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Africa Week Festival in Yeoville (Johannesburg, South Africa): reclaiming a physical, social and political space

Introduction

Yeoville[1] is a pericentral suburb in Johannesburg – the economic hub of South Africa (figure 1). In the late 1970s, it was one of first desegregated suburbs and a hub of activism against Apartheid (1948-1994). However, since the mid-1990's, Yeoville has been facing a cycle of decline, marked by 'white flight' (figure 2), urban decay, unemployment and xenophobic tensions. While Yeoville is now generally perceived as a place of crime and grime, Yeoville residents are trying to improve their life in the neighbourhood and to change the image of their suburb, in Johannesburg and beyond. For this purpose, several community-based organizations launched an initiative that aimed at creating an annual week of celebrations – to be ended by a street festival – to honour the neighbourhood and the diversity of its residents. The first of these festivals took place on May 29th 2010, a symbolic date chosen to commemorate both "Africa Day" – a day established in 1963 in remembrance of the formation of the Organization of African Unity –, and the South-African xenophobic attacks of May 2008[2]. In the current context of Yeoville, the festival is conceived as a means to promote a renewed image of the neighbourhood in order to attract people and investments in the area, as well as an opportunity to bring all the people from the community together.

In this paper, I argue that the festival is not only a cultural event, but also a symbolic and political statement made by the residents of Yeoville to reclaim the space of their neighbourhood while delivering a new kind of narrative about diversity in South Africa in general, and in Yeoville in particular. In this respect, the festival as a whole can be considered as a performance, that is to say as a (re)presentation of a specific identity and image of the suburb through different cultural means. Yet, one can wonder why this particular form of expression was chosen to promote and initiate change in Yeoville. To what extent can such an ephemeral and cultural event truly transform a space at a social, economical or political level? What could be the short-term and long-term impacts of the Yeoville Africa Week Festival on the area and its residents? This last question also implies a methodological issue about how to assess the consequences of performances, especially at a

[1] What is generally known as Yeoville is actually made of two suburbs: Yeoville itself and Bellevue. Because of their similar history and dynamics and of the absence of discontinuity between the two suburbs, people usually considered them as one and refer to them as Yeoville. Except when mentioned, I will use Yeoville in its wider meaning.

[2] The so-called 'xenophobic attacks' refer to a bloody wave of violence against predominantly – though not exclusively – Black foreigners in South Africa (Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2008) that started on May 11th 2008 in the North-East of Johannesburg before spreading across the country.

symbolical level. To comprehend the perceptions and representations linked to the festival, I will refer to: press releases published before and after the festival by various media; pictures taken by the participants on the day of the festival; interviews of Yeoville residents, festival's organizers and people who attended it. These interviews were carried out almost one year after the festival in order to evaluate the memories left by the event on a longer time-scale.

