jensen 2008). The analysis of vigilante violence and forward panic presented here is, in part, an attempt to provide balance and understanding to these often sensationalist media portrayals.

Research sites and approach

I collected the data for this research in three townships just outside of the city of Johannesburg (Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South). These townships provide an ideal context to examine the issues surrounding crime, policing, and vigilante justice. Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South all include a mixture of formal and informal settlements and are nearly homogeneously black and impoverished to varying degrees, typical of many townships throughout the country. All three communities have extremely high rates of crime and limited access to policing or private security. When policing services are available they are often seen as ineffective in controlling crime through inefficiencies in the criminal justice system or corruption. As a result, many township residents do not always rely on the police to deal with criminal activity. By Abraham’s definition, all three of these communities could be considered frontier zones, which are ripe for vigilantism (1998).

According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), semi-structured interviewing is used to “achieve analyses that 1) are attuned to aspects of human group life, 2) depict aspects of that life, and 3) provide perspectives on that life that are simply not available to or

prompted by other methods of research” (p. 5). The data for this analysis consist of semi-structured interviews with township residents who were intimately familiar with vigilante activity or mob violence, having witnessed or participated in it. To gain initial access to interviewees, I employed a research assistant from Freedom Park to act as an entry point and arrange initial interviews. From my initial contacts I employed snowball sampling techniques for the subsequent interviews, a convenience sampling technique whereby initial interviewees suggest new ones. Given the sensitive nature of the research, I never attempted to contact interviewees without an introduction, thus snowball sampling was the most effective sampling technique available to me. This strategy is widely employed in the study of high-risk activities (Kalyvas 2006; Viterna 2006). During July and August 2011, I conducted eighteen interviews with seventeen people (one participant was interviewed initially, and then again a day after a vigilante/mob violence incident with which he was involved), at which point I met theoretical saturation (Guest et al. 2006). My research assistant was present for 17 of the 18 interviews. Some of the interviewees were more comfortable expressing themselves in Zulu and in these cases, as necessary, the research assistant translated for me what interviewees said.

All seventeen interviewees were with Black South Africans. Fourteen were male and three were female. The ages of the interviewees ranged from late 20s to early 50s. Interviewees were spread across a variety of low-wage or informal occupations or were unemployed. Five of the interviewees were from the township of Diepsloot, four were from Freedom Park, and eight were from Protea South. Two of the interviewees in the sample were freelance journalists. Both live and work in Diepsloot and primarily cover “mob violence” stories for a national tabloid newspaper. Interview topics covered issues related to crime, policing, and vigilante justice. The interview questions focused specifically on the interviewee’s experiences with and views of the SAPS, Community Policing Forums (organizations instituted by the state after apartheid to control crime by addressing the contentious relationship between the SAPS and township communities), and the criminal justice system in the country, experiences with and views of informal policing/mob justice, xenophobic attacks, and the violence that often accompanies informal policing and mob justice. Interviews ranged in length from 23 min to 2 h and 33 min, with an average interview length of 56 min.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, only omitting repeated phrases such as “um,” “you know,” and “what what” (a common South African colloquialism), etc. The interviews that contained Zulu portions were transcribed by my research assistant under the same guidelines. When necessary, excerpts from transcripts used in this article have been edited for clarity while maintaining the interviewee’s original meaning. Additionally, I use pseudonyms throughout this article to protect the identity of the interviewees. Data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO9. Initial analysis consisted of open coding to allow for unanticipated themes to emerge, after which these codes were grouped and patterns were established across cases.

I operationalize forward panic into codes corresponding with the sequence of events in a forward panic situation as defined by Collins (2008): “Build up of Tension/Fear,” “Sudden Resolution in favor of one side,” “Piling on,” and “Overkill.” These codes are derived from the different stages of forward panic outlined above. “Build up of Tension/Fear” is operationalized as a period of tense standoff between two sides

threatening violence; this could include actual fighting, violent confrontations, and threats (perceived or actual) of violence. “Sudden Resolution in favor of one side” is operationalized as situations in which the built up tension/fear is suddenly resolved or overcome in favor of one side, with one side gaining control. The third code, “Piling on,” is the process occurring immediately after a sudden resolution in favor of one side and is operationalized as the numerical, physical, and emotional domination of one group over the other, which primarily includes references to the number of people involved, as well as the weapons and ferocity employed by the dominating group. “Overkill” is the prolonged beating or attacking even when the conflict is over and won. It is operationalized as excessively violent or brutal attacks on defenseless individuals, attacks far beyond what is required for victory as in the attacking or mutilating of dead bodies. “Piling on” and “Overkill” refer to situations and actions occurring during an episode of forward panic.

Results

Although forward panic was developed as a micro-sociological approach to understanding violence by focusing primarily on individual emotions leading up to, and during, violent episodes, this article argues that the conditions and processes of forward panic can take place on a much broader, potentially macro, level. This argument is based on the notion that the individual-level conditions of forward panic, particularly the build up of tension/fear, can be experienced by a large number of individuals within a certain area and over an extended time period. In his discussion of crowd violence and ethnic riots, Collins very quickly touches on the possibility of multiple actors experiencing the pre-conditions of forward panic simultaneously and for an extended period of time. Collins’s discussion of these processes is very brief. While other attempts to validate or test forward panic have focused more on the micro (even biological) (see Mazur 2009), I instead focus on the more firmly sociological processes, linking micro and macro-level processes as they contribute to violence.

