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# EXPLORING NEGOTIATIONS OF SPACE AND SAFETY BY INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A dissertation submitted to the School of Human and Community Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Community-Based Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Supervisor

Prof Hugo Canham

2019

**DECLARATION**

"I declare that this dissertation on EXPLORING NEGOTIATIONS OF SPACE AND SAFETY BY INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university".

Gezina Hoxobes 2019

……..

## ABSTRACT

This study employed a phenomenological analysis to explore the negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education. Issues of how international African students enhance their safety, what identity consequences these safety enhancements have and how the sense of community amongst international African students influences their psychological wellbeing were of pertinence to this study. This study included international African students from the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Pretoria, totalling 13 participants. It was found that international African students: employ diverse mechanisms to enhance their safety; have inhibitions to self-expression and enablers to identity expression in enhancing their safety; have a poor sense of community; experience feelings of happiness, sadness and loneliness as well as indifference and; have encountered xenophobia in diverse forms. These findings contribute to the scant body of knowledge about the experiences of international African students within the South African context and so encourages further research in this area.



Keywords: *international African students, identity, psychological wellbeing, safety, sense of community, xenophobia*.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... 2

ABSTRACT ..... 3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... 4

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 5

1. INTRODUCTION ..... 8

1.1 Background of the study ..... 9

1.1.1 Mapping of the universities ..... 10

1.2 Rationale ..... 13

1.3 Research aims and questions ..... 14

1.4 Outline of the report ..... 14

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 16

2.1. Conceptual overview ..... 16

2.1.1 Migration, Xenophobia and Afrophobia in South Africa ..... 16

2.1.2 Internationalisation and international students ..... 19

2.1.3 Navigating space ..... 22

2.1.4 Sense of safety ..... 24

2.1.5 Sense of identity ..... 26

2.1.6 Sense of community ..... 28

2.1.7 Psychological wellbeing ..... 29

2.1.8 Conclusion ..... 31

2.2. Theoretical framework ..... 31

2.2.1 The Politics of Belonging ..... 31

2.2.2 Performativity ..... 34

2.2.3 Conclusion ..... 36

3. METHODS ..... 38

3.1 Qualitative research methodology ..... 38

3.2 Research design ..... 39

3.3 Sampling procedure ..... 39

3.4 Participants ..... 40

3.5 Data collection method ..... 41

3.6 Data analysis ..... 42

3.7 Ethical considerations ..... 44

3.8 Reflexivity ..... 46

3.9 Conclusion ..... 48

4. FINDINGS ..... 50

4.1 Safety enhancements ..... 50

4.2 Identity consequences to enhancing safety ..... 58

4.2.1 Inhibitions to self-expression ..... 58

4.2.2 Enablers to identity expression ..... 62

4.3 Sense of community ..... 64

4.3.1 Poor sense of community ..... 65

4.4 Psychological wellbeing ..... 69

4.4.1 Happiness ..... 69

4.4.2 Indifference ..... 70

4.4.3 Sadness and loneliness ..... 71

4.5 Accounts of Xenophobia ..... 73

4.5 Conclusion ..... 78

5. DISCUSSION ..... 79

5.1 Conclusion ..... 85

6. CONCLUSION ..... 87

7. RECOMMENDATIONS & LIMITATIONS ..... 92

REFERENCE LIST ..... 94

LIST OF FIGURES ..... 103

APPENDIX A – Ethics Clearance University of the Witwatersrand ..... 104

APPENDIX B – Ethics Clearance University of Pretoria ..... 105

APPENDIX C – Participant Information Sheet ..... 106

APPENDIX D – Consent Form for Semi-Structured Interview ..... 107

APPENDIX E – Audio Recording Consent Form ..... 108

APPENDIX F – Registrar Permission Letter ..... 109

APPENDIX G – Interview Guide ..... 110

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Sample Demographics…….. 40

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of African migration to South Africa is motivated by issues such as political instability, seeking better employment opportunities and improving overall standards of living. Amongst these reasons is that of education and gaining professional training. This study focussed on international African students. These are people that emigrate from their countries of origin to obtain tertiary education qualifications from other countries (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). These students either fund their own studies with the assistance of families or seek financial aid from third parties. Their efforts at obtaining quality education are aimed at improving their life chances and gaining international exposure.

International students face challenges regarding personal safety due to their identity construction as immigrant nationals in the modern conception of the nation state as an exclusionary mechanism between nationals and non-nationals (Marginson et al., 2010). Those considered immigrants sometimes face prejudice within the spaces they occupy (Puwar, 2004). In order to expand knowledge on this subject, this study investigated the experiences of international African students within the space of South African higher education. This investigation yielded the importance of concepts such as migration, xenophobia, Afrophobia, internationalisation, safety, space, identity, psychological wellbeing and community.

The experiences of international African students within this study were mainly made sense of through the theoretical frameworks of Yuval-Davis on belonging and the politics of belonging and Judith Butler on performative identity. These experiences were investigated by way of semi-structured interviews with 13 international African students from two South African universities. These interviews were subjected to an interpretative phenomenological analysis so as to extract overarching themes. The results of the exploration were thematically organised

into the topics of enhancing safety, identity consequences, sense of community, psychological wellbeing and encounters with xenophobia.

### 1.1 Background of the study

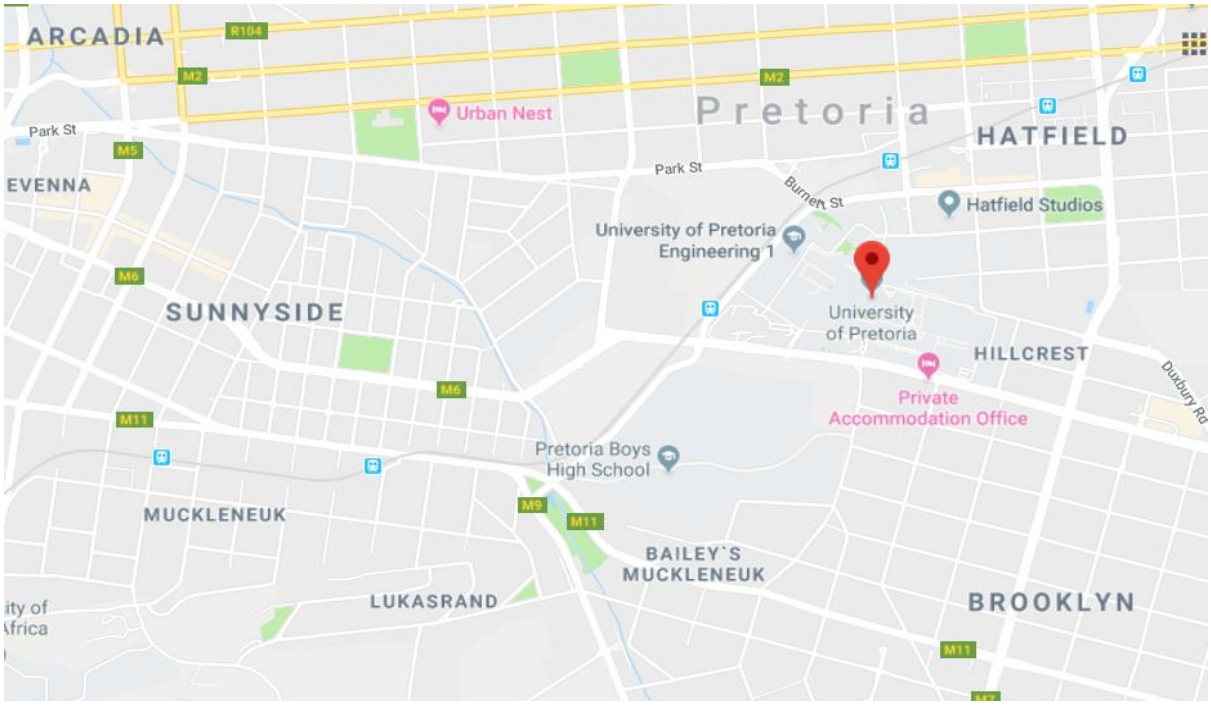
The landscape of universities around the world has been altered by the continued enrolment of international students in these institutions. Owing to globalisation and migration, the movement of people for the purposes of education and professional skills training has become a more regular phenomenon (Adepoju, 2000). The entry of relatively large numbers of international students into South African higher education institutions owes to these developments. However, the internationalisation of the South African education system has been underway since the colonial era that introduced African students and knowledges from the rest of the world to the country (Sehoole, 2006). The University of Fort Hare was a popular destination of study for Africans from across Southern Africa. International student populations within South African higher education are primarily African as people from the continent immigrate into South Africa in search of better opportunities. This context brings with it advantages and disadvantages for international students which includes elements of quality education and exclusion, amongst others. Experiences of international students in other contexts also resonate with international African students in South African higher education in relation to issues of safety and adjustment (McCarthy, 2016).

This study was conducted with students from two South African universities, namely: the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand. In the period of 2017 to 2018, the University of Witwatersrand was reported to have 38 343 student enrolments with 3 752 of these students being international students (University of Witwatersrand, 2018). In 2015 the University of Pretoria reported having 59 514 enrolled students whilst 4 298 of these were international contact students (Univeristy of Pretoria, 2018).

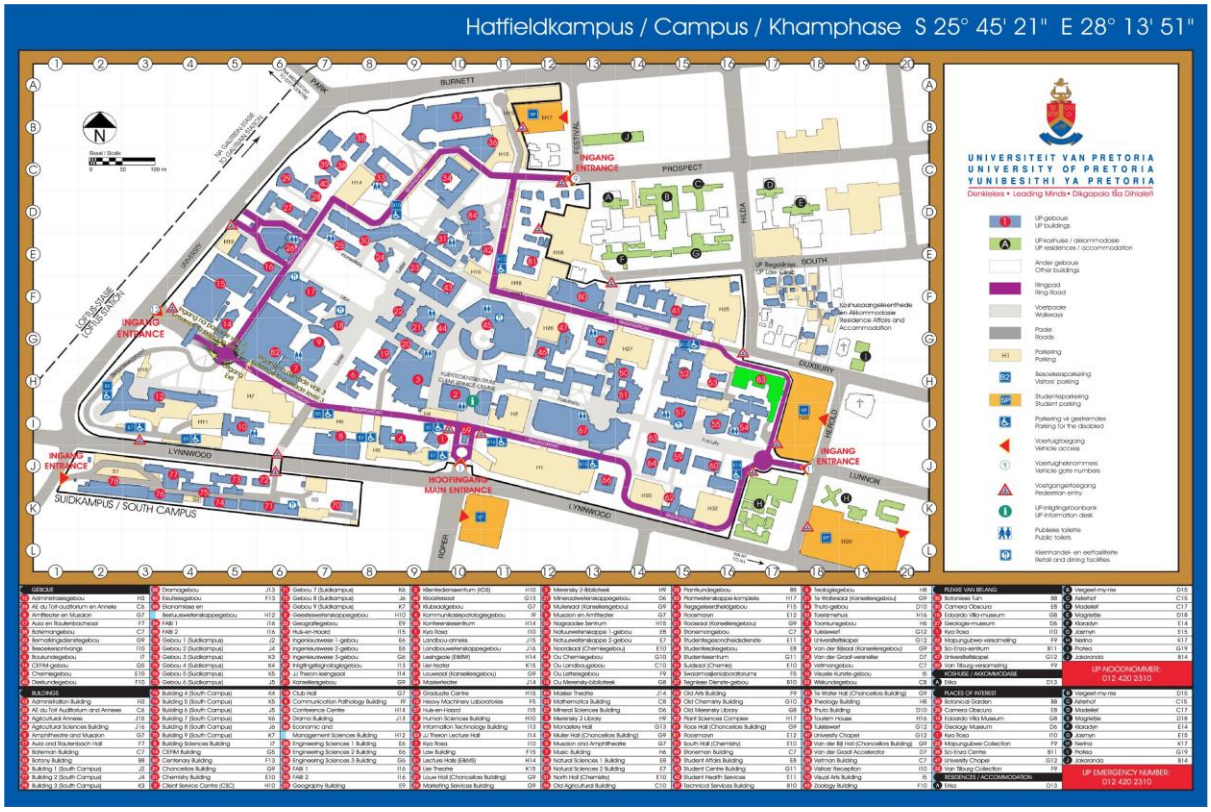
### 1.1.1 Mapping of the universities

The main campuses of two universities were used in this study. These are the Hatfield campus of the University of Pretoria and the Braamfontein campus of the University of Witwatersrand. International students are attracted to these institutions due to their quality education across faculties and research prowess on the African and global scene. These institutions also work towards fostering diversity and inclusivity.

The University of Pretoria has been used as an anchor institution that provides its Hatfield campus as a precinct project that links student accommodation, amenities, police services, security services and transport systems to the university (Hendricks & Flaherty, 2018). The goal of the Hatfield precinct is to combat crime, issues of economic decay and infrastructural decline. However, crime such as robberies and car hijackings remain problematic. Students also face other challenges such as large income disparities with only 30% having disposable income, safety and parking issues, unequal real estate markets, lack of recreational activities, rapid enrolment and the disparate nature of the seven university campuses (Hendricks & Flaherty, 2018). In 2014 the crime at the University of Witwatersrand was reported to be on the rise. Most of these crimes related to the theft of electronics and motor vehicles as well as robbery. The crimes at the University of Witwatersrand were targeted by Campus Control and the South African Police Service (University of the Witwatersrand, 2018). It is evident that these institutions provide a sense of safety and opportunity. However, they can also be sites of insecurity and hardship for both local and immigrant students. Below are the maps of these campuses to emphasise their geographical locations for a contextual understanding of the information conveyed in this section.



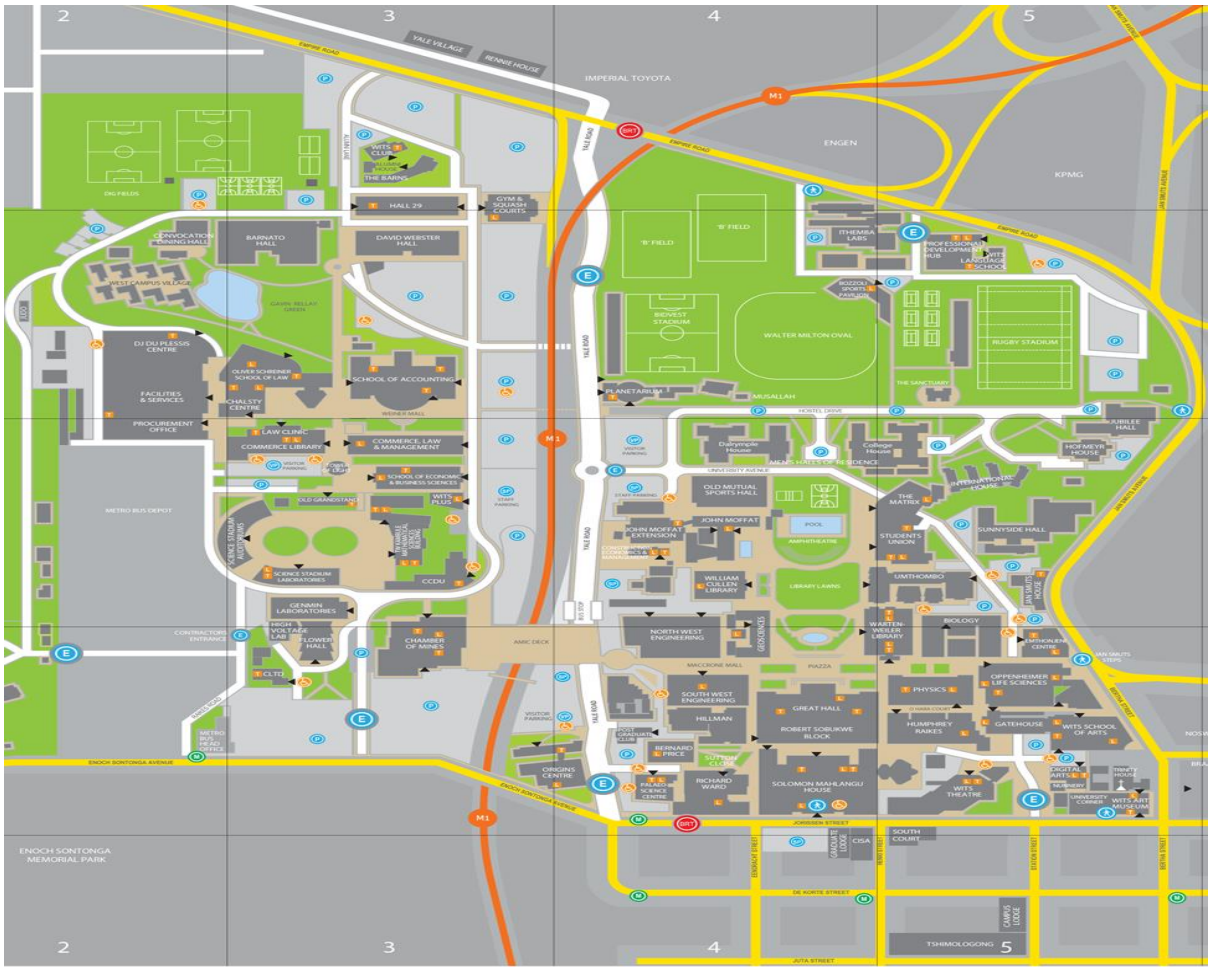

*Map 1: University of Pretoria location*




*Map 2: University of Pretoria Hatfield Campus*




*Map 3: University of Witwatersrand location*




*Map 4: University of Witwatersrand Braamfontein Campus*

## 1.2 Rationale

International students are a subset of the overall student population that traditionally cross borders to obtain educational qualifications from institutions of higher education (Marginson et al., 2010). However, their position as consumers in society leaves little attention for their personal safety and sense of self. Since identity is embedded in social contexts, it is believed that populations that experience marginalisation or discrimination may be subjected to the pressure of assimilating to locally acceptable identities. This study aimed to explore the probable identity consequences resulting from international African students' efforts to have a sense of safety in contexts where they may be perceived as space invaders (Puwar, 2004).