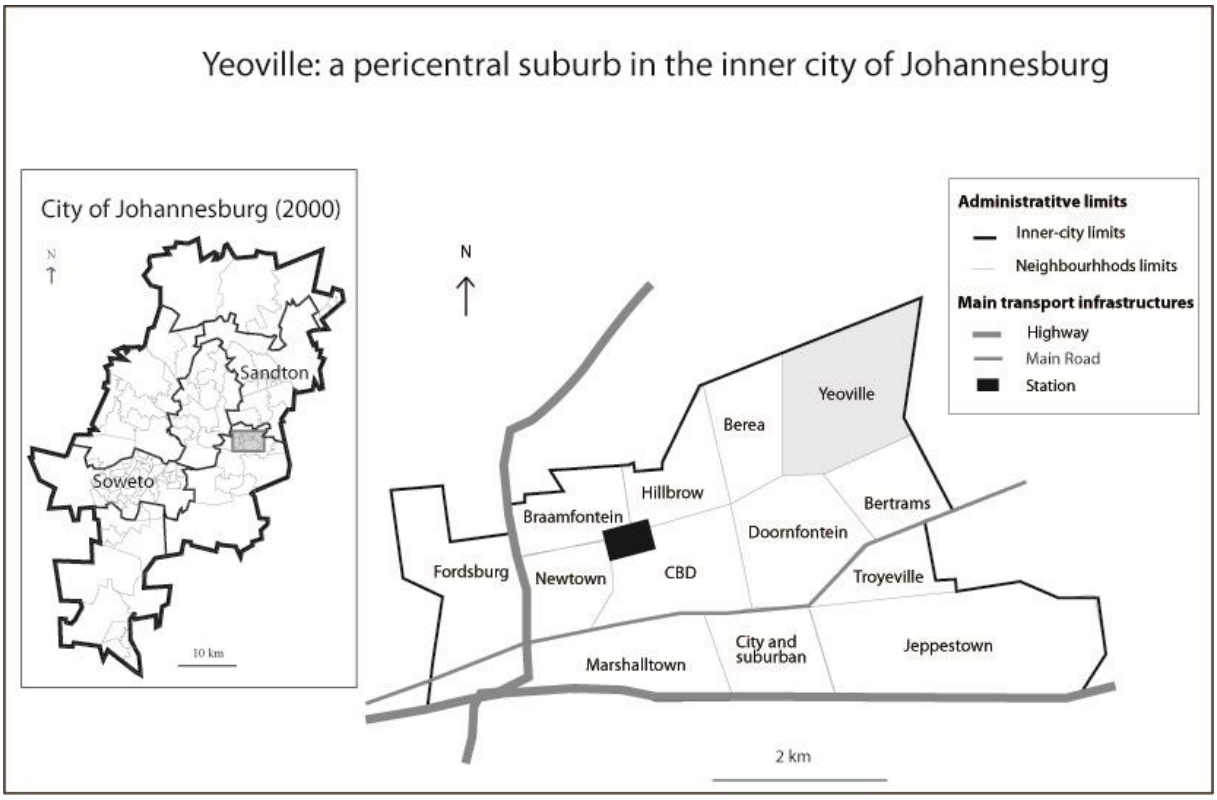
To cover all these different matters, I will first look at the history and the current socio-economic context of Yeoville to understand the issues faced by the area; then I will analyse the building of new discourses on Yeoville and the use of the art to promote these visions; finally, I will try to understand to what extent the Africa Week Festival can initiate a redefinition of the place on social, economic and political levels.

Yeoville: from a White Suburb to an African one

The birth of Yeoville: a cosmopolitan area (late 19th century-late 1970's)

In its strict meaning, Yeoville was officially proclaimed a suburb in 1890, one year after Bellevue and only four years after the foundation of Johannesburg. It was named after Thomas Yeo Shrewell, one of the first surveyors of the city. Yeoville soon became a White working-class area – even though it was initially planned to be a White upper-class suburb because of its advantageous location near the Johannesburg CBD (figure 1) and up the hill (Roux, 2010).

Figure 1:



In the 1920's, the area experienced its first period of desegregation due to a lack of accommodation in the inner city (Gray, 2010). From then on, buildings – and not only houses – were erected (Beall *et alii*, 2002) to face this shortage. This desegregated era ended in the late 1940's with the beginning of Apartheid, and the implementation of its racist laws such as the *Group Areas Act* (1950). This Act allocated specific residential areas to the people depending on their belonging to a 'racial category' (White, Black, Coloured or Indian). Then a White area, only the 'non-White' domestic workers working in the suburb were allowed to stay in Yeoville. They lived in the servant quarters, those rooms in the backyard of the house or on the roof of the building (Beall *et alii*, 2002).

Yet, since its foundation, Yeoville has been regarded as a 'cosmopolitan' area because of the importance of the migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe in the area (Harrison, 2002). Amongst those, the Jewish community was particularly significant, especially from the 1920's onwards (Glauber, 2010). Their presence was visible in the area through the number of Jewish bakeries and synagogues in the neighbourhood, which remained until the late 1970's (Kimoto, 2009). They also contributed to the shift of the area from a working-class suburb to middle-class one (Glauber, 2010). Thus, the history of Yeoville as a place of immigration is not new. Nevertheless, unlike today, immigration at that time was not regarded as a problem probably because the European immigrants had a similar socio-economic background to the people already living in the area (Beall *et alii*, 2002), and this probably facilitated their integration. Finally, as described by Maurice Smithers – a resident and an activist who has been living on and off in the area since 1961 –, Yeoville was then:

> *"A quiet suburbian village, mainly Jewish [...] just a suburb like anywhere else in Johannesburg."* (Smithers, April 2011)

This started to change in the late 1970's.