Build up of tension/fear

Build up of Tension/Fear was mentioned regularly throughout all eighteen of the interviews. In the interviews, the tension/fear of the community and police was most often expressed as the result of failure of the police to deal with crime, thus serving to exacerbate the tension/fear between the communities and criminals. “Discontent with police” was mentioned by all interviewees. Although forward panic against the police does sometimes occur, more often than not that tension/fear is built up and expressed towards criminals. References to tension/fear as related to criminals also appeared in all of the interviews. There is, however, substantial overlap between tension/fear resulting from discontent with police and tension/fear as a result of problems with criminals.

Build up of tension/fear: police misconduct

All interviewees expressed complaints against the police for misconduct in the form of the police treating victims poorly or with hostility, not arresting criminals, releasing of

criminals once arrested, or taking bribes. One of the most common themes in the discussion of police misconduct was that the police did not detain criminals in the desired manner or for the proper or desired amount of time. Many interviewees complained of negligence, bribery, and even collusion between the police and criminals. In regards to police misconduct, particularly around the issue of bribery, it is rather difficult to parse out what were simply the interviewees' perceptions of police accepting bribes and when bribery had actually occurred. However, given the high level of police corruption in South Africa (Pillay 2013; Singh 2005), it is safe to assume that many of the allegations of bribery were based in reality. Regardless of whether the police conduct referenced is real or perceived, the consequences are identical for the collective emotions of the community.

This perspective can be seen in the case of a man whom I call Dumi, the chairperson of the public safety/domestic abuse prevention organization Men as Safety Promoters (MASP) in the township of Freedom Park. As the chairperson of MASP, Dumi is heavily involved in community affairs, regularly attends community meetings, and patrols the streets on foot as part of his position. He is also a particularly outspoken critic of the police and African National Congress (ANC) (South Africa's ruling party since the first democratic elections) and did not shy away from vocalizing his potentially controversial opinions and assertions about either body. In his interview Dumi repeatedly claimed that the police themselves engage in criminal activity while on duty. Recounting a recent incident of police misconduct, Dumi said, "I can attest last week Wednesday at around 10:30 in the evening, I witnessed four police officers, all of them they were smoking heroin, nyopi (a local drug), they smoked it from ten in the evening to two in the morning... on the same day we heard that two men were raped." Situations like these, which appear to be rather common, create tension/fear in the community through the aggravation as a result of the blatant misconduct of the police but also in that the misconduct can oftentimes lead to, or be perceived as leading to, more crime (specifically in this case the rape of two men).

The misconduct of the police also creates tension/fear when community members widely see criminals as facing little or no punishment for their crimes even when arrested by the police. This is most commonly perceived as being the result of bribery, whereby suspects are able to buy their release from the police. Highlighting the frequency with which this occurs, a phrase occurring nearly universally throughout the interviews was that if the "police arrest him today, tomorrow he'll be free." While it is sometimes unclear if suspects are actually bribing the police or being let out legitimately on bail, the frequency with which people alleged this misconduct suggests that bribery occurs with regularity. Jabulani, a Community Policing Forum (CPF) chairperson from Diepsloot who is a supporter and participant of mob violence describes a case where a police captain in Diepsloot was actually arrested for accepting bribery:

The police rob our community. They are taking bribery from the community. When we complain to the police they say "No, it's just allegation." But through the help of the police outside Diepsloot, if the captain of the station here has been arrested fro bribery. He went down here at the tavern checking their permits and their license and said "Your license is expired. So now you must pay R1500 [about \$150]." They've been doing that all along. Until we finally raised it with

the Station Commissioner to say he needs to do something about it. It's his policemen who are robbing the community. He said he would put the police in check. They arrested that same policeman... They arrested their captain there at the station. We told the Station Commissioner, "No bail for that policeman. No bail, he must stay there."

In addition to illustrating the difficulty of dealing with the issue of bribery even for a CPF chairperson, Jabulani also touches on a general dissatisfaction with the bail system. Since bribery is perceived to be so rampant, it is often difficult or impossible for community members to distinguish between situations where suspects have bribed the police or have been released on bail.

Whether a suspect actually bribes the police or is released on bail (and is perhaps perceived to have bribed the police), the consequences in regard to creating tension/fear in the community are the same whether the police misconduct is real or perceived. Lindsey, a wiry young and enthusiastic local activist in Protea South and a vocal supporter of mob violence notes the seeming futility of turning over a suspected criminal to the police and the anger it causes: "When we give [the suspect] to the police, I won't get my stuff back. Tomorrow I'll see him walking free, so what's the use? I bought those things with hard earned cash, and then they get stolen by someone who I'll see tomorrow. That thing it eats my heart out. So it's better to take them out." Lindsey highlights how the release of criminals—whether through bribery or bail—leaves these criminals free to continue committing crime, creating anguish for victims. Furthermore, this form of police misconduct also creates tension/fear between the specific perpetrators and their victims.

In Protea South, Lungile, the chairperson of the local chapter of Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM), a social movement organization that advocates for squatters and informal settlement dwellers, illustrates how police misconduct can in some cases threaten the lives of the victims of crime: "Some of the criminals are the police department's friends or the friends of the police, and maybe they used this bribery to get out of the police station. And when the criminals come out, the person who opened the case... their life is in danger." This sentiment was echoed by Thabo, a young former CPF member in Protea South:

The Protea Glen police station doesn't know how to manage crime here, because they get lost in every thing, because today we get the criminal, tomorrow is coming back again and that criminal is not coming back again to say 'I am going to change the things that I was doing.' He is coming back to the place where he was caught and he will say 'You can't do anything to me, I am back again and I will do it again.' You see that thing makes the community of Protea South to get angry and to say there is nothing that can be done by the police.