Moreover, there is evidence that if basic human needs such as safety, as well as belonging and love are fulfilled, they can serve as functions of psychological wellbeing and overall positive adjustment within a bond of community (Lester, Hvezda, Sullivan & Plourde, 1983; Pretty, Bishop, Fisher & Sonn, 2006). This study aimed to ascertain whether these elements assist international African students in their efforts to adjust to life in South Africa.

It is believed that the country hosts a large population of international students as over 13000 international students were enrolled in South African universities in 1996 and 53000 in 2007 (Zar, 2009). The number of international students continues to rise with close to 74000 international students being recorded in 2013 (Mokhothu & Callaghan, 2018). A total number of 72 960 international students were recorded in 2015 of which 10 338 were international African students on degree enrolment (International Education Association of South Africa, 2018). Contrastingly, Zar (2009) purports that two thirds of the international students in South Africa come from other African countries. Both the scale of international African students and the reported xenophobia against African migrants (Worby, Hassim, & Kupe, 2008), suggest that this is an area worth studying.

Moreover, while there is a significant amount of research on African migration in South Africa, such as by The African Centre for Migration and Society, a small amount of this research focuses on the African immigrant student population. It is against this background that I deemed this study relevant and significant for enhancing the existing body of academic knowledge regarding the experiences of international African students that are studying at South African higher education institutions.

### 1.3 Research aims and questions

The primary aim of this study was to explore international African students' perspectives on how they negotiate space to enhance their safety in South Africa by conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis of their accounts. Additional research aims included: an exploration of what identity consequences assuring their safety has, and; how their psychological wellbeing is influenced by the presence of a community of international African students and local students. This research aimed to investigate the following questions:

a) How do international African students navigate space to enhance their safety?

b) What identity consequences follow from international African students' decisions to enhance safety?

c) How does the sense of community amongst international African students influence their psychological sense of well-being?

### 1.4 Outline of the report

This study began with an *Introduction* that detailed the background of the study, the rationale and the research aims and questions. It will proceed to the second section titled *Literature Review* where a conceptual overview of the main concepts pertaining to this study is detailed and the theoretical frameworks within which this study is conducted are explored.

The third section is titled *Methods* and discusses the chosen methodology for the research. It also provides an overview of the research design, sampling methods, participant demographics, data collection method, data analysis, ethical considerations and reflexivity section. The fourth section is titled *Findings* and discusses the themes extracted from the data. These themes inform the outcome of the study. The fifth section is the *Discussion* and includes an exposition of the findings.

The sixth section discusses the *Limitations* of the study whilst the seventh section titled *Recommendations* explores comments and possible directions for future research. The final section is the *Conclusion* that encompasses the main points and final thoughts of the report.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. Conceptual overview

This section of the literature review aims to provide an overview of the key concepts used within this study. These concepts are discussed due to their significance in shaping the reading and understanding of the study.

### 2.1.1 Migration, Xenophobia and Afrophobia in South Africa

Migration trends within and from Africa have been influenced by various factors but distinctive forms of migration such as labour migration, refugee migration and the cross-border concealed migration of nomads characterise African migration (Adepoju, 2000). These dynamic and complex migratory patterns result from the unstable economic situations and decreasing agricultural sectors of many African countries. This makes countries with stable economies such as South Africa attractive destinations for highly qualified people and trades workers (Adepoju, 2000). After becoming democratic in 1994, South Africa has had strategic significance for those that have been displaced on the African continent in that the country is viewed as offering economic opportunities and asylum to those from more economically disadvantaged and politically volatile countries (Kruger & Osman, 2010).

However, the arrival of immigrants that results from various pull factors, such as education and employment, has engendered a dislike of "foreigners" amongst citizens (Kruger & Osman, 2010). This dislike of strangers or people from beyond the nation state is rooted in fear or hatred and is known as xenophobia (Mogekwu, 2005). One of the main reasons that have been advanced for this dislike is a working class-based competition for employment and scarce resources (Worby et al., 2008). South Africa is characterised by a huge gulf between those living in abject poverty resulting from high unemployment and those who live in first world levels of luxury (Canham & Langa, 2017). The legacies of colonialism and apartheid mean that

this inequality remains largely racialised. Working class inequality creates a fierce competition for very limited resources among the largely unemployed black people.

Being of a low socioeconomic status, being unemployed and having a low social status in relation to minorities or outgroups, has been proven to increase xenophobic sentiments amongst citizens due to a threat perception (Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, & Pedahzur, 2007). While the class position of international African students is more complex and transitionary, they also form part of this classification of immigrants as they migrate to South Africa to obtain an education. They therefore pose a possible threat as their presence and intentions may be viewed with suspicion. They might attract xenophobic attitudes as xenophobia not only means having a fear or hostility towards immigrants (Palmary, 2002) but can also entail the embodiment of discriminatory attitudes and actions that have the potential of becoming violent, abusive and exhibitionistic (Solomon & Kosaka, 2013).

With increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in South Africa, since the 2008 outburst of public violence against those constructed as immigrants, the more specific racial issue of Afrophobia has become problematic (Tafira, 2011). Mngxitama (2008) also termed xenophobia directed at blacks within the South African context as Negrophobia as it exhibits fear, dislike, hatred and violence towards immigrant African people and not white immigrants. The threat posed by darker skinned Africans is perceived as greater than that of others and is also noted as black on black violence (Koenane & Maphunye, 2015). Afrophobia disproportionately bases discrimination of a xenophobic nature against people from certain parts of the African continent as well as Africans that have settled in South Africa over the years. Afrophobia therefore becomes a form of oppression Africans enact against each other through practices and behaviours based on racial, nationality, cultural and ethnic differences which form the basis of all individual identities including international African students.

According to Tafira (2011), Afrophobia in South Africa manifests itself through everyday hate speech and derogatory terms such as: *Makwerekwere* referring to speakers of a strange language; *Magrigamba* referring to West African men that came with only clothes on their bodies and have now accumulated wealth; *Maforeigner* referring to non-nationality; *AmaKalanga* referring to the ethnic and immigrant identity of Zimbabweans; *MaNyasa* a term alienating and oppressive to Malawians; *MaNigeria and Broder* referring to the nationality and offensive speech appropriation of Nigerians; *Ngwangwa* referring to Nigerians; *Padrao* a misused and misappropriated use of the term towards Mozambicans; *Omotswagai* used for African migrants as inferior species in general; *Mkwevho* used towards migrants such as Mozambicans; *Abantu BakaMugabe* meaning Mugabe's people; *Amaxenophobia* meaning fear of immigrants as a racial label; *MaZimbabwe* referring to Zimbabweans and other immigrants; *Myfriend-Oooo* derogatory references to Western African speech patterns; and *MaSasko* referring to Zimbabweans.

Being an international student, in South Africa and beyond, is both an economic expense and a safety compromise when the categories of international student and immigrant converge in one body or identity. It is thus possible that the failure of the South African government in fostering safety is at the forefront of the mistreatment of immigrants, at least at a policy level (Abatan, 2015). This failure to provide security for immigrants can also be understood in relation to the states failure to provide adequate services for its own citizens as is evidenced by nationwide service delivery protests (Alexander, 2010). The endemic levels of violence in South Africa (Bowman, Stevens, Eagle, Langa, Kramer, Kiguwa & Nduna, 2015) mean that both citizens and immigrants are exposed to high levels of violence. Immigrants however have the added burden of confronting prejudiced police officers that might harbour xenophobic views. Koenane and Maphunye (2015) thus argue that the broader issue of xenophobia will not disappear until its moral and political disguises are dealt with radically and proactively.

The South African constitution is one of the most progressive in the world and the Bill of Rights affords all residents of the country basic political, cultural and socio-economic rights (Crush, 2000). However, the country is not a place of tolerance and openness towards non-citizens whether they are legal, illegal, immigrants, migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. It can be argued that xenophobia belongs to the domain of political identity or political consciousness and discourse (Neocosmos, 2010) as it implies a knowledge of belonging and not belonging as well as searching for truths. The existence of xenophobia in Africa was thus threatened by the spirit of Pan-Africanism at the height of liberation movements, birthing post-apartheid South Africa, as collective African efforts were pivotal in liberation movements (Neocosmos, 2010). Pan-Africanism challenges nation-states for being colonial artefacts and in its aspiration for African solidarity, it is the antithesis of xenophobia. In the post-apartheid period however, Pan-African ideologies appear to have been abandoned in favour of nationalism.

### 2.1.2 Internationalisation and international students

Globalisation has created a context in which the economic climate has started influencing academic trends (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The commercialisation of higher education, together with the drive to increase the number of post-graduate paying students, fuels internationalisation where higher education institutions (HEIs) adopt policies and practices to compete in the global ratings indices of the academic sphere (Ojo & Booth, 2009). HEIs are increasingly competing in the global market to maintain an attractive and competitive image that is paramount for obtaining funding and attracting financially resourced students, which are necessary for institutional survival in the global economy (Ivy, 2001). Thus, there is a move towards more active efforts by tertiary institutions at regulating institutional images by way of marketing (Ivy, 2001) and joining the transition towards internationalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

With the increased commercialisation of higher education, South African HEIs have recognised the plateauing of middle-class citizens and are now more actively recruiting well-resourced Africans from the rest of the continent. Higher education is also part of the free-trade context internationally and is moving to being considered as a private good rather than a public responsibility (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This is however highly contested in South Africa as was demonstrated by the FeesMustFall protests (Langa, Ndelu, Edwin, & Vilakazi, 2017) that insist that education is a public good that should be funded by the state.

The majority of South African HEIs are fragmented in their efforts towards genuine internationalisation as social, economic, political, local, and global factors shape the context where they are located and influences the process (Mavhungu, 2003). Sehoole (2006) argues that internationalisation within the South African context has existed since colonialism as education has always been influenced by global processes. The reasons for internationalisation in South Africa are due to: the post-1994 education crisis that caused universities to compete for a decreasing number of qualified school graduates; the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training that fosters southern African HEI cooperation through collaborative admissions; the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001 that seeks to enlarge South African research capacities through recruiting students from African and developing countries, and; the New partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) under the African Union that aims for political and social integration to further research in science and technology (Mavhungu, 2003).

According to Altbach and Knight (2007), the global motivations for internationalisation in higher education are numerous and include: profiting as the internationalisation project and knowledge industries contribute large sums of money not only to the higher education sector but to the total economy; access provision and demand absorption in that internationalisation

caters for the high demand for education by those that do not have access to education in their context; traditional internationalisation motivations of exposing students to other contexts and profiting from them; developing-country internationalisation for improving university diversity and income and; individual internationalisation where students mostly fund themselves for an international education. It therefore supports the notion that international students and an international culture within higher education institutions have come to feature as an important factor in determining measures of institutional "success" and reputation.

There exists a global market for international students as tertiary institutions capitalise on their quest for education. As state subsidies decrease (Bokana, 2014), many higher education institutions are becoming increasingly dependent on international students for revenue. However, "this commercial form of tertiary education for international students, designed to minimise costs and maximise revenues, leaves many students feeling under-protected and disenfranchised" (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 2). In addition, these students are made vulnerable because tertiary institutions misconstrue them as "consumers rather than individuals with a variety of social and economic rights" with needs that are similar to host country students (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005, p. 330).

It is evident that there are tensions about which identity(s) international students should occupy, whether they should be seen as individuals merely to be profited from or whether they should be seen as students that also have rights and needs. The identity of international students and the unique ways in which their personal and global meanings intersect are ultimately based on the contextual factors that define the spaces that these students inhabit. In addition, higher education institutions do not operate in a vacuum and as such, governmental approaches and the societal milieu profoundly influence international African students' negotiations of space

and safety. To make meaning of the personal experiences of international African students in the local context, it is important to examine the spaces that they occupy.

### 2.1.3 Navigating space

Space refers to places, physical or virtual, that people occupy. People can belong in a space or they can be constructed as invaders of that space. Puwar (2004) provides a critique of diversity and equality that happen through the superficial practices of merely including bodies that represent various categories of race and gender in spaces. This work looks at the consequences resulting from women and racialised minorities entering privileged and reserved spaces, as spaces are not fixed, and such unsanctioned encounters cause disruption. The entry of bodies into spaces and the movement of bodies has been noted as having reached a concrete ceiling despite the glass ceiling being cracked for gendered and racialised exclusions within spaces (Puwar, 2004). Although women from minority groups occupy spaces, they are limited to do so as they resemble minority or subordinate bodies.

Bodily and psychic boundaries have been historically formulated to restrict the access of marginalised groups to public spaces. This is because bodies do not simply move through spaces but constitute and are constituted by them. The entry of minority bodies into normative spaces causes disorientation and disruption to normative bodies (Puwar, 2004). The constructions of a closely defended nation state create disorientation across space and bodies and can cause anxieties when local and immigrant bodies occupy the same space.

This disruption happens in various spaces where minority bodies come into close proximity to normative bodies. Bodies that do not belong to or fit into spaces are subjected to super-surveillance and must work twice as hard to be accepted (Pedwell, 2007). In keeping with Butler's concept of performativity, super-surveillance may cause racialised and gendered

minority groups to perform socially sanctioned identities such as whiteness. These performances of unnatural identities are violent but happen because:

> [E]xisting under pressures of a microscopic spotlight of racialised and gendered optics, the slightest mistake is likely to be noticed, even exaggerated, and then taken as evidence of authority being misplaced (Puwar, 2004, p. 61).

Puwar (2004) connects her concept of space invader to institutionalised racism and whiteness. This highlights the structural and unseen nature of whiteness in its embeddedness within the institutional culture. Despite the entry of mismatched bodies into previously white, male and masculine spaces, these spaces remain gendered, classed and raced. This suggests that space is not neutral or colourless. Puwar (2004) argues that colour-blindness and notions of sameness need to be challenged. However, space invaders that challenge these notions are further marked or labelled as deviants. This theorisation provides an intersectional analysis of the structures of white dominance and oppression as well as the differing experiences of bodies within spaces based on their social categories. Therefore, highlighting the danger of assuming that spaces are safe, shared and inclusive.

Held (2015) argues that how people feel in certain spaces, geographies and emotional geographies is important to consider as the intersections of social identities influences feelings of safety and comfort. Similarly, Canham (2017) contends that physical spaces are informed by various intersections and that the performance of identities affords differential access to various spaces. Feelings of safety and comfort or fear and dis-ease within spaces signal that bodies and spaces are gendered, sexualised, racialised and classed. This suggests that the relations of othering can be observed through the feelings evoked within spaces (Held, 2015). Marginalised bodies experience displacement whilst privileged bodies constitute spaces to enhance their hegemony over access and safety. These relations to space are historically rooted.