Yeoville, a bohemian place (late 1970's-mid 1990's)

From the late 1970's onwards, a change in demographic slowly transformed the atmosphere in Yeoville. The suburb – as Hillbrow or Berea (figure 1) before it – experienced its second period of desegregation and became a 'grey area', that is to say a legally White area experiencing an influx of non-White population (figure 2). As was the case in other 'grey areas', this influx of new population was linked to a broader context: after the 1976 uprisings[3], the Apartheid regime was increasingly contested inside and outside South Africa, to an extent that it was difficult for the government to enforce its own legislation (Beavon, 2004). In Johannesburg, as White people started to move from the inner city to the burgeoning Northern suburbs, a non-White population came from the townships[4] into the pericentral suburbs of the city. In addition, Yeoville was known to be more liberal than the other suburbs: this promoted and facilitated the settlement of these newcomers (Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003), even though they were still a minority group (figure 2).

[3] On June 16th 1976, during a march organized by Black students in Soweto (figure 1) to protest against the obligation to use Afrikaans as the only language of education, a thirteen years-old boy was killed by the police.
[4] *Townships* are residential areas built by the Apartheid regime for Blacks, Coloureds or Indians, generally in the far periphery of the inner city designed for Whites.

Figure 2: Population groups in Yeoville (1970-2001)

	1970	1980	1985	1991	1996	2001 *(ward 67)*
Whites	86.5	89.7	88.5	74.4	29.8	15
Coloured	0.2	0.2	0.3	3.4	5.3	3.2
Asians	0	0.3	0.6	2.2	2.4	3.9
Black	13.3	9.8	10.6	15	62.5	77.9

Sources: Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003; South Africa census 2001.

Living in Yeoville as a non-White individual was illegal at the time and consequently quite difficult. For example, to be able to rent a place, non-Whites often had to give a false White name (Dewar, 2010). By the 1980's, Yeoville started to be a hotbed of political activism against Apartheid. Indeed, the simple fact of being a non-White person living in Yeoville was a daily rejection of the Apartheid laws and an opposition to the system of segregation. Furthermore, political figures, liberation movements as left-wing intellectuals were also based – often illegally – in Yeoville (Harrison, 2002).

These different forms of political activism echoed in the cultural domain. Rockey Raleigh Street – Yeoville's main street – was an alternative entertainment spot, for Yeoville residents as well as for the people living in Johannesburg, in South Africa and even abroad. Yeoville offered clubs, an independent cinema, an avant-garde theatre and restaurants such as *House of Tandoor* – the only one of these places that still exists today. All of these places contributed to turn Yeoville into a counter-culture hub and to give the neighbourhood the reputation of being a 'Bohemian' place where people could mix and express themselves in unconventional ways. The representation of Yeoville as an artistic and alternative place dates from then. The people who used to live or go out there at that time now perceive this period as the golden age of the area (Prabhala, 2008). This leads to nostalgic reconstructions of what was supposed to be Yeoville in these years. The numbers of Facebook groups like "We Grew Up IN & AROUND YEOVILLE!" or "Rockey Street nights in the 90's" are indicative of this trend. The fondness for that period is probably a consequence of the decay Yeoville had been facing from the mid-1990's and of the difficulty for these former inhabitants and users of Yeoville to recognize themselves in the current area.

Yeoville, a transit place (mid 1990's-2000's)

The abolition of the *Group Area Act* in 1991 and the gradual dismantlement of the Apartheid system triggered an acceleration in the change of Yeoville's demographics. According to the 1996 census, the percentage of Blacks in the area rose from 15 % to 62.5% in just five years (figure 2). As in the other parts of the inner city, this shift led to a de facto re-segregation of the area, from a White-dominated suburb to a Black-dominated one (Guillaume, 2001). Many of the new black residents were foreigners[5], mainly from Southern African countries (Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003). Moreover, the population

[5] The accurate number of foreigners in Yeoville is unknown, firstly because the last census was made in 2001; secondly because some of the foreigners are illegal and not taken into account in the official database; and thirdly because of the high mobility of the Yeoville population.