He later goes on to talk about how this police misconduct and its consequences caused him to quit his work with the CPF: "I was working for the CPF and we arrested two guys with stolen property and the police don't do anything on that thing. I had to resign from community patrol because at the end, I'm going to be killed. And I left my community stranded with nothing.... We help the police but the police doesn't help us." Regardless of whether these claims are accurate (although the frequency with

which they are made would suggest that many are) the mere perception that the police are letting criminals off, free to threaten or attack their victims again, is enough to cultivate tension/fear in the community and generate very real consequences in these communities.

The tension/fear due to the perception or reality of widespread police misconduct creates a situation where members of the community are dissatisfied with the police in their response to crime. This process creates antagonism between the community and the police as well as the community and criminals, as criminals are perceived to be free to terrorize the community as they please. Furthermore, the repeated references to the police releasing criminals for bribes (or otherwise) creates tension and fear because the community not only perceives criminals as frequently going unpunished for their crimes, but there are situations in which they actually are. Thus, tension/fear between the community and police and tension/fear between the community and criminals interact with and exacerbate one another to heighten the overall level of tension/fear in these communities.

Build up of tension/fear: police response time

Another frequently cited complaint against the police was their response time to emergency calls. All interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with how long it took the police to respond to calls and crimes in progress. This view was shared by both those who worked very closely with the police, like CPF chairpersons, as well as those who have had very little formal interaction with the police. Although problems with infrastructure are a substantial issue in townships and many townships do not have their own police stations (Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Shaw 2002, p. 11), even people in those areas with active police stations cited regular experiences with unreasonably long and frustrating delays in police response time. Of those who were interviewed in areas without an active police station, the delay in police response was far greater than could be accounted for in travel time. Dumi, the chairperson of MASP mentioned above, briefly explains this vast disparity in the distance of the police station from Freedom Park and response time of the police: “from here to the Eldorado Park police station, its about 3 min, but all the time when we’ll report a crime the police will come after 2 h or 3 h,” far longer than could be accounted for in driving time.

Thabo, the former CPF member in Protea South who resigned as a result of a lack of support from the police, claims that police are blatantly ignoring calls: “We called the police and say ‘here is another guy who had been shot. Come and help.’... The police say ‘We are coming now,’ but we wait and wait and they are going to say ‘There is no van at the police station ... there is no police person ... wait for another to come and we are going to come to you.’ When you go to the police station you are going to find a van there.” Bheka, a rather serious and dedicated CPF chairperson from the township of Diepsloot who regularly interacts with the police as central part of his job, echoes this frustration when he recounts the situation of tension/fear when he would apprehend criminals and the closest police station was roughly 40 km away:

We operated for a long time without the police station, and people apprehend [a criminal] or maybe they do a citizen’s arrest and it takes for two, three, 5 h, waiting for the police. So somewhere somehow they get emotional, you

understand and that's where it started. We're not saying it's right but that's where it started. Once the police don't come then they take the law into their own hands.

As someone with an invested commitment in working with the police and dealing through legal means, it is readily apparent to Bheka how the context of struggling with slow police response times can create a tense emotional and dangerous situation where vigilante violence is understandable, if not sometimes inevitable, even among CPF members (who have a formal relationship with the police). The circumstance Bheka recounts is quite literally a standoff, similar to those Collins describes during police chases that end in police brutality.

In certain situations, the entire community might experience this tension/fear at the same time. Sam, a resident of Diepsloot and freelance journalist who photographs vigilante justice in his community, describes a particularly violent night where the lack of a police response was felt on a larger scale due to the widespread violence of the evening:

We had something like eleven murders Friday night and people were angry with the situation. Because others even tried to phone the police at the time they were being robbed, the police never came.... A lot of people were shot. I went to a tavern where three people were gunned down.... So people were angry and when somebody came up and said no, I know where these criminals are living. People stood up and said "where are they, these people are killing us."

Sam recounts a situation where many people are *simultaneously* experiencing the tension/fear from police non-response in the form of a violent crime spree. The residents then become angry and decide to respond themselves while the crimes are still taking place. The heightened tension/fear in this situation is such that people are willing to risk their lives in pursuit of these criminals.

As a precursor to forward panic, the failure (or perception thereof) of the police to deal with or respond to crime contributes to forward panic in two important ways: 1) by exacerbating the existing tension/fear associated with crime and 2) by firmly establishing these areas as frontier zones in which the next processes of forward panic can take place with little fear of interruption or repercussion by state authorities like the police.