However, Canham (2017) cautions that hegemonic forces are always challenged through performances of resistance and claiming spaces that were historically exclusionary. This suggests that power is always resisted (Foucault, 1990) and that those that are victimised have the agency and ability to contest their oppression.

Against the background of the drive towards internationalisation, having access to a space such as a tertiary institution does not guarantee inclusion and integration. According to Ditouras (2017), international students continue to face collective challenges in their experiences whilst navigating higher education spaces such as: challenges accessing financial aid, isolation, exclusion, loneliness, apprehension about life in a migrant country and, language and cultural barriers. Despite these challenges, international students occupy spaces in migrant countries and this may indicate performances of resistance and empowerment. This also extends to attempts at securing safety.

### 2.1.4 Sense of safety

In this study, sense of safety is a construct that comprises of a "psychological and subjective dimension" based on an individual's personality and a "social and objective dimension" (Migliorini, Rania, Cardinali, & Manetti, 2008, p. 71). Sense of safety is therefore a multifaceted construct constituted by both individual factors of influence as well as political and social factors of influence. This convergence of the private and public in sense of safety creates a complicated relational dynamic for the subjective and objective from an experiential perspective.

It is evident that a sense of belonging is inherent to the spaces that people occupy, albeit to various degrees. According to Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 198), the understanding of belonging has transcended the boundaries of "civil societies of nations and states into reconstructed defensive identity communities". Thus, one's social location in a society is driven by intricate power

dynamics and differences which subject people to operating within various identity categories. Consequently, belonging to an identity category such as being an international student does not exclude one's convergence and divergence with the host population along other categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality and ability status (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This poses a unique challenge for understanding the interplay of these multi-level social divisions within the spaces that international students occupy. This also impacts upon the overall experiences of safety and identity negotiation by international students in migrant settings (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

When an individual's sense of safety is jeopardised, a feeling of insecurity emerges in three dimensions. The first dimension is a cognitive evaluation of the degree of the threat to personal security. An evaluation is made of the extent of a situation and how serious the problem is (Migliorini et al., 2008). The second dimension is an emotional fear of personal inclusion in the threat. This relates to having an uncomfortable feeling about the environment and being included in a threatening situation (Migliorini et al., 2008). The final dimension manifests as behavioural coping strategies employed in response to the perceived threat (Migliorini et al., 2008) such as the fight, flight or freeze strategies employed in the face of a threat stressor (Schmidt, Richey, Zvolensky, & Maner, 2008).

Feelings of insecurity are exacerbated by prior traumatic or negative experiences. In addition, an individual's sense of safety and security can be influenced by receiving information from secondary sources and being subjected to indirect victimisation (Migliorini et al., 2008). Therefore, sense of safety and security can affect people's overall psychological wellbeing as feelings of fear, insecurity, uncertainty, destabilisation and exclusion prevail in violent or unsafe contexts (Moser, 2004). The relationships between feeling subjectively insecure and being objectively insecure are thus intricately intertwined.

McCarthy (2016) attributes the main issues of safety for international students in the United States to: transportation as students come from countries using different traffic regulation rules, different volumes of traffic and may be intimidated by public transit systems; medical issues in the realm of mental, physical, emotional and sexual health may prove intimidating for international students as they have to adjust to new systems; safety may be an issue in that international students' home countries may be safer or worse off in comparison to the new context thus causing confusion about the knowledge of crime and what to do; finally, logistical aspects such as accommodation may be a safety hazard as international students get taken advantage of by landlords or do not know how to find jobs and internships in a safe manner. Issues of safety are therefore tied to one's degree of belonging in a space and having identities normative to those spaces.

### 2.1.5 Sense of identity

Judith Butler's work on performative identity (1988) intersects with that of Puwar (2004) in the notion of not belonging because of not enacting the signifiers of a particular identity. This intersection stems from Puwar's theorisation that unfamiliar bodies do not belong in spaces. Similarly, Butler (1988) contends that marginalised groups perform identity in ways that highlight their difference. For Butler (1988), identities are created through the repetition of socially sanctioned performances and are shaped by the language that guides people's identity discourses. These performances receive the reassurance and reinforcement of membership, mastering, and belonging. Those that fail to perform hegemonic identities of belonging are however marginalised.

According to Howard (2000), sense of identity is embedded within social contexts and changes in the social contexts in which one finds oneself. Following Butler, identity emerges around social sanctions. It is also formulated through language and the manner in which people talk

about themselves. Identity can be viewed as malleable in verbal interactions because identities change as interactions and contextual variations occur (Howard, 2000). This demonstrates the power of language in creating the realities of self. This implies that power dynamics are implicit in identity dynamics (Bernstein, 2005).

In addition, Mkhize (2013) explores the dialogical basis of selfhood. This perspective proposes that one's conceptualisation of self is a decentralised sense of self that is influenced by the internal dialogue between one's own voice and that of others. Therefore, sense of identity contains an element of fluidity to the extent that dialogical dependence is prominent. However, populations that experience marginalisation or discrimination can be subjected to identity conflicts, especially when they experience anxiety and have difficulty coping with the reality of oppression (Zar, 2009). This highlights the possible fragility of identity for those that experience societal pressures and hardships.

Freeman (1993) challenges this notion of passivity in identity development by referring to people's sense of autonomy in the authorship of selfhood and (re)constructing identity. Moreover, it is important to consider the influence of the social psychological construct of metastereotypes on how international African students (out-group) are experienced by citizens (in-group). Metastereotypes concern the "impressions that group members expect members of a relevant out-group to hold of the in-group and are often activated by concerns that one would be evaluated along those lines during an intergroup encounter" (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011, p. 528). Thus, metastereotypes are mostly negative and influence levels of identification with the ingroup and can reinforce negative self-views and social identities in the outgroup (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011).

The application of the sociological analysis of identity by international students shows that it is an on-going process where identities are relative to experience and highlights the tensions

that exist when living dynamically as international students do in an on-going state of meaning creation (Velez-Gomez & Bell, 2018). Identity negotiations take on different experiences for different students in that whilst it creates tensions for some, it entrenches existing identity positioning's for others. Identity can therefore be influenced by the communities within which one is located.

### 2.1.6 Sense of community

Sense of community is an integral part of community psychological research and entails various elements. Community is defined as "a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships on which one could depend" (Sarason, 1974, p. 1). Thus, a sense of community entails an element of strong ties or bonds established between people. McMillan (1996, p. 1) views sense of community as "a spirit of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted, an awareness that trade, and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences that are preserved as art".

Perhaps the most influential definition of sense of community is that of McMillan and Chavis (1986) and it includes elements such as: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Sense of community is thus seen as "a source of social support, a buffer against physical and psychological illness and facilitates adjustment" (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 10). There is support for findings that when people perceive prejudice and exclusion from host communities, this increases identification with the minority group members of international students (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). The concept of sense of community has however been critiqued for its potential to create divisions by not recognising the fluidity and permeability of identity. For instance, there may be markers of personal identity that trump national identity and cause sharing of interests with non-nationals

versus nationals. However, the general concept has resonance when loosely applied with an awareness of what it enables and forecloses.

It is important to note that the above exposition of sense of community, based on McMillan and Chavis, is intended as a theoretical framework against which to understand the research participant's understandings of sense of community. This study did not utilise the Sense of Community Index (SCI) which is based on McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory, as a measurement instrument. The study did however take a phenomenological approach to explore how participants perceive and experience sense of community and whether this can be viewed as enhancing or challenging their sense of safety and negotiation of space. The phenomenological approach was used in this study due to the reliability and validity constraints (Stevens, Jason, & Ferrari, 2011; Long & Perkins, 2003) related to implementing the SCI. The SCI does not fit theoretically with the concepts proposed by McMillan and Chavis and lacks reliability when the concepts or phenomena are observed.

### 2.1.7 Psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing in this research is informed by a community psychological lens which conceives of international African students beyond the individual but as a diverse community with areas of convergence and divergence. It is essential to note that wellness is a contextually bound, and relative phenomenon that is applicable across individual, group and community levels alike (Prilleltensky, 2008). For wellness to be optimally fulfilled, three needs of human existence should be simultaneously satisfied, and these include: personal needs; collective needs; and relational needs (Prilleltensky, 2008). Personal needs pertain to aspects of "health, self-determination, meaning, spirituality, and opportunities for growth" (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 122). The interdependent nature of these needs is evident in that personal needs ultimately rest

on the fulfilment of collective needs such as “adequate health care, environmental protection, welfare policies and a measure of economic equality” (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 122).

The relational needs involve an even more complex confluence of inherent individual and group interests which can ultimately foster or constrict the development of healthy microsystemic and macrosystemic relationships (Prilleltensky, 2008; Visser & Moleko, 2012). These two parallel, yet interdependent individual and group interests, can be merged by way of fostering a “respect for diversity which ensures that unique identities are affirmed by others” and by facilitating democratic participation in which “community members have a say in the decisions affecting their lives” (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 123). It is at this point that it is necessary to note the complex interplay between elements of power, wellness, oppression and liberation in community settings and their role in informing the experiences of local and immigrant bodies within those spaces.

International African students face similar challenges to host country students that transition to university. These challenges include anxiety about unknown and new experiences, academic stress, relational tensions, feelings of isolation and financial pressures (Prieto-Welch, 2016). However, their experiences are compounded by contextual adjustments notably the cultural, social and political contexts that entail issues such as racism, discrimination and microaggressions (Prieto-Welch, 2016). These issues and narratives shape the lived experiences of international students not only on campus but in the surrounding communities and impact on psychological wellbeing. Due to issues such as language barriers, different understandings of mental health, culutral differences and stigma, international students’ help-seeking behaviours for support services are largely decreased in comparison to local students (Prieto-Welch, 2016).

### 2.1.8 Conclusion

This part of the literature review section provided a conceptual overview of the existent research and data on the negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education. It began by noting matters pertaining to African student migration, xenophobia and Afrophobia in the South African context. The literature reviewed was particularly focused on the phenomenon of internationalisation and the increase of international students' as a subset of the general student population in South Africa. Furthermore, literature on the concepts of space, safety, identity, community and psychological wellbeing were unapacked in order to explicate the core concerns of this study. It is from the preceding review that this study was deemed researchable and pertinent in broadening knowledge about the issues relating to international African students in South African higher education.

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework focuses on the specific theories that underpin the study and inform the meaning made of the findings of the study. It offers a high-level abstraction that drives the study.

### 2.2.1 The Politics of Belonging

Nira Yuval-Davis has contributed to the literature on belonging through differentiating between belonging and the politics of belonging. Belonging entails feeling at home and feeling safe and deals with emotional attachment (Christensen, 2009). The politics of belonging has to do with who is included and who is excluded from communities through boundary maintenance (Yuval-Davis, 2007). It problematises belonging by pointing out that belonging is not a neutral concept as it is informed by boundary maintainance. The politics of belonging therefore deals

with “specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). Belonging is often naturalised and only becomes politicised when there are threats to it. Yuval-Davis (2006) has also made a point of differentiating between the politics of belonging that is symbolised through loyality to origin and nationalism versus citizenries that recognise diversity. She posits that belonging can happen in different ways for both individuals and groups as it is a dynamic process influenced by organisational and subjective factors (Christensen, 2009). Belonging is therefore constructed and naturalised through hegemonic power relations.

Belonging is constructed at three analytical levels, namely: social locations; people’s identifications and emotional attachments, and; ethnic and political value systems (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Social locations are created along power lines of difference through categorisations such as class, race and gender. People can either be located higher or lower on these social and economic grids of power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These positionalities are contextually based, fluid and contested. Social locations are also intersectional in nature and are constructed along several power axes of difference. This intersectional analysis has three points, namely: people’s concrete social locations are created along several axes of difference despite their exclusive identification with one category such as only women; the intersecting social divisions need to be viewed as constituting each other and not as separate analytical items; the navigation of social divisions is not simplistic and remains open-ended for the most part despite some social divisions taking precedence contextually (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Yuval-Davis’ intersectional perspective on belonging argues that the construction of identities and belonging take place within the interrelationships of social categories such as race, gender,

class and ethnicity (Youkhana, 2015). Intersectional perspectives are based on the interlocking nature of systems of power and assert that social categories do not exist in isolation of each other (Cooper, 2015). It is critical to hold an intersectional perspective to belonging where homogeneity is challenged so that the differential meanings of black or women, amongst other categories, are considered in discussions of citizenship and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2007).

Ways of identifying and attaching may be related to personal narratives on who one is and where one belongs (Christensen, 2009). These identity narratives can be individual or collective with the collective identity often influencing the individual identity. Depsite the reproductive and generational nature of identity narratives, they can be altered and contested (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These narratives extend beyond being cognitive stories as they are driven by emotional investments and desires to attach that symbolise people's yearning to belong and become. This constructs identity as transitionary and shaped by the dual processes of being and becoming as well as belonging and yearning to belong (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The desire to belong shifts in importance based on the context. However, the emotional aspects of identities become more prominent when there are insecurities and threats. People may be willing to sacrifice their lives to secure the continuation of their identity narratives, identity objects and attachments and return to safe places (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging also has an aspect of performativity that involves repetitive actions of individual and collective behaviour that constructs and reproduces identity narratives and attachments. Some people resist these performances whilst others are forced to construct their identities in certain ways to maintain socal locations and positionings (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Although individual and collective identities are constructed and socially located, there are value systems people use to make judgements of their and other's belonging. These ethical and political values relate to where identity and category boundaries should be drawn, who should

be included or excluded and what accommodations can be made for these boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These contestations around identity narratives and social locations transition from belonging into the politics of belonging.

Belonging has to do with who is included and who is isolated from communities and ties into debates about space through migration studies. The construction of who belongs and who does not belong has been theorised by Butler and Spivak (2007) through the lens of the nation state. Here the state has the power to decide positions of belonging and non-belonging. The idea of the nation state is unstable especially in the context of globalisation that is challenging the notions of homogeneity and belonging (Castles, 2000). Globalised communities come with diverse and multicultural associations that cause belonging to have an impact on collective and individual identities. There has however been a backlash to globalisation as nation states have reasserted the boundaries of the nation. For example, the United States of America has made migration for Mexican's particularly difficult while many European countries have kept Serian and African refugees out of their countries. Brown and black bodies are particularly prone to exclusion. Identities are influenced by non-identity (Skeggs, 1997) and therefore by notions of belonging and non-belonging. This is because both explore who is marginalised and which representations are unfavoured.

### 2.2.2 Performativity

Judith Butler's (1988) work on gender, performativity and identity posits that people's behaviour and social positions are shaped by the power of language, symbolism, repetition of performances and the status quo. Her post-structural orientation influences her perspectives on gender socialisation and the impact this has on marginalised groups as the dominant cultures and discourses permeate into people's lived experiences. Butler's work is important as it

challenges dominant notions of normality. She questions taken for granted understandings of gender.

In deviating from the traditional perspectives of agentic identity development and achievement, Butler (1988) theorises identity as the performance of repetitive acts by women and men. She contends that while there are aspects of agency that underpin this performance; social pressure and modelling operate as a constraining force (Lloyd, 2007). Identity is seen as being influenced by the socio-historical context of patriarchy and heteronormativity as well as by politics. This renders it as a social construction largely influenced by culture and language (Butler, 1999). Identity developes out of social norms (Butler, 1993) and is a process of becoming for a subject through repetition and recitation. This process of repetition and recitation is important for the credibility of the gendered subject in society (Lloyd, 2007). This differs from traditional persepctives on identity by combining both agency and structure as well as seeing identity as fluid and changeable.

The concept of performativity is a discursive process of enacting what it names by using cultural cues and maintaining these cues through interpellation (Butler, 1993). Therefore, performativity results from a pressure to adhere to an intelligible subject in order to fit into society and is also achieved through the stylisation of the body (Butler, 1999). For example, effiminate stylisation of the body is important for the achievement of the identity of a woman. Gender is seen as appointed and acted out through its maintenance by socially dominant discourses as well as generationally spread social schemas. Whilst dominant identities and gender roles are transmitted and performed due to structural pressures and conscious and unconscious repetition, non-dominant self-expressions may tend to be repressed or suppressed due to pressure. For instance, a man might perform hypermasculinity in order to supress effeminate expression. The operation of marginalised identities within contexts structured

around heteronormative dominance may be challenging as it can influence how genders and identities are performed.