was characterized by a high level of mobility: only 9% of the people living in 1996 in Yeoville were born there, and 71% moved in between 1991 and 1996 (Beall *et alii*, 2002; Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003). For many residents, Yeoville was a 'transit' place: an entry point to Johannesburg but not a place to neither stay nor settle; a place to leave as soon as one could afford it (Prabhala, 2008). As a result, Yeoville has experienced urban decay, leading to a lack of attachment to the area by its residents – which led to further neglect. The new Yeoville residents have tended to be less educated and to have a lower level of income than the previous ones (Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003), further affecting the perception of the neighbourhood. Consequently, investments in the area slowed down as people anticipated a devaluation of property values. As a result, the owners – mostly White – left the area but instead of selling their properties at a devaluated price, they subdivided them and rented them out to various tenants, in order to make more money out of them (Beall *et alii*, 2002; Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003). The owners' departure from Yeoville and their disinterest in their properties had left the area with problems of poor maintenance of the buildings, overcrowded and/or hijacked-buildings[6]. As acknowledged by Phillis Mohlala – Yeoville ward councillor[7] –, these problems are still the main issues the area faces today (Mohlala's interview, April 2011). To make things worse, the increase in crime rates – violent crimes doubled from 1994 to 1998 (Jürgens, *et alii*, 2003) – did nothing to break this vicious circle. Once known as an attractive place, Yeoville like much of the inner city became a no-go area in less than two decades.

Given this historical context, for some residents – South Africans and others –, the easy explanation to the decline of the area is the arrival of the foreigners. This misperception creates a climate of distrust and suspicion amongst the people living in Yeoville. Therefore, while Yeoville was not directly affected by the 2008 xenophobic attacks, it is far from being a place of tolerance (Harrison, 2002). Verbalised and silent tensions between South Africans and foreigners exist on a day-to-day basis. However, some of the Yeoville residents are trying to transform these negative representations about migrants into positive ones.

The reinvention of Yeoville

Yeoville as a "gentrified" area

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Yeoville became a priority area for the new City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Authority[8]. The main objective defined in the successive metropolitan strategies for the inner city[9] has been to fight urban decay to attract people and investments, which have been diverted to the Northern suburbs since the 1980's (Bremner, 2000; Beavon, 2004). The emphasis put on the inner city is obviously linked to the importance of the area for the city as a hub of economic

[6] The hijacking of a building consists in taking control of a building – usually poorly managed or abandoned by its landlord – to collect illegally rents from the tenants, but without taking care of the place in return.
[7] A ward councillor is an elected representative at the local level.

[8] The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Authority – often referred to as the City of Johannesburg – is a local authority, created in 2000, to bring together all the former municipalities that were divided along racial lines during the Apartheid.
[9] Cf. *Inner City Regeneration Strategy* (2004); *Inner City Regeneration Charter* (2007).

activity and infrastructures. Beyond that, there seems to be also an emotional attachment to the inner city, imbued with nostalgia. The idea is not only to transform the area into a "World-class African [inner] city" (as stated by the 2000 City of Johannesburg motto), but also to restore its past glory (Murray, 2008).

Consequently, several regeneration projects took place in Yeoville. The Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA)[10] managed the more recent one from 2005 to 2010. Based on a strategy conceived by a Yeoville community-based organization in 1988 (Farouk, 2007), this project involved the repaving of Rockey Raleigh Street, the creation of a new library, the renovation of the community Recreation Centre and the park next to it. Furthermore, a public art programme designed for Yeoville, Hillbrow and Berea (figure 1), was added to the project in 2008. Artist-designed benches were installed in Rockey Raleigh Street, mosaics were crafted in the park and a sculpture was built for the library. This programme aimed at being site-specific and community-based. For example, as an echo to the diversity of the neighbourhood, the mosaics in the park represent all the African flags. Nevertheless, the observations and interviews I conducted in the area in 2010 and 2011 strongly suggests that the project fails to make sense for the passers-by and the residents of the neighbourhood. For instance, most of the interviewees think that the flags in the park are linked to the 2010 Soccer World-Cup instead of acknowledging their own diverse origins. For the sake of the security of the library employees who park their car there, the sculpture erected in the courtyard of the library is now made inaccessible to the public. Which public is this *public* artwork made for? This contradiction obviously questions the ability of public art to be more than (decorative) art in public spaces, and to be appropriated and reclaimed by the people who use these public spaces.