Sudden resolution of tension in favor of one side

The next stage in a forward panic that Collins's discusses is the sudden resolution of tension/fear in favor of one side, which is often the result of something that brings widespread attention to a situation and tends to happen during a crime or shortly after a crime has been committed, when a numerically or physically superior group apprehends a criminal. Many of the interviewees mentioned that if people see someone struggling with another person, hear someone screaming or making a commotion, they will come out to see what is happening and often try to help the victim. The crowded nature of many townships further contributes to this process, as witnesses are likely to be more prevalent and able to respond more quickly than in other contexts. Sam, the freelance journalist mentioned above, said that "once a person screams in this community, you say he is in trouble, the community comes ... you can't scream a small

thing, the people come running.” The scream alerts many people at once to a situation, and once they arrive, the tension/fear is resolved in the community’s favor. He also notes that screaming is taken seriously enough by the community that you should not scream unless it is a serious matter. The serious nature of screaming further highlights the build up of tension/fear in these communities and its relationship with the sudden resolution of tension in favor of one side in that a high level of tension/fear needs to exist for a scream to trigger such a response from a community.

Sudden resolution of tension in favor of one side: whistling

The importance of alerting many people at once to a crime or disruption (like through a scream) has taken on a more institutionalized form than a simple scream, with many communities employing whistles as an alert system. The fact that many communities employ whistles for this purpose points to the fact that there is a certain level of latent tension/fear that exists within the entire community at all times. Lindsey discusses how institutionalized and widespread the whistle is in her community:

We discussed it in a meeting here in Zone 3, we have our own strategy of how to defend ourselves at night, the whistle is the first point that we are going to use if somebody is attacking a family. This plan that we have, even other zones they do the same. Also we don’t allow children to play with the whistles because we know the whistles is saying something, if the children are playing with the whistles then we have to talk to their parents and tell them that they must not allow to their children to play with the whistles.

Again here, the seriousness of the alert system is referenced. It is important that the effectiveness of this tool not be undermined through abuse. Lungile describes how the whistle system works, you blow the whistle to “call your neighbor and that neighbor calls another neighbor, so when we hear it, all of the neighbors come out.” Again, the density of townships contributes to both the effectiveness of the alert system in disseminating the alert that a crime is in progress and the ability for people to respond to that crime rapidly.

An additional way the whistle serves to resolve tension/fear in favor of the community is to call people out from their houses to attack or hunt a suspect once he or she has already been caught. Given the congested nature of many townships, using the whistle to alert others creates a situation in which large numbers of people can gather in a matter of minutes, aware of a transgression and ready to respond. Jabulani explains how important the whistle is and how quickly it can resolve tension/fear in favor of the community: “Once they blow the whistle, you must just surrender. You are dead.” Here Jabulani illustrates the common idea that the whistle is such an effective and institutionalized strategy that even criminals acknowledge its efficiency. Rather than attempting to run away, criminals who hear the whistle will often simply surrender rather than attempt to escape. The use of the whistle thus creates a rapid shift in both the emotional and physical strength that the community has over an alleged criminal, conducive to the emotional rushes that can lead to extreme violence.

Sudden resolution of tension in favor of one side: sudden weakness or vulnerability

In addition to the whistle, another process by which tension/fear is resolved in favor of one side is when a small group of community members or a body like the CPF will apprehend a criminal on their own, and once the community sees what is happening, they gather and attack the now vulnerable criminal. The tension/fear here is suddenly resolved by the fact that the criminal is in some sort of custody and thus particularly vulnerable. In describing an event in which the CPF apprehended three notorious criminals only to have them killed and burned by the community, Mandla, a scrappy young activist and former member of the CPF in Protea South who remains deeply involved in community issues, describes how a frustrated community quickly took advantage of the situation: “We tied them there ... we tied their hands together with their legs, sitting down but the community started to see the agitation.... People started to be angry [making a clapping noise].... There are some groups discussions and people are saying, ‘No, no why should we ask those people some questions? Why can’t we kill these people? They are butchers.’” Here, the apprehended criminals were incredibly vulnerable, as they were tied by their hands and feet and were completely defenseless against the community, even with the CPF trying to ward off an attack.

Many of these situations in which the tension/fear is suddenly resolved or overcome are due to a prolonged build up of tension/fear and also the result of the fact that most of these townships are often highly congested. This situation results in many people at once being alerted to a situation through a noise like a scream or whistle, or by visibly witnessing a confrontation. It also creates a situation where many people are capable of reaching the location of a confrontation in a very short period of time, as many people are necessarily already close by. Indeed, in many situations, the sudden resolution of tension/fear also takes the form of Piling On, in that a rapid increase in the numerical superiority of one group resolves the tension/fear in favor of one side and allows an “emotional rush” of violence to surge forth.

Piling on

The third stage in a forward panic situation is piling on and the theme came up in all of the interviews. It is the rapid increase in numerical superiority of one side over another, occurring simultaneously with or immediately after, the sudden resolution of tension/fear. Piling On allows one side to dominate the other physically and emotionally, who in most cases is defenseless or has given up. Through this process, violent aggression is made less risky and thus relatively easy. In most situations a criminal might be stronger than a victim, attack them when they are off guard, or have a weapon. In situations marked by Piling On, the victims suddenly gain the upper hand in the situation and the tension/fear bursts forth violently. Additionally, Piling On creates an intense emotional atmosphere that is particularly conducive to violence, as people’s anger and intense emotional state feed off of one another.

In these townships, Piling On is fueled by the collective tension/fear, as well as the congestion that makes it easy to become aware of a confrontation and quickly become involved. Sometimes piling on occurs when people are called to the scene (occurring simultaneously with the sudden resolution of tension/fear), as Phila, another former CPF member and political activist in Protea South, describes, “immediately when

someone is caught a lot of people scream, ‘Here is the thug!... And he was caught stealing this and that. ..’ and then people will come and he will be beaten by the community.”