Dominant discourses around the constitution of the intelligible subject may lead to the subverting and rejection of socially unacceptable idenitities. This may result in internally unhealthy and incongruent performances in order to avoid violence and exclusion. These dynamics of dominant versus subordinate genders and identities is termed the masculine signifying economy by Butler (1999). In these binary dynamics, there is the existence of disproportionate power dynamics. The internalisation of the masculine signifying economy may hinder the expression of identities that are othered within the societal context. The idea of the intelligible or socially approved genders or identities impacts those that do not conform as they are not recognised or rewared (Butler, 1999). This intelligibility applies to other social divisions such as race and class, amongst others.

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

The theoretical framework explored two theories, namely: the politics of belonging by Nira Yuval-Davis and performativity by Judith Butler. Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights that there is a difference between belonging and the politics of belonging. The former may be based on various internal standards of who can be included or excluded, whilst the latter relates to the political influences determining who is included or excluded such as through the demarcation and policing of borders. She also emphasises the importance of intersectionality in conducting analyses of belonging and the politics of belonging. Butler's (1988) theorisation of performativity challenges normative views of gender and other social categories. The performances of these social categories are susceptible to various influences and are thus not fixed. She posits that individuals may conform to an intelligible object to fit in or may resist

these performances as an act of protest. Both theories are important in understanding the issues of identity, safety and space that are of interest to this study.

# 3. METHODS

The methods section outlines an exposition of the research methodology, research design, sampling procedure, participants, data collection method, data analysis, ethical considerations and reflexivity.

## 3.1 Qualitative research methodology

The qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. It can be conceptualised as "the approach to empirical research that relies primarily on the collection of qualitative data (i.e., non-numeric data such as words, pictures, images)" (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2014, p. 383). Instead of focussing on numbers, it focuses on an in-depth analysis of words, knowledges and sentiments. This research provides results that do not use statistical procedures or methods of quantifying data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative research has three major epistemological positions or types of knowledges, namely: realist knowledge, phenomenological knowledge and social constructionist knowledge. Whilst epistemology covers the question of how we can know, ontology seeks to answer what there is to know. Two ontological positions exist within qualitative methodology and these are the realist and relativist positions where the former deals with cause-effect relationships and the latter emphasises the existence of the world and the various interpretations that can be made (Willig, 2013). This study used a phenomenological orientation to knowledge production. This approach aims to capture the subjective lived experiences of research participants (Finlay, 2013). Qualitative research can have an output of descriptions and explanations for various phenomena. Phenomenological knowledge subscribes to a relativist ontology that eschews single truths.

### 3.2 Research design

The research design adopted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). An interpretative phenomenological approach to research does not take for granted the lived experience accounts of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007) but instead scrutinises the account whilst considering the contextual influences that inform it. It also requires of me to make an interpretation of the account (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Interpretative phenomenological research does not hold true to the traditional phenomenological approach of merely providing a description. It insists that descriptions cannot exist without interpretation. This is particularly important for interpretations that draw on the broader social, cultural and theoretical contexts (Willig, 2013).

### 3.3 Sampling procedure

Participants that met the criteria of being international African students were eligible to participate in this study. Thirteen participants took part in this study. The participants were aged between 21 and 33 years and were from African countries other than South Africa. The inclusion of the number of years of residency, which averaged at 3.5 years, assisted me in making sense of some variations or patterns between participants based on years of residency. There was effort made to be inclusive of both male and female participants. Two non-random sampling methods were applied in tandem, namely the purposive sampling method and the snowball sampling technique.

Purposive sampling includes cases where, “the researcher specifies the characteristics of the population of interest and then locates individuals who match the needed characteristics” (Christensen et al., 2014, p. 177). Participants were identified by way of approaching the international student divisions of the relevant institutions; international student associations, and; by way of advertising the research on various electronic media platforms and by word-of-

mouth. The areas where the participants were available ultimately determined where I went to conduct the data collection. The study was interested in students' lives both on and off campus. It was after meeting participants that the snowball sampling technique was essential for locating further participants. In this sampling technique, "each research participant is asked to identify other potential research participants who have a certain inclusion characteristic (or set of characteristics)" (Christensen et al., 2014, p. 177). The participants were asked to contact me via email and were given information about the study and a request for their participation was made.

### 3.4 Participants

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the sample demographics. For example, the youngest participant was 21 while the eldest was 33. Participants were mostly from the SADC region and included Namibia, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Uganda and Kenya represented East African participation and Nigeria was the only West African country of origin for participants. Participants period of residence in South Africa ranged from as recently as seven months to nine years. The average period of stay in South Africa was 3.5 years. Participants were recruited from two Gauteng-based universities, namely: the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Pretoria (UP).

| PARTICIPANT | AGE | GENDER | COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | DURATION IN RSA | INSTITUTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 24 | Female | Namibia | 7 months | Wits |
| **2** | 21 | Male | Democratic Republic of Congo | 2 years | Wits |
| **3** | 29 | Male | Swaziland | Part-time | Wits |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4** | 23 | Male | Uganda | 5 years | UP |
| **5** | 31 | Female | Zimbabwe | 4 years | Wits |
| **6** | 26 | Female | Namibia | 2 years | Wits |
| **7** | 21 | Female | Kenya | 2.5 years | Wits |
| **8** | 30 | Male | Nigeria | 3 years | Wits |
| **9** | 24 | Male | Nigeria | 9 years | Wits |
| **10** | 31 | Male | Nigeria | 2 years | Wits |
| **11** | 23 | Male | Zimbabwe | 5 years | UP |
| **12** | 21 | Male | Zimbabwe | 7 years | Wits |
| **13** | 33 | Female | Nigeria | 3 years | Wits |

*Table 1: Sample demographics*

### 3.5 Data collection method

The semi-structured interviewing method of data collection was employed with the participants because of its compatibility with the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This method allows for adjustment in the method of asking questions based on the participants unlike an unstructured interview which uses open-ended questions without any particular order. Semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts about the safety and space negotiations of international African students and the accompanying consequences. Although this style of interviewing is non-directive, the questions I asked engendered a willingness to talk in the participants (Willig, 2013). An interview guide was used to give structure to the interview process and to foster meaningful interaction between myself and the interviewees (Van Zyl, 2010). Finally, these interviews also captured the relevant demographic information pertaining to students' nationalities, race, sex, length of time spent in South Africa, residential setting and higher education institution of enrolment, amongst others.

The interviews were conducted with participants in a neutral location within the vicinity of the relevant institutions of higher education. I used the interview guide (see Appendix G) to conduct the interviews and recorded the data from the interviews by way of field notes and audio recordings that were subsequently transcribed (Van Zyl, 2010). Thus, the accounts of the lived experiences of the students were collected and the interview transcripts were subjected to an interpretative phenomenological analysis, which entails the four stages that are discussed in the data analysis section (Willig, 2013).

### 3.6 Data analysis

The IPA analyses the individual written transcripts of the accounts produced by participants and takes an idiographic approach which means that every individual is unique and should be studied in an individual manner. The first stage of IPA includes the reading and re-reading of the text (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Here the writing of unspecified notes that are reflective of the initial thoughts I had regarding the text are included and it comprises of questions and descriptive labels (Willig, 2013). This can be regarded as my open-ended ideas that are typically recorded in the left or the right margins of the text (Willig, 2013). In this study, each transcript was individually re-read and participants responses underwent analysis with notes and labels to create text lines under every interview question instead of using the typical left or right margin approach.

In the second stage of IPA, I was required to "identify and label emergent themes that characterise each section of the text" which are recorded in the margin opposite to my ideas in stage one (Willig, 2013, p. 88). In continuing with a non-margin approach, the identification of emergent themes was done by creating thematic labels for the text lines created in the first stage. Lines that represented similar ideas were merged into one theme and their locations were noted for the reader at the end in brackets. It is important to note that IPA is not a prescriptive

methodology and remains open for adaptation as qualitative analysis is ultimately a personal process especially with IPA being an interpretative endeavour requiring my own stylistic analysis at every stage (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

The third stage of IPA includes the beginning of the structuring of the analysis by me through creating clusters of the themes listed in the second stage (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Methods of connecting individual themes by using labels are: clustering themes that are alike through abstraction; subsuming related themes into an overarching theme through subsumption; identifying themes that constitute opposite meanings by way of polarisation; forming clusters based on the frequency of theme occurrences in the text through numeration and, lastly; clustering themes based on the functions they fulfil in the participant's experiences as per the account given (Willig, 2013). The theme clusters must resemble the original text to retain consistency (Smith & Osborn, 2004). This study connected individual themes by subsuming related themes into broader encapsulating themes for every individual transcript. The locations of the themes comprising the overarching themes were also provided at the end in brackets for identification and consistency.

The fourth stage of IPA involves the creation of a summary table of the themes that were constructed in the third stage. "The summary table must only include themes that capture something about the quality of the participant's experience of the phenomenon under investigation" which is safety and security as experienced by international African students (Willig, 2013, p. 88). This may result in the exclusion of some of the themes identified in the second stage and may lead to the creation of subtheme labels, brief quotations and references to where extracts in the interview transcript can be located (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Thus, it is assumed that the summary table will be reflective of the participants' experience as recorded and the meaning they attached to it. The individual accounts will then be integrated

into an inclusive list of master themes that encapsulate the experiences of the entire participant sample (Willig, 2013).

In this study, the third and fourth stages are combined. This is because the themes identified in the second stage are combined to create the main categories of meaning as clusters for the third stage and then organised to indicate keywords and locations as the fourth stage in the same document. Thus, these two stages are not separated by a conventional summary table. Instead one table with the main clusters (master/superordinate themes) with their constituent/subordinate themes as well as the identifiers/references of where to locate these themes was constructed.

These master themes can be interpreted on two levels. The first level of interpretation in the IPA is a descriptive and empathetic approach that enables me to enter into the participant's world (Willig, 2013). The second level of interpretation takes a critical stance to the accounts given by the participants. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature, meaning and origin of the participants' accounts. However, this level of IPA interpretation can accede to ethical denunciation as it may result in me giving meaning to and diminishing the views and experiential accounts of the participants which can undermine the reflexive quality of the IPA (Willig, 2013).

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

This study acquired internal ethical clearance from the registrars of the two universities from which the samples were drawn as the participants were located at these institutions of higher education. These committees included the Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Human and Community Development of the University of Witwatersrand and the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. The participants that were recruited for participation in the study were wholly informed about its aims and objectives

by way of an information sheet. They were also made cognisant of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage as there were no rewards or prejudices associated with their agreement or disagreement to participate. Furthermore, the recruited participants were required to give their informed consent for participation in the study by signing an informed consent form for both participation in the study (Christensen et al., 2014), as well as, for the audio recording of the interview process if they agreed to such recording.

Participants' confidentiality was guaranteed as only I had knowledge of the identity of the participants. Their identities were known as a result of the data collection and transcription phases as well as for the data dissemination at the culmination of the study. Pseudonyms were used, and the data was reported in abstraction in order to protect the confidentiality of participants. Participant's anonymity was not assured as the interview process required contact which meant that participants were known by me. However, anonymity was fostered through the use of pseudonyms during the transcription, analysis, and write up phases of the study. The collected data (both hard and soft copies) and its analysis were stored on a password protected computer which is only accessible to me and my supervisor.

The results of this study were compiled in the form of this research report and may also be written up as a research article or presented at a conference. A summary of these results will be made available to participants on request. Furthermore, the public will have access to the final report which will be stored in the library, as well as be made available digitally on the library website of the University of Witwatersrand. I included a section on self-reflexivity in this research. This was particularly important as I am an international student. Finally, participants were offered debriefing at the respective counselling centres that function within their tertiary institutions if the data collection phase brought about any unsettling memories due to the line of questioning used in the research. Since this is a not a sensitive area of research,

none of the participants indicated that they required psychological support as a consequence of the interview.

### 3.8 Reflexivity

According to Willig (2013) qualitative researchers influence and shape the research process both as individuals and as researchers. Acknowledging personal biases aids the process of understanding one's own reactions and the influence this has on the insights and understandings gained during research. Personal and epistemological reflexivity mimic the process of countertransference used by psychoanalytic psychotherapists to gain a better understanding of the client (Frosh & Young, 2010). This process was important in this research due to my personal position as an international student and the knowledge produced in this study impacting upon me in one or other way.

I took interest in this research topic due to my feelings of discomfort during the FeesMustFall protests of 2015. It was a turbulent period filled with ambiguity. Feelings of fear arose due to: the possibility of needing visa or accommodation extensions, probable opportunistic crimes by people directed towards immigrants, not knowing if the student movement would yield tangible benefits for international African students, the safe space of campus being violated and being indefinitely restricted to spaces of accommodation complexes. There were also feelings of supporting the movement due to a wave of impending change in higher education. Whether this impending change was in the mere form of bravery at attempting such an initiative or the eventual challenging of the status quo arising only years after attempts at forming resistance, due to insecurity on the part of students, it warranted some sense of support.

What made me realise that international African students may have specific stressors, not experienced by locals in situations of widespread anxiety about safety in diverse spaces, was the technology of Whatsapp's conveyance of panic. This internal ambiguity also symbolised

other international African students divergent or convergent positions on the safety of higher education institutions. It is from these events that I decided to formally research the general experiences of international African students in South African higher education.

In this period, I had to switch institutions for degree purposes from the University of Pretoria to the University of Witwatersrand. Knowing the dynamics of international African students more at the former institution made me include it in the study as my personal experiences were different at both institutions and could perhaps be meaningful for the analysis of these phenomena in different contexts. However, gaining participants from the University of Pretoria proved challenging whilst students at the University of Witwatersrand were more receptive. Perhaps this was due to the willingness of the latter university to engage in contacting students than the former as the call for participation was not circulated to the student body through an email database. Thus, issues of gatekeeping and power dynamics came through in communication regulation (Visser & Moleko, 2012).

My identity as an international student was not known to all participants unless they directly wished to know. Perhaps broadcasting this would have been helpful as one student replied to the call for participation with fury expressing the view that the use of international African students for research purposes only, without improving their lives, was inhumane. This highlighted the possible sensitivity of the research from the perspective of this student and made me reflect on my position as the researcher and the implied power relations. This was a conflict that I had to navigate by reminding myself that the participants are pivotal in the research and that I should approach the process with humility and respect.

My identity placed me in a unique position of relating to some things and being completely unrelated to others as I can relate to being an international student but not necessarily to the other aspects of their experiences. This absence of complete similarity and processing my

feelings made me maintain some sense of awareness and objectivity. Being a Namibian citizen of a neutral complexion, speaking Afrikaans and being mistaken for coloured in this context, I could not relate to the experiences of darker skinned Africans or those that struggled to communicate without being profiled. Most of the participants had different experiences from me and gave me new insights into this research. This made the data collection process quite open and made me vigilant in relation to everything that was communicated so as not to misunderstand or impose personal assumptions onto accounts by the participants.

Some of the information was difficult to hear and even imagine as I shared a common goal with the participants for which I came to South Africa and hoped to have a seamless experience of studying. I also experienced the burden of expectation arising from questions by participants in terms of how this research would change their circumstances for the better. This was an aspect that caused much internal conflict as the research report was not a form of activism but knowledge production. Participants were reminded that once the report is disseminated, it is open to be used in any form by any reader. Overall, the research process highlighted my biases about the experiences of international African students and altered my mindset to accommodate diverse experiences.

### 3.9 Conclusion

The methods section outlined that the study used qualitative research methodology that was epistemologically influenced by phenomenological knowledge and had a relativist ontological orientation. The study's research design was an interpretative phenomenological analysis that aimed to explore participants lived experiences. The purposive sampling method and the snowball sampling technique were used in this study that had 13 international African students in South African higher education as participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data whilst the four-stage IPA method was used to analyse the data. This section was

concluded with discussions regarding ethical considerations and reflexivity on my position as a researcher who shares the identity of being an international African student with the participants.