Surely, as explained by Trinity Session[11], the art consultants company in charge of the project, this problem is partly a consequence of time and budget constraints, leading to a lack of consultation and even of information about the project for the Yeoville residents. But it is also symptomatic of City of Johannesburg's wider top-down strategy in the inner city to promote gentrification (Farouk, 2007; Murray, 2008; Gray, 2010). According to this view, art would mostly be used to beautify an area and to build a standardized vision of the inner city. The public art programme's name "Hillbrow-Berea-Yeoville" (HBY) recognizes the similar histories of these neighbourhoods, but fails to considers them as particular places with their own identities. This kind of regeneration project is problematic due to its lack of consideration for the specificity of both the place and the people (Farouk, 2007; Murray, 2008). Furthermore, it excludes people who do not fit into the new 'gentrified' definition of the area, such as street traders, (illegal) migrants or poor people (Götz, Simone, 2003; Farouk, 2007; Murray, 2008). Is it possible to reinvent Yeoville in a way that can resonate with the place and the people living and working in Yeoville, while addressing the issues of the area? Could art be a means to embody such a reinvention?

Reinventing Yeoville as a "Pan-African Village"

The City of Johannesburg is not the only one to produce new discourse about the inner city and its neighbourhoods. In a more bottom-up approach, some residents as Smithers have been trying to change the image of their place by proposing a renewed vision of Yeoville as a "Pan-African Village".

[10] The JDA is an agency of the City of Johannesburg in charge of implementing its development strategies.

[11] http://www.onair.co.za

Behind this catch phrase, the idea is actually to transform the negative perceptions around Yeoville in general, and about (African) migrants in particular, into positive ones. As Smithers puts it:

> *"Let's market Yeoville as this pan-African destination where you can come experience the diversity of African culture all in one place, because it's all here."* (Smithers's interview, May 2010)

In this respect, migration should not be looked at as a burden but, on the contrary, as a cultural resource that must be celebrated in order to attract people as investments in the area and to bring all the residents together. The choice of the adjective "Pan-African" might be a way to bypass the usual associations with the City's motto "African" – Black[12] if not poor in the South African context. "Pan-African" could also be a means to inscribe this vision into the pan-Africanist discourse, a political and cultural movement that calls for the unification of all African people. The notion of Pan-African underlines not only on the particular identity of the people living in Yeoville, but also the potential relations between them.

"Village" refers to an idealised vision of rural areas as a welcoming, quiet and peaceful place where people know and help each other. To present Yeoville as a "village" could then encourage a perception of Yeoville as a united neighbourhood, challenging the lack of sense of community and belonging, often deplored by its own residents (Beall, *et alii*, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Gray, 2010). It might also be an attempt to differentiate the area from the close neighbourhoods of Hillbrow and Berea known to be tough places, implicitly defined as urban jungles in contrast with the "village" of Yeoville. Yet, we can wonder if this kind of representations is shared by the community as a whole or if it just a vision created by those people who are more involved in the community – the "community-builders" described by Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell (2002).

In this respect, the impulse given by the community to look at Yeoville in a different way coincides with a recent interest from the academics in the area. In 2010, the School of Architecture of the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) launched a three-year research programme, which is exclusively focused on Yeoville. The "Yeoville Studio" includes all the students and staff members of the School of Architecture while working closely with different community-based organizations in Yeoville. This Studio is conceived as a vehicle to create knowledge and awareness about the neighbourhood. It is a way to give a voice and to legitimize a counter-discourse on and from Yeoville that could challenge the City's top-down approach and force it to work more closely with – and not only in or for – the community. The debate around the launch of the new library is emblematic of this process of negotiation of power between the City and the community, and of the extent to which the community can influence the metropolitan strategy. The launch of the library was initially supposed to take place on Thursday, April 7th 2011. However, different local organizations complained about the fact that the people would not be able to attend the function on a weekday and criticized the lack of consultation and participation of the community in the planning of this event. As a result, the launch was postponed to Saturday, 7th May 2011. On that day, officials as well as people from the community – activists, children and residents – came, while local artists were invited to perform in the library, in and in front of the Recreation Centre. Art was thus used to display the involvement and identity of the community.

[12] During the Apartheid era, "Africans" also mean Blacks.

Whereas the JDA used public art to market its regeneration project, the community in Yeoville seems to favour art performances to promote its reinvented identity as a united, diverse and vocal neighbourhood that is able to shape its own vision. The Yeoville Africa Week Festival is a symptomatic example in that matter. The next section will deal with the reasons behind the unobvious choice of performances like a festival to embody and spread this vision of Yeoville as a "Pan-African Village".