The built up tension/fear in the community is highlighted by peoples’ willingness to participate in the violence: in many situations community members need only to see others responding to an incident. As a result, many join in without any knowledge the crime that occurred or the events leading up to the confrontation. Sbu, another journalist from Diepsloot who primarily covers mob violence in his community for a *The Daily Sun*, a tabloid newspaper and also the most popular newspaper in the country, describes how this process takes place, “there are people who just come out of nowhere who would not even ask ‘What’s going on?’ they would just help and beat that person.”

Often people are so eager to take part that even in situations where a few people have captured a criminal and do not want others involved, they are unable to stop them. Mandla describes how quickly the community can respond and completely take over a situation, even overpowering the CPF:

The answer of the community is to kill. There is no other thing. If you grab someone.... I could catch someone here and ... I wont even reach another zone. The minute I go from here to the clinic (about 40 feet away)... the crowd is here, out at the clinic, they say, ‘What’s going on?’ They start and say, ‘No, no, no. Why you taking this man there to the station?’ They say ‘No, let’s beat this man u. .. they are killing you.’

Once the tension/fear has been resolved or overcome through piling on, people are, in many situations, ready and fervent perpetrators in the violence.

The nature of piling on, with many people joining in and attacking one side in a very short period of time, makes it so that these outbursts of violence often occur incredibly quickly. Many people all at once are punching, kicking, beating with sjamboks (a cattle whip), throwing stones or bricks, or using whatever else they can find to attack a criminal. The journalist Sbu describes how quickly the process of piling on can result in death, “It only takes 3 min ... he’s gone. Three minutes and he’s gone. The multitude of people of attacking one person with different weapons. Yeah, it takes only 3 min.”

Overkill

The last stage in a forward panic is overkill, which was talked about in all of the interviews. Overkill is the process whereby people are caught up in the intense and collective emotional atmosphere or “tunnel” of forward panic and cannot stop their momentum. Many interviewees spoke of situations of piling on with phrases like, “you cannot stop the community,” where the community is “unstoppable” or “uncontrollable” to describe the rapid and unified emotional and violent escalation. When asked, “Who participates?” most responded with “The whole community,” that is to say the “community” is acting as a collective group in the violence. While we know that typically only a small percentage of individuals in violent crowds participate in the violence (Collins 2008), the perception that the community is united in this violence has very real consequences. The “community” is often so immersed in the

emotional atmosphere that people who do try to intervene or prevent the violence in any way are attacked as well. Whether it be people questioning the guilt of the suspect, defending the suspect, or even interventions by CPFs or the police, anyone seen as voicing transgressions are then at risk of attack because they are seen as “siding with the suspect.”

The emotional atmosphere is so intense and widespread that simply asking if the criminal is actually guilty can put one’s life at risk. Sbu, describes the risk of trying to stop or even question the community once they are in this state:

[You] can never do that. You become a victim. They never stop the mob. You can see your brother there but you can’t do anything. They will kill you as well. You will die with him. .. they have these preconceived ideas. And it is uncontrollable. When the mob is beating someone you can never come and say something. .. you’ll be killed.... They will say “No, you are doing it with him, that’s why you support him.” So you will also get killed.

This solidarity in emotional frenzy, which is free from opposition or even skepticism, creates an environment where people are feeding off of and reinforcing one another’s intense emotions. The group acts to amplify the emotions of individuals and often creates a “moral holiday,” where traditional moral constraints are ignored and individuals support and encourage one another in activities normally forbidden (Collins 2008, pp. 98, 243). In these situations the atmosphere is often marked by elation, exhilaration, or celebration. Numerous references were made to the jovial mood of community members during these incredibly violent episodes, where people were singing and dancing while a suspect was being beaten to death.

Overkill: burning

The burning of victims was referenced in the majority of the interviews. Although far from occurring in the majority of instances of vigilante violence, the burning of victims or their dead bodies illustrates how incredibly violent forward panic can get during situations of overkill. In a violent situation free from physical opposition or expressed moral disagreement, no one can question the group if it decides that it wants to escalate the violence to the point of burning a victim, something that would be morally reprehensible and unthinkable in nearly any other situation. Burning is undoubtedly overkill as it is hardly the most efficient way of killing a person, happens well past the point of the victory of the group, and in many cases happens after the person is already dead; there is much more violence than necessary even in the context of the already very violent situation. Sbu describes the mood of people just before the burning of someone alive:

It is just for the fun of it. I think it is just for the fun of it. Because you find people laughing you know... others are excited when they look at it. They are excited by what is happening. That person is naked, they are excited, they are laughing, they are chanting around that particular person. You see while others are soaking him [in paraffin]... yeah I think it is just for the fun of it.

As Sbu describes, the burning of alleged criminal alive is not functional violence in the way that beating or stoning might be perceived in the context of the violent episode: it is well beyond what might be deemed “necessary” to punish or even to kill the alleged criminal. Instead, within the context of forward panic and the subsequent moral holiday, the atmosphere Sbu describes during the burning of an alleged criminal at the very least signifies an atmosphere of extremely heightened emotion and could be taken to illustrate that these incidents might even border on recreational (Collins 2008; Grossman 2004).