# 4. FINDINGS

In this section, a discussion of the integrated themes containing the master/superordinate themes and constituent/subordinate themes, that were derived from the data analysis will follow. These themes include: safety enhancements, identity consequences (inhibitions to self-expression and enablers to identity expression), sense of community (poor sense of community), psychological wellbeing (happiness, indifference, loneliness and sadness) and accounts of xenophobia.

## 4.1 Safety enhancements

Exploring how international African students enhance their safety when navigating spaces yielded the superordinate theme of safety enhancements. These enhancements are against the background of real or perceived threats to people designated as immigrants in South Africa. However, the high levels of crime and gender-based violence in South Africa mean that international African students may engage in safety enhancement strategies against both the perceived or real threat of xenophobia and/or violence in broader society. Safety enhancements are defined as any attempt made at increasing an international African students' sense of safety subjectively or objectively.

> Well, one I'm very conscious if I'm walking especially after dark even on campus I always keep check of my surroundings and if I see a person walking towards me then I cross over the road and go over to the other side. (Zelda, W).

The excerpt above shows a safety mechanism of enhancing safety through hypervigilance and proactiveness. Here, Zelda suggests that an internal alarm system has developed to alert her of possible danger and how to act on it, whether reactively or proactively. This may be attributed to an awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence and the heightened vulnerability

after dark. Gender-based violence makes women particularly vulnerable to harm. Zelda therefore feels vulnerable as a woman.

> I think I'm used to thinking about my future and that I need to succeed. I don't think about it, if something happens it happens, it's your time, because I'm a believer. (Mac, M).

Mac refers above to issues of time, fate and faith to enhance his safety. He feels that being preoccupied with questions of safety can take away from living in the here and now and so remove one's sense of security. Mac also embraces the idea of fate and not knowing. Thus, releasing control of his safety and placing it in a deity enhances his safety through faith. The difference in approaches between the two participants might also be gendered. In this regard, Zelda might not have the option to be philosophical about her safety while Mac might be protected by his gender. This is because males are less likely to be victims of gender-based harm when compared to their female counterparts. This means that not all international African students experience space and safety in the same ways as they have unique intersections of identity that shape their experiences.

> And if I'm going off campus I always take somebody with me. I'm walking on campus after 10pm I always get a friend to take me to class or come and get me from class. So I always organise somebody to take me or I leave my personal belongings somewhere and just walk. (Zelda, W).

> I always call a friend when I want to go do something like that for example. If I want to go for a jog on the field or be with a 2nd person, I would never be by myself. I think that's the most important one. (Anna, W).

Having a companion that accompanies them is a strategy of enhancing safety on and off campus for two women international African students. It seems that having reinforcement from someone else offers an added sense of security even in situations of walking to class, shopping, and participating in leisure activities. Thus, the idea of spaces, especially off campus spaces, being unsafe for these two international African students to navigate alone is a prominent one. A sense of dependence has been communicated by Zelda and Anna in their accounts of needing companionship to ensure safety. This means that these two women have an unfair burden of requiring chaperons to move about in public spaces. This could also lead to constrained movement particularly when a walking companion or escort is not available.

> I think what I do right now is update my immediate family which is close by about my location and my whereabouts as often as I can. So like for instance, if I'm leaving from here to a place like Soweto for instance, I update my status on my WhatsApp or I update my status on my Facebook or something that says the location that I'm going to and when I get there I log in to my Facebook and sign myself in to show the location where I am. So as often as possible I just update my family about where I am and that I would say secures my safety somehow. (Joseph, M).

With modern technological advancements, international African students can bridge gaps between them and their families as a mode of enhancing their safety. Thus, communicating whereabouts consistently provides a sense of security not only for them but those that have vested interests in their lives around the world. Joseph finds solace in his family's knowledge of where he is even though they may not be the closest in proximity.

> I keep everything to myself. I don't disclose everything. Hmm, I just don't state my origin, I don't disclose it. (Mac, M).

This extract by Mac highlights a fear of being discovered as an immigrant as he believes his nationality holds stigma and this represents the possibility of danger. Thus, he enhances his safety through the non-disclosure of his country of origin. Perhaps beyond his particular nationality is the idea of being an 'other' that Mac sits with and that othering puts him at the risk of danger of the spaces he occupies. If he does not disclose certain details, then this process is not as risky or insecure for him. Following Butler, this is a performance of "South Africanness" to portray a sense of belonging to the nation state.

> Personally, I have made friends outside of school [university]. There are a couple of families that I can stay with if I need to. One is in Houghton and the other is in Waverley. I have friends in Pretoria, so I've made friends outside of school. (Zack, M).

Forming and maintaining friendships with South Africans within and outside of university has been perceived as a buffer that enhances safety when navigating spaces. Zack points to the importance of having networks outside of university in diverse settings to also aid in practical needs such as safe lodging. Integration into the local community through friendships appears to be important for enhancing safety. Embedding oneself into local networks however requires time. For example, Zack has resided in Johannesburg for fairly long periods of time. Newer students might not have the benefits of protective local networks.

> If I'm out at night then I make sure I'm driving and I use undercover parking. (Stella, W).

International African students such as Stella also seem to engage in acts of taking active control and responsibility of their safety in situations such as driving in South Africa and employing personal safety rules such as using undercover parking. This eases safety concerns through acts of agency and safe driving practices. Stella is, however, protected by a middle-class position

as she drives a motor vehicle and can seemingly afford to pay for undercover parking. Working class students that rely on public transport are therefore more vulnerable.

> I was scared and was feeling vulnerable and I had these fantasised ideas of what could happen. So for me it was an important lesson to think for myself, to think if we are going somewhere then how am I going to get back? To teach myself to ask how does it work because I am not very comfortable with taxi's because I don't know the area well but what else can I do. If I can't go then I shouldn't go, if I don't know how I'm getting back, then I shouldn't go. (Anna, W).

Enhancing safety by knowing modes of movement to and from places is at the centre of the extract above from Anna. Feelings of fear and vulnerability arose in her in this pivotal moment of determining her rules for future movement in South Africa as she was left stranded somewhere without means to get home. Anna was pushed towards making these rules as she did not have comfort in taxi's and did not have alternative sources of transport. This created absolute or black and white, otherwise restrictive rules of movement. Her experience can be contrasted to the middle class options that Stella has as was illustrated by the preceding excerpt.

> I Uber. (Mali, W).

Having discomfort with public transport and deriving a sense of lack of safety from it encouraged the response from Mali to enhance her safety by using Uber. Although Uber is more expensive than the conventional public transport such as using a taxi or bus, it offers a greater sense of security for international African students. Enhancing safety is therefore a costly exercise for international African students. Space is navigated at an extra cost particularly for women students. In Anna's case fear inhibits possibilities of movement while it has a financial cost for Mali.

> I think that makes it more safe and just not being stupid and going to places where I know I shouldn't go or even some South Africans are afraid of going there. (Mali, W).

Enhancing safety by restricting movement to safe places that are common to both migrants and local people is something that Mali feels should be a natural act of ensuring safety. Thus, the notion of entering an environment and defying its laws and endangering oneself is not a good way to adjust to a different country or to enhance safety. In major cities like Johannesburg where crime is fairly high, there are spaces that are unsafe for both immigrants and locals.

> When I go to places I use my GPS rather than to ask people for directions. I don't trust the security. I would rather not talk to anyone and just go to the places I know. I avoid communication. That's it. (John, M).

This extract depicts the choice that international African students make to rather engage with technological devices than seek human assistance in acts of everyday movement. They sometimes restrict their movement to avoid revealing communication. Enhancing safety through using a Global Positioning System (GPS) and avoiding communication with people when moving around is common place. Here safety is enhanced through self-reliance and minimal human interaction.

> Usually when we have meetings because most of my classes finish at 4pm, most of them actually, so I will be doing extra mural, extra curricula activities so I usually take the Gautrain. Usually when it's late I take the Gautrain to go home to Kempton Park and I get off at Rhodesfield then I take the bus and the bus drops me off across the road from where I stay. So it's a matter of, in terms of the transport alternatives that I have. (Ethan, M).

Enhancing safety has become a balancing act for some international African students. Ethan has to calculate his day meticulously and have reserve plans for when transport systems of his choice fail him. This is an additional burden that he has to consistently bare in mind. Thus, enhancing safety by making time judgments for movement and having alternatives that work for him as an international student are means of enhancing safety.

> I guess my friends are also a shield aspect. I have South African friends, which makes it easier to navigate spaces because I just let them do the talking. Especially the language thing I feel that it really affects people here. (Mali, W).

> I'm good with languages so I've learnt how to speak. (Mali, W).

> …being from Zim, our languages are very similar so I know some of them, but that's probably only where it becomes evident that here and there, there is some hostility towards immigrants… (Zola, M).

> This far I've tried to acclimatise as far as possible by learning the local languages. I've ensured my safety by trying to be as un-foreign as possible and everything associated with trying to learn the culture and trying to learn the languages. (Zola, M).

> …sometimes just not speaking in public, so if I get to go to highly populated areas then I'm just quiet and no one knows. (Stella, W).

> In an environment where I see a domination of a particular tribe, I try not to speak because of identity problems and being international so I speak less and listen more... In particular because we are in Gauteng obviously the Zulu's would be mentioned without trying to pick on a particular tribe… If I'm in Rustenburg and I see a large population of Afrikaner people I also try to do the same, to speak less and listen more. I do this not to cause intimidation and not to upset anyone. (Joseph, M).

The preceding accounts illustrate how international African students perform identity and deploy strategies to acculturate in order to enhance their safety. Mali uses an important term of having South African friends as "a shield" to hide behind for protection in situations of potential threat. For her, this entails knowing local African languages as these enable her to blend in and appear South African. Enhancing safety by learning local languages and culture stems from a sense of perceived intolerance towards being considered "foreign" and being better absorbed into the South African society. For many international student's local languages have become a symbol of fear as language barriers drive hostility towards immigrants. This is captured in the experiences noted by Zola. Knowing the languages brings about some acceptance. In Stella's account, it is evident that densely populated areas are associated with a perceived lack of safety. They open one up to the public gaze and produce anxiety. While silence protects participants from revealing accents that might expose them to prejudicial violence, being quiet also invisibilises and makes them anonymous and passive.

Joseph speaks about assuming a non-dominant or non-threatening position so as not to cause intimidation and draw unwelcome attention to himself. Joseph is therefore like Stella who also uses silence as a protective measure. He more specifically mentions enhancing safety by avoiding certain tribes and not having dominance conflicts with groups in spaces where they are dominant. Linguistic plurality enables co-existence and less policing of those who are different. Linguistic and cultural homogeneity lead to dominance and marginality of those who are conceived of as not belonging. Thus, being inconspicuous within particular environments has proven to enhance safety for participants such as Joseph.

### 4.2 Identity consequences to enhancing safety

In exploring what identity consequences follow from the decisions international African students make to enhance their safety, two subordinate themes were derived: inhibitions to self-expression and enablers to identity expression.

#### 4.2.1 Inhibitions to self-expression

Here, I explore the data for the compromises that international African students make in terms of their identity or modes of self-expression as they try to enhance their safety.

> When there are other South Africans, like my Namibian friends together with South African friends, then I kind of feel like I'm leaving them out when I speak my language so I stick to English. Even if they actually do keep to their language most of the time so I try to accommodate them so that would be one of the scenarios. (Zelda, W).

In the excerpt above, Zelda experiences discomfort speaking her native language in the company of her South African friends despite having people she can speak with and even when her South African counterparts speak their native languages at will. Thus, language identity expressions that are withheld have come as a consequence of ensuring safety.

> Sometimes even in South Africa they have a bad reputation and to find a Congolese on campus…usually you find Congolese on drugs, cutting hair, driving taxis and bodyguards. But when you on campus and you say you Congolese then people ask, 'are you cutting hair' or 'are you body guarding someone'? That makes me really uncomfortable. (Mac, M).

Ensuring safety for Mac has come at the cost of rejecting his own identity due to the bad reputation he believes Congolese nationals hold in South Africa. Given the prevailing

stereotypes that he outlines, it is apparent that Congolese are not expected to be found on university campuses. Thus, this identity as a Congolese national makes him uncomfortable.

> When I started here I actually consciously changed the way I speak and my accent because people couldn't follow me, apart from being told that I speak too fast. (Zack, M).

In the preceding extract, Zack tells of his difficulty communicating with people who claimed they could not understand his accent or the speed of his speech. This caused him to adjust his accent to assimilate to environments. This was an identity consequence as it led to discomfort.

> So when I'm moving around on my own, it becomes less of an issue because I know where to go, I know what I want to do and I just go do and I return. But when I'm moving around with my girlfriend I'm more aware, it heightens this feeling. So it's not so much with myself but now all of a sudden when I move around with someone who I think might be affected by me being international. (Paul, M).

Paul points to an important issue in identity relations that one does not exist in a vacuum and is both influenced by and influences context. As an international student, he is not afraid of navigating Johannesburg on his own as he believes he has mastered his way around. He is however concerned that his identity may have a negative impact on his local partner. This makes him avoid his international identity expressions due to fearing for his romantic partner and violence being acted out on her for choosing an immigrant partner.

> "I wouldn't want to be known as someone who has taken someone's place. It's just maybe an enhancement of diversity in society. So I'm an immigrant, but an immigrant who isn't here to take but who is here to give or to enhance something". (Stella, W).

> "Maybe those that resonate with xenophobia, makwerekwere and coming to take our place and our jobs and stuff like that". (Stella, W).

In enhancing a sense of safety, Stella is uncomfortable with having an identity as taking space and taking locals places in society. Thus, identity inhibitions come from not having security in being seen as someone that is here to enhance and give a service or provide diversity. Perhaps efforts to enhance safety in this sense also stem from being uncomfortable with an identity that attracts xenophobic violence.

> It's interesting because I was going to say academic spaces, but academic spaces according to me don't have any openness to any individual expression. What I'm finding is other class-mates actually, because we are so diverse, people explaining their language to people, really saying I can only say this in my language and they won't even translate it. (Anna, W).

In this excerpt, Anna feels that academic spaces do not have openness to individual expression and that her language identity is not freely expressed with classmates. For Anna the onus of explaining diversity and tolerance should not be on her alone as academic spaces should cater for such nuances. No safety is provided within diverse spaces such as this to foster the required spirit of diversity whilst still ensuring identity expressions.

> Oh, I won't really wear my African items to the mall. I think that happens sometimes. And even how I'll walk with my friends just so that no one really knows. I guess it's just like a protecting mechanism especially when going to a new place it better for me to be identity-less or ambiguous until I know where I am…. (Mali, W).

Mali avoids her African attire as she chooses to observe the environment until she is familiar with it. She also hides her identity by using the presence of her South African friends as a

means of distracting from herself. She attempts to protect herself by being “identity-less”. This is a profound identity consequence of fearing xenophobia. These identity consequences are inhibitions Mali has learned to manage to gain comfort and enhance her safety in her movements.

> My speaking style because sometimes people want to identify me with the way I talk which could be a good thing or a bad thing depending on where I am expressing it… when I'm out there then I don't feel comfortable because some people might beat me up. (John, M).

Accent was a central issue for John in this extract especially the uncertainty of how different people react to it. Thus, his accent has caused him to be identified and linked with xenophobic views and stereotypes. Ensuring his safety has been difficult and uncomfortable and caused internal struggles with his identity as good or bad.

> But I feel free to express my Zimbabwean identity here on campus because outside campus there's a little bit of reservation speaking the Zimbabwean language [Shona] because you are scared of being identified by the police requesting papers. Because you are afraid of them asking for your papers because sometimes your papers and passport and all those requirements are not always there. (Ethan, M).

Enhancing safety has sometimes had practical consequences on identity such as Ethan not expressing his identity freely off campus where documents may be required randomly at any point by law enforcement officials. This causes reservations on his part of being identified speaking his native language or being noticed as an immigrant.

> But maybe let's say on a more social level rather than maybe the academic, I'm not too sure how South Africans perceive me because mostly I’m a Muslim and most of those

> that you see with hijab are Indians and I have noticed, I think the Indians also kind of keep to themselves…I don't know why a lot of people are kind of annoyed at the fact that I'm doing a PhD because it's nothing. Well it's not that's it's nothing really but it's not the important thing about meeting a person. (Esther, W).