However, once the moral holiday is over the brutality of such acts becomes clear. Jabulani, who despite his language was visibly excited in relaying this event, reflects back on one such horrific situation:

Sometimes it disgusts me when the community wants. .. after stoning they want to burn the person.... It doesn't.... I started to shiver. You see. .. I have seen two criminals from Mozambique, they were tied like this (with their hands together) and their legs. They took the plastics. .. the plastic bags and threw them on top of them and then they light. They were crying. They were crying until that fire come up. .. everything eaten by fire.

All the components of a forward panic situation work together to create these incredible episodes of violence. Indeed, forward panic often takes on the characteristics of what Collins calls an “atrocious,” “it is patently unfair: the strong against the weak; the armed against the unarmed (or the disarmed); the crowd against the individual... [it] is a very ugly-looking event” (Collins 2008, p. 94).

Contributions and implications

This research yields a number of important findings and contributions to the theoretical development of forward panic and the sociological literature on vigilante violence, illustrating when and why vigilante violence might become gratuitously violent, potentially undermining its own goals. First, the operationalization of forward panic in purely sociological terms through clearly defining the sequential processes and providing a coding scheme for forward panic should address many of the concerns leveled by critics of this theoretical perspective on violence. A clear operationalization should assuage Laitin’s (2008) concerns regarding coding schemes and theory confirmation. Furthermore, this operationalization places forward panic firmly within the body of sociology. Where Mazur (2009) attempted to address the “tangibility” of this theory by focusing on biological process, this article shows that such a complete shift in focus is unnecessary as the processes of forward panic are already readily apparent and tangible within the sociological.

Secondly, the processes of forward panic can occur at the group or community level. It is clear from this research that the micro-sociological pre-conditions for forward panic can occur simultaneously in many people at once and can occur over a longer period of time than described in Collins’s original work. Specifically, the build up of tension or fear that is a necessary pre-cursor for forward panic situations can affect entire communities if they are subject to the same processes that might incur those same

emotions at the individual level. When these processes are structural, as in high levels of crime and corrupt or inefficient policing in a community, it becomes even more apparent that “micro and macro theories cannot be entirely distinct, since macro always contains micro within it” (Collins 2009).

The findings from this article have important implications for future research using micro and macro approaches to understanding violence, research using forward panic in particular, and the study of informal social control and vigilantism. Returning to some of the concepts around vigilantism outlined earlier, it is clear that many of Johannesburg’s townships resemble Abrahams’s frontier zones and are areas where Weber’s state’s monopoly on violence is often non-existent, or at best severely fragmented. The lack of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence creates an environment marked by extremely high levels of crime as well as a need, in absence of the police, to control crime in the community by other means. These other means are usually various forms of crime control vigilantism, or the community “taking the law into its own hands.” Yet, the seemingly lawless context found in many townships and the build up of tension/fear as a result, lends itself to forward panic *rather* than the targeted and precise acts of violent punishment that would best serve the ultimate goals of vigilantism. Once forward panic is established, it bursts forth into levels of violence that move far beyond what could be considered an effective level of punishment to create social control. Instead, it could be argued the process of forward panic potentially undermines the social control potential of vigilante justice in Johannesburg’s townships, turning them from situations in which the community members take the “law into their own hands,” and find solidarity in collective punishment, into very violent instances of collective violence and brutality that often more closely resemble atrocities like lynchings than the efforts of a concerned community trying to take back control and protect themselves. When this gratuitous violence occurs, it is likely that vigilante violence itself is viewed as the problem, rather than a response to a problem.

Additionally, while I have argued that a more macro (i.e., group level or community level) approach to understanding forward panic is useful, focusing on the micro processes remains fundamental. Understanding gratuitous vigilante violence or mob justice via the micro-sociological approach of forward panic then, provides an optimistic take on an inherently negative social phenomenon (Kluseman 2010). If we are aware of the processes and pre-conditions of forward panics in South African townships, perhaps focusing efforts on disrupting these processes could result in reductions or preventions of mob violence. Research on effective interventions is then likely to be increasingly fruitful and could have important impacts in reducing the instances of mob violence in townships.

For instance, aside from the unfeasible overhauling of the SAPS to reduce inefficiency and corruption, more realistic interventions to reduce the build up of tension/fear might include programs and efforts to make the criminal justice system more transparent and information more accessible for township residents. This could include community meetings, pamphleteering, and other informational campaigns aimed at explaining the bail system, the court process, and other aspects of how the criminal justice system functions, the limitations of the police, and the rights of the accused.

In conjunction with making the criminal justice system more transparent, strengthening CPFs in township communities also has the potential to disrupt the processes of forward panics by reducing the build up of tension/fear through more effective community policing. Additionally, CPF officers deemed to be legitimate by the community have the potential to disrupt the sudden resolution in favor of one side and piling on.

In regards to the capacity for informal social control in communities, Drakulich and Crutchfield (1) argue that informal social control is more likely to occur in more affluent neighborhoods, neighborhoods with a higher degree of residential stability, and where trust in the police is high. This is in part because residents see the benefits of participation in informal social control as outweighing the costs. Where police are perceived to be willing to support and engage with informal social control efforts, the costs for participation are reduced via reducing the perceived risk of retaliation or further victimization, and the benefits are increased through increased effectiveness. Following these findings one would assume that the capacity for informal social control in South African townships would be very low as these communities are typically marked by high poverty, racial segregation and isolation, low perceptions of police efficacy, and very high levels of distrust in police. If lack of faith in the police in particular “inhibits informal social control activities, and in fact explains lower capacities for informal social control in minority communities” (Drakulich and Crutchfield 2013, p. 403), why then do we see such a high prevalence of vigilante violence in townships? Research on this might look to the perceptions of the costs and benefits of participating in informal social control. While the benefits are likely low due to poor police support, the costs might also be very low as the police may be unlikely or unable to punish those who participate in vigilante violence. Further research might also focus on the organizational capacities and collective efficacy in these types of communities that allow for this type of informal social control to take place but are unable to control effectively control the level of violence employed.

In addition to the capacity for informal social control in communities, this work also points to potential new research on the effectiveness of informal social control, particularly violent social control. Given that the ultimate goal of vigilante violence is to restore law, order, and safety, and the use of violence or threat there of is primarily a means of punishment or deterrence to support this goal, it should follow that vigilante violence would then be calculated and very deliberately directed at perpetrators or other symbolic targets. The data show that as a result of forward panic vigilante violence in townships is often poorly directed and very frequently goes well beyond what could be considered a calculated use of violence as punishment to restore law and order. Theoretically this should undermine the social control potential of vigilante violence but further research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of these forms of violent informal social control.

If the state remains unwilling or unable to police effectively and to provide formal social control in townships, the residents of these communities will regularly resort to informal methods of social control. In contexts in which the specific micro-sociological processes found in forward panic are experienced collectively, as in many townships communities, the result will likely be acts of collective violence often bordering on atrocity.

Acknowledgments First, the author wishes to thank the African Population Studies Research and Training Program at UC-Boulder and the Hewlett Foundation for their financial support of the research that went into this project. Additionally, the author would like to a number of people for guidance and feedback on earlier versions of this article. In particular, Randall Collins, whose guidance helped clarify the theoretical framework early on; Dana Fisher, for her help as I developed this article as part of one of her courses; Sangeetha Madhavan for her input and continuous direction throughout the writing and submission process; and Aviva Tevah for reading countless drafts and her ongoing support. Finally, I would like to thank Bongani Xezwi, whose assistance in navigating the townships where I conducted this research was invaluable.