Enhancing safety has also been a socially isolating experience for Esther as identity consequences remain questions of discomfort for her identity as doing a PhD as an immigrant and being a contextually unusual immigrant black Muslim woman. Thus, identity intersections also seem to have consequences in terms enhancing safety.

### 4.2.2 Enablers to identity expression

The theme of enablers to identity expression deals with modes of self-expression that international African students feel comfortable or safe expressing.

> I wouldn't know the pool to choose from, but I'm just ok being known as an international student. (Stella, W).

> I'm comfortable with that in academic circles. (Stella, W).

In the excerpts above, Stella contends that her campus is a safe space for her to freely express her identity as an international student. This suggests that the immigrant identity is not a constant threat for her and that there are spaces where she does not have to monitor her expression because of a fear of surveillance.

> I think for me, the most used has been my language, that has an immediate access. But it's also been one of the things that I'm conscious of and I think sometimes that it's been a while that I haven't spoken my language. (Anna, W).

> I think at the moment it would just be the language because that's the only thing that follows me when I'm on campus because here and there I need someone from back home to talk to in our home language. (Zola, M).

From the preceding excerpts by Anna and Zola, it seems that having access to language or people with whom to share language with, is an important element in expressing language identity freely and safely. There are moments when both of them long to speak their home language. However, even though there are not many people who speak their languages, their campuses have some interlocutors.

> Ok. I'm wearing a Kenyan bracelet like so, I think I don't mind being known as a Kenyan. I think there's also an element of pride to it like I'm here representing my country wanting to get the best so that I go back to my country and make changes and improvements and things like that. So I don't mind that at all. (Mali, W).

Here, Mali associates wearing external identity representations and being known as Kenyan with pride, patriotism and the purpose for which she is pursuing her studies in South Africa. These factors seem to give Mali comfort in her identity expression and enhances her safety.

> I would say from my part as a person and an individual I'm comfortable with normal African attire where you will find maybe somebody wearing, I don't know how to describe it, the homemade attire with the designs, the homemade, locally made tribal attire. I'm comfortable with that and I also have mine that I wear around. So if I see people wearing it then it's easy for me to then associate myself with them as an African. (Joseph, M).

Joseph is comfortable expressing himself in African attire but also finds a sense of association and affinity with others he may see wearing the same attire. Thus, he identifies safety in himself

and others in external expressions held within African attire. He associates African attire as enabling of identity expression as it appeals to an inclusive Pan-African identity that transcends parochial and bounded identities.

> Like I said, if this question was asked of me before when I was in high school, I would be pumped to say that there's a stigma against Nigerian people… So it's about who do you associate yourself with. So you don't generalise that everyone is the same. So now I don't know, it used to bother me when I was in high school, but not anymore, I can say I've outgrown it. (Mark, M).

In this excerpt Mark is arguing that generalisations about a group of people are not wise because his nationality of Nigerians face stigma within the South African context even though not all Nigerians fulfil these stereotypes. Thus, he takes comfort in his Nigerian identity but not in stigma as he has outgrown the emotional responses he had to the stereotypes and this enhances his expression of his identity.

> So I think my identity is more or less altogether. When you see me you see a Muslim, Nigerian student, that's what I think or maybe there are others as well. I also identify myself as an activist… (Esther, W).

This extract points to important issues of intersectionality. Esther highlights that she is comfortable with her identity as an international student, a woman, a Muslim and an activist. While these identities mark her as different, she feels at liberty to express them and experiences this as liberating.

### 4.3 Sense of community

In exploring the sense of community amongst international African students, the subordinate theme of poor sense of community of international African students emerged.

### 4.3.1 Poor sense of community

This theme reveals that sense of community should not be assumed as existing solely on the grounds of having a common identity as international African students. It challenges the idea that solidarities occur due to shared national identities and highlights that diverse shared interests are also grounds for developing communities or relationships.

> It's not very united in a way. It's like every international student based on where they come from have their own thing. (Zelda, W).

What Zelda is referring to in this excerpt is that there is division amongst international African students based upon their nationalities. With each country having their own society, there is not a genuinely united society for all international African students. This causes fragmentation among international African students who do not share a united sense of community.

> Hmm, actually I don't see a lot of international African students. The only international African students that I have in my faculty, most of them are White people from Zimbabwe. (Mac, M).

> Shu! Sense of community, I'd say it's non-existent. (Anna, W).

> So in that way not being able to access them makes it really hard to even know because for me it was terrible that it was non-existent. (Mali, W).

From the above extracts, notions of inaccessible international African students resulted in feelings of a non-existent sense of community amongst international African students for Mac, Anna and Mali.

> We are not cordial yet, we are not connected like it's expected to. Even though Wits statistics shows that more than 2000 international students are at Wits, I would say that

> the coordination between this number that makes up the community of the Wits institution itself, is not cordial. And that's because it's made up of different international students and not Africa per say and not European per say, not American per say. (Joseph, M).

This response by Joseph cautions that one may assume that a population of students as large as that of international students should be more cordial, connected and coordinated. Yet due to its continental diversity and beyond, the sense of community amongst international students is not exactly pleasant, harmonised or well-associated.

> I've been here for 4 months now and I've only attended 1 meeting unlike when I was at UJ where they have 1 meeting every 2 weeks so that people come together to get to know each other. (Mark, M).

According to Mark the sense of community amongst international African students is not very active in his current university as compared to other institutions of higher education as the membership is low. Having frequent interaction and establishing networks as international African students contributes to establishing some sense of community despite it not defining sense of community.

> Part of the reason we are here is to actually share our diverse culture, part of the reason why we are here is to network and meet new people and learn from each other. And that is not being achieved. I think the only part that is being achieved is achieving excellence… We are still not united. We are still not coming together as international African students. That's part of the reason why these guys are not seeing us and not including us into their system. (John, M).

John asserted that international African students' sense of community is jeopardised by their sole focus on academic excellence and that this united as well as inactive sense of community amongst international African students may be a contributing factor to struggles of adjustment and assimilation into the broader society.

> I would say some of it I think is a bit superficial. Most of the countries have some association of some sort, like a Zimbabwean association or a Namibian association and with that it sort of seeks to keep the students together to support each other because they have a common identity and a common history and all of that. But to some extent I think it's just like, 'oh, I think I'm going to hang out with you just because you from my country' not because I have anything in common with them outside of being from the same country, which is why in my case I didn't want to join that association. And then on the other end of the scale there is that, like I said before, you sort of going through the same thing together so to that extent I think it's real. (Zola, M).

The ideas that sense of community can be superficial, real and not real is what Zola is dealing with in this extract. Student societies come to represent formal community structures for international African students where a shared national identity is fostered but Zola critically contemplates that sense of community should entail more criteria than nationality such as common interests and experiences. Otherwise it may be that the whole idea of sense of community is not viable as nationalism does not determine shared interests and assure friendship. Zola therefore questions the expectation that international African students should have solidarity on the basis of national origins. This resonates with some of the criticisms that have been levelled at the concept of sense of community.

> I think that there is a lot that needs to be done at campus to integrate. I'm not speaking on a personal level obviously because I see that there remains a lot of work to be done

> for international African students to feel welcome and to be part of the university as opposed to being recognised as the 'other'. Part of that integration has to include looking at how the internationalisation policy of the university is implemented, and the administrative bodies that deal with international African students, they need to kind of focus not just on the administrative part but also on the daily lives and the experiences of international African students. (Ethan, M).

Ethan is of the view that international African students sense of community is a structural problem that must be worked on as they have yet to feel welcome and integrated. He argues that a sense of community amongst international African students cannot be achieved whilst they are still on the periphery. The internationalisation policy of the university still works in a discriminatory manner and he urges universities to pay attention to the quality of the everyday experiences of international African students.

> I know my answer would not be the same as maybe a Masters' student answer. You know PhD is more or less individualistic. It's something that you are on your own and when you done with your stuff you go to your supervisor and he'll tell you whether you did well or not and he will put you on track. So maybe my general perception is that it's not a very strong sense of community but there's efforts being made… (Esther, W).

This excerpt illustrates that sense of community amongst international African students is in fact influenced by the academic context and the graduate level students find themselves in. Esther asserts that as a doctoral student, she does not expect to fit within the university context in the same way that cohorts that belong to classes would develop a sense of comradarie. Despite these differential experiences of sense of community amongst international African students, Esther contends that international student unity can be regarded as weak.

### 4.4 Psychological wellbeing

This theme addresses the emotional or psychological state of the international African students within this study based on their feelings of being within a migrant setting. The subordinate themes of happiness, indifference as well as sadness and loneliness emerged.

#### 4.4.1 Happiness

The theme of happiness details international African students' contentment with living within a migrant setting.

> I think for me per say I've been happy here to put it simply, I've been happy here. I can't say that an actual place is home for me. Home is not a place for me, it's when I can be with those people (mother and brothers). (Paul, M).

> I am happier here, I won't take that back. (Anna, W).

From the above excerpt by Paul, the idea of a diasporic existence is evoked. For Paul, happiness and contentment are not associated with geographical location. Home and place are not mutually exclusive. This unsettles the dominant narrative that both enables xenophobia and fuels expectations that diasporic communities should necessarily live as connected communities in diasporic settings. Anna is happier in South Africa than her home country. International African student's choices of places to study in other countries can have a liberating effect that frees them from strenuous conditions in their home countries. Moreover, international African students can find happiness in friendships and romantic relationships in their host country. This problematises the dominant narrative of a single experience characterised by negative stories. Her simple statement that "I am happier here", is an important disruption of how people think of immigrant and migrant communities in South Africa.

### 4.4.2 Indifference

The theme of indifference deals with the feelings of international African students that do not express either a sense of happiness or sadness at being an international student in South Africa. There are both pros and cons to living in South Africa.

> If I compare to Swaziland there are benefits above so I can't compare the one with the other. So I can't really pick Swaziland over Joburg or Joburg over Swaziland because the town I live in has one shopping centre and there is no Pick and Pay, and most of the other shops are vendors and spaza shops owned by immigrants. So I like it for the peace but if ever you need something you have to drive for an hour to the next town. (Zack, M).

> When I started it was good, but now I've had enough because I'm here since 2013 and now I just want to go back. I will miss the shopping but that's pretty much it. (Stella, W).

Here Zack argues that to decide whether living in South Africa has made him happy or not is rather difficult. This is because he sees the advantages and disadvantages of both his home country and South Africa. It seems that the countries compensate for various things that the other lacks. Stella agrees that South Africa provided amenities that her home country does not have. This highlights the view that reducing psychological wellbeing to dichotomous thinking takes away from its complexity as well as the various factors that influence lived experiences in different settings.

> That's a 50/50 hey because it depends on what makes me unhappy and what makes me happy. And also I cannot wake up and say that this country has done something bad to me, no. So if I am unhappy it means that there is something else bothering me. So South

> Africa is a good place for me, there's misunderstandings everywhere, not only in South Africa. (Mark, M).

For Mark, one's psychological wellbeing is mostly internally determined and not dependent on the country in which one finds oneself. He takes a pragmatic view by pointing out that there are "misunderstandings everywhere, not only in South Africa". It seems that an understanding that every country or setting has both advantages and disadvantages neutralises associated feelings.

### 4.4.3 Sadness and loneliness

This section deals with feelings of sadness and loneliness associated with being an international student living in another country.

> …I had this sadness because it was just so sad for me. It was actually hard at the beginning because my dad passed on at the end of the year and I thought coming here would be a break like to move away and just start the year fresh. But it was actually a very stiff year for me because I came and I was so saddened to be alone this far and I guess that's when I needed everybody around me... So at the beginning it was very lonely and quiet especially weekends. I wouldn't talk very much to anyone until eventually I made some friends at International House and I guess time makes it less lonely. The more people you get to know in time and adapting to not being around as many people as before. (Zelda, W).

This account by Zelda highlights that not knowing anyone as an international student can have a negative impact on emotional wellbeing as well as make pre-existing situations and adjustment more difficult. The isolation from family during a period of bereavement was particularly hard for her. This made it sadder for her to live in South Africa.

> I think maybe sadder because I come from a very large family. There's always family around. It's a double feeling because living here I feel like an adult, I pay my rent, I live my life… But maybe in terms of home sickness and missing family a bit. Maybe it comes with time and learning. (Mali, W).

> You know you have your mom and everything at home. Living by myself is difficult. (Mac, M).

In the above extracts, Mali and Mac mention being homesick due to their separation from familiar people and contexts. For Mali, there are simultaneous feelings of pride based on being able to live independently while also struggling with the loneliness of independence. She sees the value in it for her future but it remains difficult for the time being. This is a struggle that Mac echoes as well.

> Sometimes I feel it gets to me when I'm being denied some things as an international student and as an African student in South Africa. Let me take for instance last year I qualified for the Wits bursary but unfortunately, I was told that it was not being given to international students. I told them that I am an African and this is an internationally recognised university so why was I not being given the bursary. So, I do understand it, its policy and that's how it's being structured but there are some things that as an immigrant student you don't get and there are some benefits that you are due to get but you don't get. I mentioned earlier that I'm staying off campus because residences will be given to locals. Another matter is the issue of medical care. I am on medical aid which is compulsory for me as an international student and on the other hand if you go to a hospital for instance even though you are paying a very high sum of money, but because you cannot communicate in a local language or in any of the South African languages, you will not be attended to even though you are paying so much. And when

> you are attended to and you have this perception that you are an immigrant then they don't even pay attention to you no matter how much you pay, so they make you wait for 2 or 3 hours even if it's an emergency which I have experienced also. (Joseph, M).

This account by Joseph captures grievances that he experiences as an international student. These experiences of not accessing funding despite having sufficient academic skills, not qualifying for university residence after traveling across borders and paying high amounts for low quality medical services add to the psychological burden of international African students. These daily realities of denied opportunities and inequalities make it sadder to live in South Africa.

> I don't feel sad because I chose to come to South Africa it's my choice so I cannot say if I'm sad or not because sometimes you feel pain not sadness. You feel the pain maybe when you need to change that's another aspect … but sometimes when you need to come back nearer to earth it's so bad when you think about … losing a lot of money when you come back to earth. It's painful and not sadness. (John, M).

The declining psychological wellbeing depicted by John is a reality of sadness captured as pain. Pain is appropriate because as an international student he made a choice he cannot turn from. This choice costs him a lot of money and forces him to change himself to fit in and these are high psychological burdens to bear.

### 4.5 Accounts of Xenophobia

This theme explores accounts of xenophobia that were expressed by the participants in relation to their sense of safety and broader contextual experiences.

> Well that's especially with the whole xenophobia vibe. And especially last year when I had lived here for a month that was exactly when there was lots of xenophobia thing

happening. But everything was booked already and I just had to come and do my training because also they guaranteed me that the area that I was going to stay in was more, I mean it's more quiet in Midrand and not like the CBD. (Zelda, W).

I think xenophobia because I've been affected twice or three times. I was on a bus and one guy that didn't look South African and I paid him for the taxi, he was actually the driver and I told him that I'm going to Randburg and he said that his changing his way because I was the only one on the bus. So I asked him to help me because sometimes they can help you and call other drivers and say, "please take this guy and go to Randburg". He said, "no, you must manage it yourself" and I said, "give me back my money" and he said this is not your country, if you want to do it then go back to your country and stuff like that. So I just said, ok. I thought don't want to fight, this is not my country and I don't have my brothers here so let me just be humble. And I walked because that was the only money that I had for the taxi. I walked from Rosebank to my place which was really far, it was really far. The second time I was on campus. I can't describe it on campus because on campus people have that, that kind of, let's say character, or that kind of living. They know mostly black people in South Africa. They know he doesn't look South African, and he is not South African. So you can see the way they talk to you, "you from Congo" oh, so I just leave it. The third time was in the night and I remember I went to talk to a girl and she asked me where I was from. I said I'm from D.R.Congo and she said, oh, you from D.R.Congo, Nigeria. I said, no, I'm from D.R.Congo and she said, oh useless, I don't talk to Congolese people. So I said, ok thank you. But this is the kind of thing that will affect you, but I take it positively because I know that it's the kind of situation that can really go up. (Mac, M).