References

- Abrahams, R. (1998). *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the state*. Malden: Polity Press.
- Bandeira, M. & Higson-Smith, C. (2011). Responding to the smoke that calls: Principles of community-level interventions for the prevention of collective violence. *Centre for the study of violence and reconciliation and the society, Work and Development Institute, University of the Witwatersrand*.
- Barak, B. (2011). The murder of an innocent man. *NY Times Magazine*. June 2.
- Buur, L. (2006). Reordering society: vigilantism and expressions of sovereignty in Port Elizabeth's townships. *Development and Change*, 37(4), 735–757.
- Buur, L. (2008). Fluctuating personhood: Vigilantism and citizenship in Port Elizabeth's townships. In D. Pratten & A. Sen (Eds.), *Global vigilantes*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Buur, L. (2010). Domesticating sovereigns: The changing nature of vigilante groups in South Africa. In T. Kirsh & T. Gratz (Eds.), *Domesticating vigilantism in Africa*. Woodbridge: James Currey.
- Chavez, L. (2008). *The Latino threat: Constructing immigrants, citizens, and the nation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Collins, R. (2008). *Violence: A micro-sociological theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Collins, R. (2009). Micro and macro causes of violence. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 3(1), 9–22.
- Collins, R. (2012). Entering and leaving the tunnel of violence: micro-sociological dynamics of emotional entrainment in violent interactions. *Current Sociology*, 61(2), 132–151.
- “Countries Compared by Crime > Rape rate.” International Statistics at NationMaster.com. Retrieved May 28, 2016, from <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Crime/Rape-rate>
- Dixon, B., & Johns, L. M. (2001). Gangs, Pagad & the state: vigilantism and revenge violence in the Western Cape. *Violence and Transition Series*, 3.
- Drakulich, K., & Crutchfield, R. (2013). The role of perceptions of the police in informal social control: implications for the racial stratification of crime and control. *Social Problems*, 60(3), 383–407.
- Durkheim, E. ([1893] 2013). *The division of labor in society*. Reprint, New York: The Free Press.
- Equal Justice Initiative. (2015). *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror—Report Summary*.
- Felson, R. (2009). Is violence natural, unnatural, or rational? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 60(3), 577–585.
- Gastrow, P., & Shaw, M. (2001). In search of safety: police transformations and public responses in South Africa. *Daedalus*, 130(1), 259–275.
- Godoy, A. (2004). When “justice” is criminal: lynchings in contemporary Latin America. *Theory and Society*, 33, 621–651.
- Goldstone, J. (1991). *Revolution and rebellion in the early modern world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grossman, D. (2004). *On combat: The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough?: an experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82.
- Hansen, T. (2006). Performers of sovereignty: on the privatization of security in urban South Africa. *Critique of Anthropology*, 26(3).
- Harris, B. (2001). ‘As for violent crime that’s our daily bread’: vigilante violence during South Africa’s period of transition. *Violence and Transition Series*, 1.
- Jensen, S. (2008). Policing Nkomazi: Crime, masculinity and generational conflicts. In D. Pratten & A. Sen (Eds.), *Global vigilantes*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Johnston, L. (1996). What is vigilantism? *British Journal of Criminology*, 36(2), 220–236.
- Kalyvas, S. (2006). *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirsch, T., & Gatz, T. (Eds.) (2010). *Domesticating vigilantism in Africa*. Woodbridge: James Currey.
- Kleck, G. (1988). Crime control through the private use of armed force. *Social Problems*, 35, 1–21.
- Klusemann, S. (2010). Micro-situational antecedents of violent atrocity. *Sociological Forum*, 25(2), 272–295.
- Kreager, D. A., Lyons, C., & Hays, Z. (2011). Urban revitalization and Seattle crime, 1982–2000. *Social Problems*, 58(4), 615–639.
- Kreuzer, P. (2008). Violent social control: A framework for research. Paper presented at the annual convention of the international studies association, march 28, San Francisco, CA.
- Laitin, D. (2008). Confronting violence face to face. *Science*, 320(April 4), 51–52.
- Lemanski, C. (2004). A new Apartheid? The spatial implications of fear of crime in Cape Town, South Africa. *Environment and Urbanization*, 16(2).
- Levine, M., Taylor, P., & Best, R. (2011). Third parties, violence, and conflict resolution: the role of group size and collective action in the microregulation of violence. *Psychological Science*, 22(3), 406–412.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Malesevic, S. (2010). *The sociology of war and violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masiloane, D. (2007). Proactive policing for the rich and reactive policing for the poor: hypocrisy in policing a stratified society. *South African Journal of Criminal Justice*, 20(3), 328–340.
- Mazur, A. (2009). A hormonal interpretation of Collins' s micro-sociological theory of violence. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 39(4), 434–447.
- Monaghan, R. (2008). Community-based justice in Northern Ireland and South Africa. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 18(1), 83–105.
- Morenoff, J., Sampson, R., & Raudenbush, S. (2001). Neighborhood inequality, collective efficacy and the spatial dynamics of urban violence. *Criminology*, 39, 517–559.
- North, D., Wallis, J., & Weingast, B. (2009). *Violence and social orders: A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oomen, B. (1999). Vigilante justice in perspective: the case study of Mapogo a Mathamaga. *Acta Criminologica*, 12, 45–53.
- Oomen, B. (2004). Vigilantism or alternative citizenship? The rise of Mapogo a Mathamaga. *African Studies*, 63(2), 153–171.
- Pillay, S. (2000). Problematizing the making of good and evil: Gangs and Pagad. Paper presented to the Third Crossroads in Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 21–25 June.
- Pillay, K. (2013). Thin blue line broken. *Corruption Watch*. <http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/content/thin-blue-line-broken>. Accessed 27 Feb 2014.
- Pinker, S. (2011). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Police blamed for vigilantism. *News24*. (2013). March 14. Retrieved September 23, 2015, from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Police-blamed-for-vigilantism-20130314>.
- Pratten, D., & Sen, A. (Eds.) (2008). *Global vigilantes*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rosenbaum, J., & Sederberg, P. (1974). Vigilantism: an analysis of establishment violence. *Comparative Politics*, 6(4), 541–570.
- Sampson, R., Raudenbush, S., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 918–924.
- Sekhonyane, M. & Louw, A. (2002). Violent justice, vigilantism, and the state's response. *Institute for Security Studies*, Monograph 72.
- Senecal de la Roche, R. (1996). Collective violence as social control. *Sociological Forum*, 11(1), 97–128.
- Shaw, M. (2002). *Crime and policing in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Transforming under fire*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Shearing, C., & Stenning, P. (1983). Private security: implications for social control. *Social Problems*, 30(5), 493–506.
- Silver, E., & Miller, L. (2004). Sources of informal social control in Chicago neighborhoods. *Criminology*, 42(3), 551–583.
- Singh, D. (2005). Resorting to community justice when state policing fails: South Africa. *Acta Criminologica*, 18(3), 1–18.
- Skocpol, T. (1979). *States and social revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steinberg, J. (2008). *Thin blue: The unwritten rules of policing South Africa*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2013). Intentional homicide count and rate per 100,000 population, by country/territory (2000-2012). Available from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime website: <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html>. Accessed 26 May 2015.
- Viterna, J. (2006). Pulled, pushed, and persuaded: explaining women's mobilization into the Salvadoran guerrilla Army. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(1), 1–45.
- Weber, M. (1919). Politics as a vocation.
- Wilson, M., & Daly, M. (2008). A close look at conflict. *Nature*, 451(February).
- Zimring, F. (2004). *The contradictions of American capital punishment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mark Gross is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland-College Park. His research focuses on vigilante violence and informal social control in South Africa. His dissertation, *More Than Just 'Mob Violence': An In-Depth Look at Vigilante Violence in South African Townships*, is based on extensive fieldwork and explains the geographic variations in South African vigilante violence by drawing on the well-established literature on social disorganization, informal social control, and violence. He has also done research on racial inequality and residential segregation in the United States and family demography in Africa. His work has resulted in multiple conference presentations, including at the Population Association of America and American Sociological Association annual meetings, and two co-authored publications, "'Doing' and 'Undoing' Gender in Fathering Research: Evidence from the Birth to Twenty Cohort Study in South Africa" in *Fathering*, and "Kin in Daily Routines: Time Use and Childrearing in Rural South Africa" in the *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. In addition to concentrating on his dissertation, Gross is currently working on a project that positions vigilante violence in South African townships as a form of contentious politics. Countering traditional narratives that view this violence as merely "mob violence," that is, sporadic and spontaneous; he argues that vigilante violence is a form of contentious politics reflecting the state's failure to provide adequate policing and security in marginalized communities.