Mac gives account of several incidences of xenophobia during his stay in South Africa. He recollected being discriminated against on public transport and consequently having to walk home over a long distance. Mac also mentions the profiling he experiences on campus and the effects this has on him as a Congolese national. The profiling and negative treatment that follows seems to also permeate into attempts at romantic encounters in the broader social setting.

> I don't think that I would get the same treatment that people from other African countries get. South African's share or should I say that Swazi's share something with South Africans which also means that Swaziland has a high rate of xenophobia. (Zack, M).

> I don't know, I think that also comes from when I was in Honeydew because it was students from all over the continent and there was the Zimbabwean xenophobic attacks happening and it was very hard for them when travelling home. They were afraid of going to Park Station and I think that's what's informing that fear. (Mali, W).

> Like I said they don't like us. That's my perception, I might be wrong. South Africans are more xenophobic even on campus we had the opportunity to discuss it with the SRC president and I was telling her about the international student's inclusiveness in all their politics and her response was just like a confirmation to my words she told me you guys need to organise yourselves and get yourselves involved… (Mark, M).

From the diverse excerpts above, it is evident that xenophobia is not a problem that only affects black immigrants outside of academic spaces. The xenophobic tensions and incidents mentioned above have caused difficulties in mobility for international African students. Some students have also feared using economical modes of transport such as busses to neighbouring countries due to language barriers possibly causing hostility. Acknowledgments have also been

made of xenophobic tendencies in international African students' countries of origin, but specific attention was drawn to extensiveness of Afrophobia within the South African context.

> African people are really suffering and coming from a really bad background they really suffering. Even if you go to Soweto people like 20 years ago were really suffering. But they really need to know as well that if we come from outside South Africa, but in Africa, they need to know that we also suffer, we also suffering. It's not like we are coming from Europe or America. No, we are coming from Africa and we are suffering more than what they are suffering here. We don't have electricity in Africa. We don't have water. And when you come to a country like South Africa where you think that this country is your home and you find people who are fighting with you because they are your kind but they are fighting with you just because you come into their country. I think that they don't understand or I don't know whether they have any other problem or they trying to show something else, but they need to understand it. (Mac, M).

Mac points to South African political history and how some people were geographically located for disadvantageous life chances in certain townships. It seems that in denouncing xenophobia, Mac tries to highlight a sense of Pan-Africanism and urges South Africans to see that the broader African continent may be worse-off. These circumstances in other African countries cause international African students to seek better opportunities. It seems that international African students do not want to be seen as oppressors, which may warrant the level of hostility shown by South Africans, they want to be accepted as fellow Africans.

> Besides crime being a huge thing and that's the first thing when you come as an immigrant. You come to Jo'burg or any other country that you know, that's the first thing on your mind. But for me it's this notion of xenophobia, race and especially issues around race and the huge disparity and gap of not being integrated. (Anna, W).

In this excerpt, Anna links xenophobia to issues of race and essentially highlights that xenophobia has a racial dimension. In addition, the social issue of racism within the South African context is also evidenced by the gaps in relations between the races of South Africa. These gaps caused by xenophobia and racism jeopardise the possibility of South Africa being an integrated society. She also feels that crime is a human condition that can befall her anywhere, but she consistently lives in fear of xenophobic victimisation within this context.

> …although here and there as it applies in the workforce that my presence here is taking away somebody's opportunity and so I shouldn't be here. But that's a very rare thing that I've experienced. (Zola, M).

Zola mentioned encountering xenophobia and being subjected to xenophobic comments. These comments were mostly associated with sentiments that immigrants like him are the reason why locals do not get employment opportunities. It is a competition for scarce resources that underlie comments of this nature.

> Johannesburg was built by migrants, it wasn't built by white, it was built by black people who were mining gold deep down there and being exploited. But they built this city so that's something that you can never take away and I think if they are built to be something like the xenophobia that we see then I think people need to highlight that. That narrative needs to be at the forefront to say that Southern Africa is inextricably linked…And there is sometimes xenophobia of course but I think xenophobia is part of the complexity of South African society and there are people with whom you have to make the extra effort in terms of changing the attitude of people if you the leadership and the government. (Ethan, M).

According to Ethan, Johannesburg was built by mostly black migrants. He further highlights that the southern African region is inextricably linked and that Johannesburg is an inclusive

and diverse city owing to this history. This historical lesson is one amongst many that leadership and government within South Africa can use to address a structural and complex problem such as xenophobia as it is a threat to Pan-Africanism.

### 4.5 Conclusion

The findings section provided a detailed account of participants responses in this study as they pertained to the extracted master and constituent themes. These themes included: safety enhancements pertaining to how international students secure safety; identity consequences to enhancing safety which explicated consequences such as inhibitions to self-expression and enablers to identity expression; sense of community that mostly was deemed as poor; psychological wellbeing with the sub-themes of happiness, indifference, and sadness and loneliness and; accounts of xenophobia. The findings suggested that international African students are not a homogenous group as they possess different positions and interactions in social categories. They also do not possess a strong sense of solidarity as was anticipated. These findings are important for informing further research aimed at various initiatives. The findings are discussed in the next section.

# 5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework discussed in the first section whilst complimenting the discussion with the broader literature review.

The safety enhancements of international African students were complex and showed their vulnerability as humans. Safety enhancements by international African students in situations of perceived threat were based on considerations of the context of South Africa and their social positionings (Migliorini et al., 2008). This meant there was an awareness of their immigrant status, race and gender. Women participants tended to be more hypervigilant and proactive in enhancing their safety. This makes sense as gender-based violence is established to be prevalent within the South African context. However, I postulate that the context also causes an interplay between gender-based violence and nonbelonging and therefore puts women international African students in a more vulnerable position whilst moving between places. Male participants, although aware of threats, are less conscious of their movements and consequently move about more freely. This highlighted the privilege of heteronormative masculinity in securing safety (Butler, 1999) despite the established issues of safety associated with an African immigrant status in South Africa. Due to the subordinate social position of women (Butler, 1999), female participants engendered a sense of dependence on their social networks when navigating spaces as there was an innate fear of moving alone as a woman. Against this background, I contend that male and female international African students have differential experiences of safety. In this regard, women engage more safety enhancing strategies than their male counterparts. This reflects the intersection of gender-based violence and xenophobia in Gauteng, and South Africa more generally.

In confirmation of Bulter's (1999) concept of an intelligible subject, international African students displayed abilities to distinguish between accepted and unaccepted identities and

based their performances on this. This was evident in some international African students' strategic de-centering of their nationalities so as not to experience alienation or othering in South Africa. In this context, the intelligible subject is the performance of "South Africanness" which fosters a sense of belonging and safety. I however question the legitimacy of these performances as various indicators can be used to determine belonging to a nation. The mere rejection of one's nationality does not erase the presence of other features used to determine belonging and would seem to be superficial in relation to more concrete measures of belonging such as country boundaries. It is thus my view that the politics of belonging, as postulated by Yuval-Davis (2006) creates tensions between formulating a sense of belonging in the above manner.

Embedding into local networks through the creation of friendships seemed to be a protective factor. I however observed that the benefits of this method of enhancing safety may be contingent on how long international African students have resided within South Africa. Although there is no evidence to draw a solid relationship between the number of years in a country and social embeddedness, international African students with a longer stay in South Africa seem to have networked and embedded themselves more than those with a shorter stay. Consideration should be made for the personal choices that aid such a desire to be embedded, if at all. These students also find themselves learning local languages to blend in and protect themselves therefore suppressing their identities (Butler, 1999). I postulate that language barriers are a rather unfortunate shortcoming to have in the South African context as this engenders hostility through becoming a marker of the in-group and out-group. This was shown in the findings section when international African students fostered friendships with locals for the benefits of absorption into society, amongst other reasons. I view acculturation is a phenomenon that creates great tension for personal meaning making. It is therefore not a solution for adjusting to different contexts and to securing safety.

It seems that international African students sense of safety whilst moving between places is also influenced by transport. Depending on the spaces they move between and whether they are safe in these spaces, movement would be constrained or liberal (Puwar, 2004). The idea of moving without guaranteed safe transport or not informing family members of their whereabouts caused feelings of fear and vulnerability. Based on the data, it is my view that spaces are not neutral and evoke diverse feelings for international African students. By possessing an immigrant identity, the safest way to navigate spaces is with secure transport or to avoid movement. However, transport is also a point of contention as it is a classist commodity. This means that international African students access to transport, if any, is differential and so is the level of safety. Access to safety is therefore also influenced by the class position of students. Whilst some international African students use the safer and expensive option of Uber, others walk or use public transport which are known sites of violence for displaced bodies. This is congruent with Puwar's (2004) theorisation.

The majority of the safety enhancements by international African students seem to be personal efforts. I view these issues of safety and their solutions to be an act of excusing the state from its responsibility towards inhabitants in providing safety and security. Rather, the onus of ensuring safety is placed on both locals and immigrants. These immigrant students seem to have resorted to internal reprimands and responsibility against known unsafe spaces and unsafe practices. International African students consciously occupy non-dominant positions and become inconspicuous in certain environments so as not to pose a threat to the dominant groups. Not belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006) therefore places international African students on the margins of society.

In relation to identity consequences that follow from enhancing safety, identity is both jeopardised and nurtured. International African students treated identity as a fluid concept that is continuously negotiated and constructed (Lloyd, 2007). When their identities did not serve a

protective function, they altered it. To belong in the South African space, international African students experienced immense discomfort in speaking their native languages and expressing their nationalities. The data suggests that the use of immigrant languages in culturally and linguistically homogenous spaces is an invitation for mistreatment or violence. Some immigrant nationalities have been riddled with negative stereotypes that it may be shameful to these students to express their national identity especially due to prejudices. Immigrant student identities that comprise of marginalised intersections face more prejudice and cause social isolation. In support of the theorisation around the competition for scarce resources (Worby et al., 2008), international African students with local romantic partners feared expressing their immigrant identities due to safety concerns. I postulate that aspects of identity relating to international African students' as plunderers evoked negative responses. These stereotypes and prejudices occur across spaces, including academia.

Some international African students expressed their immigrant status despite the possibility of exclusion. This shows international African students' ability to resist oppression and exclusion in spaces where they are deemed invaders (Puwar, 2004). For these students, it seems that being labelled as an international student brings comfort and locates them socially. Academic spaces and academic identities are the safest niche as there is a strong sense of belonging, relative non-surveillance (Puwar, 2004) and purpose associated to it. In a converse observation noted previously, some international African students find comfort in expressing their native languages when in the company of individuals from a similar background. Some participants nurtured their immigrant identities through external attire. I contend that national pride sometimes overrides the fear of being negatively identified as an immigrant. International African students that were aware of the intersectional aspects of their identities, managed to find comfort in their dynamic identities as they navigated society by situationally foregrounding some identity aspects for their benefit.

The sense of community amongst international African students is posited as being poor. It may be that international African students are spoken of as a subset of the general student population, but they are in no way homogenous in identity and interests. The term community, which invokes a sense of a supportive network (Sarason, 1974), was taken for granted before the finding of a poor sense of international African students' community. Division based on nationalities has vastly jeopardised ideas of unity amongst international African students. The lack of existence of an all-encompassing international African student organisation seemed to cause perceptions of inaccessibility to other international African students as well as the nonexistence of a sense of community. I do question the observation of a lack of community amongst international African students as most participants were not part of any formal international student committee. It therefore undermines the legitimacy of some of their claims. Student relations with each other were also complicated by their diverse cultures, a lack of connectedness and divergent academic journeys. It would seem that international African students desire more coordinated efforts at integrating them both structurally and socially. Importantly, some participants questioned the need for a sense of community among international African students. In this regard, they argued that common national identity should not assume that people should engage as they may not have much in common. Following Yuval-Davis (2006), this suggests that belonging and non-belonging is not limited to national identity.

International African students displayed a range of emotions pertaining to their psychological wellbeing whilst in South Africa. I view the psychological wellbeing of international African students as a subjective experience that is informed by their identity as immigrants combined with their life stories and other social categories. It is due to these intersectional categories and experiences that some international African students reported feelings of happiness as opposed to sadness and loneliness or indifference. Those students that reported happiness seemed to

have concepts of belonging and family that were not tied to geography but rather to the quality of their relationships with significant others. This defies the general perception that immigrants are only subjected to hardships in South Africa. Other international African students avoided conceptualising their psychological wellbeing, since being in South Africa, as either good or bad. They instead saw the limitations and benefits of their countries of origin and their country of current residence therefore showing a sense of indifference regarding this issue.

Immigrant students that experienced sadness or loneliness were able to reflect that these feelings arose from adjustment difficulties and isolation but that they take responsibility for their decision to study in South Africa. Based on the data, it is my view that some students face differential treatment, exploitation and material hardships due to their status as international African students. This can be seen in students accounts about the realities of issues such as tuition, medical aid, medical assistance and accommodation struggles despite local students having these difficulties as well (Prieto-Welch, 2016).

Immigrant students' responses to safety sparked conversations about xenophobia that were informed by direct or indirect exposure. For some of these students the pervasive narrative about the gross mistreatment of African immigrants was enough to evoke feelings of fear without being victimised themselves. These narratives became deeply entrenched into their consciousnesses that even family members advise caution from other countries. I contend that Afrophobia is a more common problem for international African students as differences in the accounts of xenophobia given point to the easier victimisation of darker hued international African students from non-Southern African countries. This is in support of Koenane and Maphunye (2015) as well as the incidence of Afrophobic violence documented by Mngxitama (2008). South Africa's history of racial segregation still informs xenophobia and competition for resources. It is my contention that international African students desire a recognition for

the interdependent nature of the African continent, especially as not all South Africans are xenophobic, to aid Pan-Africanist thinking.

### 5.1 Conclusion

This section highlighted that international African students face safety challenges and that these challenges have a disproportionate impact on women as they engage in efforts to enhance their safety more often. This may be based on the unsafe nature of the general South African context for all women against the backdrop of widespread gender-based violence and crime. These findings portrayed struggles with belonging based on categories such as gender as well as the politics of belonging through the rejection of what is 'foreign' in certain spaces as theorised by Yuval-Davis. International African students evidenced the application of Butler's theorisation of performativity through their choices in performing or rejecting identity markers that would secure their safety and belonging within the spaces they navigated. The sense of community amongst international African students was almost unanimously deemed as being poor and highlighted that international students may not have solidarity within themselves. Importantly, some participants problematised the expectation for solidarity and sense of community given that they sometimes had less in common with each other than with the host population.

International African students' psychological wellbeing was varied and included feelings of happiness, indifference, sadness and loneliness due to their different experiences as individuals. These students noted various incidences of xenophobic encounters which highlights that foreigners in South Africa, especially of African descent, are at risk of violence and discrimination. This section highlights that international African students face challenges that need to be included in dominant discourse but that these challenges also extend to local students. Finally, the research questions of this study pertained to how international African students navigate space to enhance their safety; what identity consequences follow from

international African students' decisions to enhance safety; and how the sense of community amongst international African students influence their psychological sense of well-being. It is evident from this discussion that all the research questions were answered, and that additional information was also gained through this study.

# 6. CONCLUSION

This section discusses the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework discussed Globalisation and internationalisation have resulted in increased access to tertiary institution spaces for international African students though the inclusion and integration of immigrants in these spaces is not guaranteed. Whilst these spaces remain racialised, gendered and classed; this study showed that international African students continued occupation of spaces in migrant countries are agency driven acts of empowerment and resistance. The findings of this study suggest that international African students in South African higher education face safety challenges in navigating spaces. These challenges have implications such as efforts at enhancing safety, negotiating identities and alterations in psychological wellbeing. This study also investigated the sense of community amongst international African students and took note of international African students accounts of xenophobia. The study therefore contributed to the scarce information available on this topic, for this population of students, within this context.

The safety of international African students was a concern within this study in support of McCarthy's (2016) research in the United States. International African students' safety may be linked to their level of belonging to spaces as posited by Yuval-Davis (2006). As mentioned in a study by Migliorini et al. (2008), these students sense of safety was multifaceted as it was influenced by personal, political and social factors. This multifaceted nature of international African students' sense of safety is pointed out in Yuval-Davis' (2006) problematisation of belonging as being informed by boundary maintenance. It highlights that belonging is constructed through projects demarcating who is included or excluded but that it is complicated by the intersectional nature of belonging. These considerations caused variations in issues of concern amongst these immigrant students as their social positionalities and power, personal

narratives of belonging and their values pertaining to inclusion and exclusion (Yuval-Davis, 2006) influenced their experiences of safety. This resulted in international African students engaging in diverse internal and external mechanisms to enhance their safety.

This study found that identity is a fluid concept that is influenced by social contexts in support of Howard's (2000) theorisation. International African students adjusted or reinforced their self-expressions depending on their level of safety and on the nature of the spaces in which they found themselves. Situations that marginalised immigrant identities and favoured dominant local identities mostly resulted in choices not to perform unsanctioned identities (Puwar, 2004). These identity dynamics are coherent with Butler's (1998) contention that socially sanctioned identity performances receive reassurance and reinforcement through membership, mastering and belonging. Identity can be seen as a mode of negotiating for securing safety and belonging in spaces in favour of Puwar (2004). These identity negotiations, however, also resulted in some international African students entrenching their existing identity positionings. Therefore, highlighting the tensions within the on-going process of identity negotiations. This is coherent with Butler's perspective that aspects of agency underpin identity performances but that social pressures and modelling constrain some performances (Lloyd, 2007). The study thus revealed that international African students consider the existence of an intelligible subject as immigrants but applied this intelligibility differentially based on their personal social divisions of race and class, amongst others.

The investigation of sense of community in this study revealed that international African students may have a mostly poor sense of community as unanimously noted by the participants. This finding opposes the research by Schmitt et al. (2003) that mentioned support for findings that suggest an increase in identification with minority group members when prejudice and exclusion are perceived from host communities. The concept of sense of community is challenged in this study as it does not adequately account for the fluidity and permeability of

identity. International African students exhibited markers of identity that surpassed national identity therefore enabling them to form connections with diverse people, including people from the host country. The existence of a community of international African students did not guarantee the availability of mutually supportive relationships as envisioned by Sarason (1974) as well as a spirit of belonging and shared experiences as viewed by McMillan (1996) in their expositions of community. However, most participants in this study were not members of formal international student organisations that could have allowed for a better analysis of the elements of sense of community as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986).

Based on research by Pretty et al. (2006), this study had an expectation of viewing the social support arising from sense of community as a buffer against physical and psychological illness and adjustment difficulties. However, there was no evidence to suggest a link between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. This may have arisen from multiple factors including: the fact of a poor sense of community indicating the absence of a buffer to begin with, and; the incompatibility of the interview protocol to the research question aiming to investigate this link as psychological wellbeing and sense of community were investigated separately. This meant that psychological wellbeing was independently evaluated.

The independent investigation of psychological wellbeing yielded various levels of wellness as being identified as an immigrant interacted differently with the spaces international African students navigated as well as with their other categories of identity. Prilleltensky's (2008) division of optimal wellness into personal, relational and collective needs was supported by participants differential accounts of psychological wellbeing. They either felt happy, indifferent or lonely and sad to the extent that these needs were met as well as how they individually interacted with power, oppression or liberation within spaces. This study found that agency also influenced the outcome of participants evaluation of their psychological

wellbeing as challenges in this regard were mostly similar to host country students, as also noted by Prieto-Welch (2016).

In this study international African students were confirmed as being immigrants. This finding is supported by Adepoju (2000) and Kruger and Osman (2010) as they referred to South Africa as holding strategic significance for Africans seeking better life chances and relative stability. International African students in this study gave accounts of xenophobia ranging from indirect to direct exposure. One of the main reasons for xenophobia in this study was a competition for scarce resources (Worby et al., 2008) which some participants attributed to the abject poverty of nationals also noted by Canham and Langa (2017). Darker skinned international African students, such as those from the DRC, were especially perceived as threats as opposed to their lighter skinned counterparts, such as those from Swaziland or Namibia. This perception of a greater threat being posed by darker Africans is supported by authors such as Mngxitama (2008) as well as Koenane and Maphunye (2015). The incidence of Afrophobia in academic spaces and towards international African students was evidenced especially through the use of hate speech and derogatory terms such as *Makwerekwere*. However, this study also found that not all international African students have xenophobic encounters and that not all South African nationals are xenophobic as the endemic levels of violence in South Africa do not discriminate. In fact, international African students saw potential for increasing Pan-Africanist ideology through highlighting the interdependence and interconnectedness of African states, both historically and contemporarily. In doing so, Pan-Africanism would threaten the occurrence of xenophobia as also argued by Neocosmos (2010).

Overall, this study acknowledges the identity of international African students as immigrants in South Africa due to various pull factors, especially the internationalisation of education. The study suggests that international African students do negotiate issues of space and safety whilst in South African higher education. The results from this study highlight that experiences of

international African students are not all negative and that the context in which they find themselves mediates most of their experiences.

The research points to the potential value in further exploring the experiences of international African students to ensure optimal adjustment in the South African context.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS & LIMITATIONS

This study has shown that international African students at all graduate levels desire well-coordinated orientation and adjustment into unfamiliar contexts. It is recommended that these orientation efforts should include practical and wellness-based methods of enhancing safety in a contextually relevant manner. Based on the findings of this study, it is also recommended that institutional efforts at internationalisation should make a more concerted effort to learn first-hand accounts from international African students about ways to improve their policies in order to move away from a commercialised approach to human issues.

In addressing the lack of solidarity amongst international students, the sense of community amongst international African students can be increased through mentorship programmes coordinated by the international divisions at the institutions, where a manageable cluster of students are taken under the supervision of another senior international African student to support them for adjustment purposes throughout the year. Thus, forming a supervision and networking chain for issues pertaining uniquely to international African students.

Furthermore, campus health care providers should adjust their services to be client specific. Prieto-Welch (2016) noted helpful strategies for providing mental health services to international African students which include: raising awareness on challenges of acculturation; promoting knowledge on collectivist values and helping students find ways of developing relationships; being more active and directive in welcoming international African students that come for the first time; helping students understand their identity development and locating that identity within the new student contextual identity; being mindful that students may experience racism, discrimination and microaggressions and validating those experiences; being mindful of language proficiency; and being mindful that the larger social context may not be welcoming.

It is also recommended that future research should aim to triangulate the experiences of international African students across institutions when choosing to study any topic of this nature as this may have policy implications with internationalisation being a global phenomenon.

It was my experience that using the IPA methodology meant that I took an active role in the research and in interpreting the results. Although I outlined the processes used to allow the reader reflection and alternative views, the context of my interpretations may be misrepresented and may lack depth, and thus cause limitations to the study. Moreover, despite aiming to have a balanced sample from both universities where the study was conducted, only a total of 2 participants responded to the call for participation from the University of Pretoria. This meant that the rest of the sample was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand and may have caused limitations. However, as the study broadly speaks of South African higher education institutions, no claim was made of institutional significance. The use of all participants was therefore deemed non-problematic.

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**LIST OF FIGURES**

Map 1:

https://www.google.com/maps/place/University+of+Pretoria/@-25.7552749,28.2277186,16.32z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x1e9561bd17853bd3:0xa7083bed5b42c902!8m2!3d-25.7545492!4d28.2314476

Map 2:

https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1366&bih=691&ei=NHm8W67bJszYaczxifgC&q=university+of+pretoria+hatfield+campus&oq=university+of+pretoria+campus+&gs_l=img.1.3.0j0i30k1j0i8i30k1l8.3691.13017.0.15842.30.17.0.3.3.0.670.2751.3-1j1j3.5.0....0...1ac.1.64.img..22.8.2913....0.s3s3tWI65Ag#imgrc=JB9y-7CG2sA9oM:

Map 3:

https://www.google.com/maps/place/University+of+the+Witwatersrand,+Johannesburg/@-26.1904617,28.0304454,15.29z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x1e953db5fe719e79:0x9d63b2d3be70f8ba!8m2!3d-26.1916888!4d28.0327614

Map 4:

https://www.google.com/search?q=university+of+witwatersrand+braamfontein+campus&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CXOx31jQ6trSIjjzxYnLiKF0DP9rj7TxGEfGOz1iicwywtCR7Pt0j1r89rW1bbwGomv7b0ruc0_1UbajT3PKPaj2QVioSCfPFicuIoXQMERULRAdq8XlVKhIJ_12uPtPEYR8YRgTrX81J-gLAqEgk7PWKJzDLC0BF9LPNUAPRAJyoSCZHs-3SPWvz2Eaoqe7v0HsjdKhIJtbVtvAaia_1sRj77toC8YhdUqEglvSu5zT9RtqBEuH6OGTw_1KkSoSCdPc8o9qPZBWEVS1ZvQA_1zd6&tbo=u&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj33P2vkPndAhWRy4UKHbFlCHUQ9C96BAgBEBg&biw=1188&bih=601&dpr=1.15#imgrc=c7HfWNDq2tKn0M:

## APPENDIX A – ETHICS CLEARANCE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

| | |
|---|---|
| CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE | PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/16/010 IH |
| PROJECT TITLE: | Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education |
| INVESTIGATORS | Hoxobes Gezina |
| DEPARTMENT | Psychology |
| DATE CONSIDERED | 31/05/16 |
| DECISION OF COMMITTEE^ | Approved |

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 31 May 2016

CHAIRPERSON
(Prof. Brett Bowman)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Hugo Canham
Psychology

---

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and one copy returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2018

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

## APPENDIX B – ETHICS CLEARANCE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

13 September 2016

Dear Prof Maree

| | |
|---|---|
| **Project:** | **Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education** |
| **Researcher:** | **G Hoxobes** |
| **Supervisor:** | **Dr Hugo Canham (Wits)** |
| **Department:** | **Psychology** |
| **Reference Number:** | **12126820(GW20160717HS)** |

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 28 July 2016 and by the Dean of Humanities on 17 August 2016. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

**Prof MME Schoeman**
**Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Ethics**
**Faculty of Humanities**
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**
**e-mail:tracey.andrew@up.ac.za**

Kindly note that your original signed approval certificate will be sent to your supervisor via the Head of Department. Please liaise with your supervisor.

Research Ethics Committee Members: **Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean)**; Prof KL Harris; Dr L Blokland; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder; Dr E Johnson; Dr C Panebianco; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard; Ms B Tsebe; Dr E van der Klashorst; Mr V Sithole

## APPENDIX C – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Good day

My name is Gezina Hoxobes and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a Master's degree in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I would herewith like to invite you to participate in my research titled "Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education". Your participation will help me gain some insight into an area that has been under-researched in South Africa.

Involvement in this research requires your participation in an interview process that will last for approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and it will take place at a venue on your campus. With your permission the interview will be audio recorded in order to ensure the accuracy of your account. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary, you will not be rewarded or penalised in any way. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. You may also refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. All data collected in the interview process (including audio recordings, notes, or transcripts) will be kept strictly confidential. All material will only be seen, heard, and processed by myself and my supervisor. All the data collected will be kept in a safe location with restricted access as well as on a password protected computer. The data will be destroyed after two years should publications arise or after 6 years should no publications arise. No information that can identify a participant will be used in the interview transcripts. The results of this study will be written up in the form of a research report. They may also be written up as a research article or presented at a conference. A summary of these results will be made available to participants on request.

It is my understanding that the study will not pose any risks or result in any benefits to you. However, if you feel you have any concerns regarding the study, or if you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me telephonically on 073 744 54 90 or via email: 1259835@students.wits.ac.za, or my supervisor Dr. Hugo Canham via email: Hugo.Canham@wits.ac.za.

Thank you for your time.

Gezina Hoxobes

## APPENDIX D – CONSENT FORM FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

I,_____have read the information sheet and I am aware of the nature of this study. I hereby voluntarily consent to taking part in a semi-structured interview process moderated by Gezina Hoxobes for her study on "Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education". I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any question.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- Direct quotes from the interview may be used in the final report, but my identity will not be revealed.
- Interview data will be kept securely with restricted access.
- I will receive a summary of the final research findings should I request it.
- The researcher will assist me in contacting relevant counseling services should I feel that I require such services as a result of my participation in this study.

Signed:_____

Date:_____

## APPENDIX E – AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

I, _____hereby voluntarily consent to being interviewed by Gezina Hoxobes for her study, "Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education".

- The digital recordings and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person at any time, except the researcher and the researcher's supervisor
- All digital recordings will be destroyed after the research has been examined.
- No identifying information will be included in the interview transcripts or the research report or subsequent research publications or conference presentations.

Signed:_____

Date:_____

## APPENDIX F – REGISTRAR PERMISSION LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

**OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR**

12 July 2016

Ms Gezina Hoxobes
Student number: 1259835

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**"Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education"**

This letter serves to confirm that the above project has received permission to be conducted on University premises, and/or involving staff and/or students of the University as research participants. In undertaking this research, you agree to abide by all University regulations for conducting research on campus and to respect participants' rights to withdraw from participation at any time.

This notice serves as proof that the University's internal mailing system may be used as the mechanism by which potential participants can be approached.

If you are conducting research on certain student cohorts, year groups or courses within specific Schools and within the teaching term, permission must be sought from Heads of School or individual academics.

Kindly liaise with Professor Samuel in the School of Economics and Business Sciences in that respect.

The necessary ethical clearance has been obtained.

Nicoleen Potgieter
Deputy Registrar

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050, South Africa | T +27 11 717 1204/8 | F +27 86 553 2271 | www.wits.ac.za

## APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is Gezina and we are here today because you have agreed to participate in an interview process for my research study that is titled: "Exploring negotiations of space and safety by international African students in South African higher education". The interview will be approximately 90 minutes in duration. I would like to remind you that the interview is completely voluntary and that you can choose to withdraw at any time. You also reserve the right to not answer questions that you are uncomfortable with. We will start with some demographic questions for comparative purposes only and proceed to questions relating to the focus of this study. The whole interview process, including this introduction, will be audio recorded.

**Part 1: Demographic information**

**Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible:**

1. Which African country do you come from?
   1.1 How long have you lived in South Africa?
   1.2 Where else have you lived in South Africa before moving to Gauteng?
   1.3 Did you complete high school in your country of origin?
   1.4 Did you study in South Africa before?
   1.5 Have you lived in another country other than your home country or South Africa?
2. Which racial category do you identify yourself as belonging to, if any?
3. Are you male or female?
4. What is your current age?
5. Describe the residential area you stay in while at university?
   5.1 Is it developed (basic services are well established) or underdeveloped (lack of water and sanitation, basic services)?
6. What is the name of the higher education institution you are enrolled at currently?

**Part 2: Research questions**

**Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible:**

1. What do you enjoy most about being a student at this university?

2. What do you like most about living in this city?

3. What do you least enjoy about being a student here?

4. What do you like least about living in this city and country?

5. What do you miss most about your country of origin?

**Section A**

6. How do you think South Africans view you in your identity as an international student?

    6.1 Can you tell me whether your opinion about how South Africans view you influences your movement between places?

7. When do you feel safe as an international student?

    7.1 Where do you feel safe as an international student?

8. When do feel unsafe as an international student?

    8.1 Where do you feel unsafe as an international student?

9. What do you do to enhance your sense of safety as an international student?

**Section B**

10. What identity expressions are you comfortable with as an international student?

    10.1 Where do these identity expressions take place freely?

    10.2 Where do these identity expressions not take place freely?

11. Which identity expressions are you not comfortable with as an international student?

    11.1 Why are these expressions uncomfortable?

11.2 Where are these expressions uncomfortable?

11.3 What do you do to not feel uncomfortable?

**Section C**

12. Please tell me about your living arrangements in South Africa?

13. Has living here made you feel happier or sadder compared to home?

13.1 Tell me more?

14. Can you tell me whether you have friends on campus/at residence/off campus?

14.1 What is the nationality of most of your friends?

14.2 Why do you think this is the case?

14.3 Do you have friends that are South African?

14.4 What makes you relate to them?

15. Please describe to me what your views are of the sense of community amongst international students at your institution?

15.1 Please tell me whether you are member of any international student community?

15.2 Please tell me how you benefit in your identity as an international student from it?

15.3 Can you tell me of anything you do not receive from this community that you feel you need as an international student?

16. Can you tell me who you walk with mostly on campus?

17. Can you tell me who you walk with mostly off campus?

18. Is there anything more you would like to tell me?

19. Do you have any questions?