Art festivals as a catalyst for change

I would argue that this emphasis on art performances by the community of Yeoville is a result of both the global and local context. At the global scale, culture in the post-industrial era is increasingly understood as an integral part of the urban fabric and hence promoted as a key-driver in urban (re)development strategies (Zukin, 1995; Paddison, Miles, 2007). In this regard, the programme adopted by the JDA in terms of public art is perfectly coherent with this trend (Miles, 1997). But this focus on permanent and tangible art is not the only way of using culture as a driver for change. Another one is characterised by the 'festivalisation' of cities and their public spaces, that is to say an increase of cultural performances and events such as festivals – temporary and intangible art forms – in order to market and/or reinvent a place (Gravari-Barbas, 2000; Quinn, 2005). Festivals are not something new. They have always been a means to celebrate the identity of a group in a place (Quinn, 2005). However, the number and the size of the festivals today are without precedent. This 'festivalisation' is often problematic in that the current festivals tend to be mainly economically oriented, losing sight of the social and local dimensions that formed their original *raison d'être*. The Carnival of Venice, for instance, is now a global touristic event, which attracts millions of visitors every year but not succeeds in bringing the Venetians together anymore (Quinn, 2005). Yet, in Yeoville, the process seems to be slightly different as the initiative to create a festival comes from its residents – or at least some of them. In their understanding, the festival is a catalyst to fight economic decline and xenophobia, in order to build a deeper sense of community between the people living in Yeoville. This attention paid to the economic and social components of the festival might be the result of a locally rooted approach.

As stressed above, culture in all its forms – including festivals – has been a distinguishing heritage of the area since the late 1970's. According to Smithers, shop owners of Rockey Raleigh Street were already organising festivals in the late 1980s to celebrate "Mardi Gras" (Smithers's interview, April 2011). In the late 1990's, another kind of community-based festival emerged in Yeoville. As Kamal El-Alaoui (one of the main organizers of the event) explained, this project was conceived as a gathering opportunity for all the people living in Yeoville, at a time when the area was experiencing drastic economical, social and cultural changes (El-Alaoui's interview, April 2011). The aim of the festival was thus (already!) to fight the decay of the area by creating a platform for cultural exchange. Unfortunately, because of a lack of funding, this festival only happened once in Yeoville, strongly undermining its capacity to be more than a one-day event or to initiate a long-term process of community building. Nevertheless, as the 1999 Yeoville development plan proved (Marais, Luke, 1999), local organizations never quite abandoned this idea of a community festival, seeing in it a good opportunity to embody their vision of Yeoville as a "Pan-African Village". In the late 2000's, two very different major events reactivated the need of having such a festival in Yeoville: the 2008 xenophobic attacks and the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The xenophobic attacks made it obvious that

something needed to be done to tackle the issue of xenophobia, while the World Cup made the money available to organise a festival. As a result in 2010, 520 000 rands (50 000 euros) were allocated by the Department of Art, Culture and Heritage of the City of Johannesburg to three local organizations – the Yeoville Bellevue Community Development Trust (YBCDT), the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF) and the African Diaspora Forum (ADF)[13] – to organise the first Yeoville Africa Week Festival.

In end effect, the Yeoville Africa Week Festival is potentially more than simply another avatar of the global 'festivalisation' of urban spaces. Its local roots and its focus on economic and social objectives for the neighbourhood mean that the festival is more likely to have a wider and multi-layered impact on the area (Quinn, 2005). Yet, it remains to be seen what kinds of short-term and long-term impacts this event could have in the area, especially at a social level – an aspect that researchers tend to overlook (Quinn, 2005). Based on the study of the first edition of the Yeoville Africa Week Festival in 2010 and on the organization of the second edition for 2011, the next section will review the festival's expected or unexpected effects in and beyond the area.

Africa Week Festival in Yeoville and the (re)appropriation of space

Walking in the streets as a statement

During the day of the festival, the Rockey Raleigh Street and several adjacent streets were closed in order to allow the public to walk freely between the various venues scattered in the neighbourhood. The principal spots of the festival were: the library, the Recreation Centre, the park, the market and five stages which were set up for the event. From 10am to 12pm, a carnival paraded down the main street. At 12pm, officials, amongst whom the director of the Department of Art, Culture and Heritage of the City of Johannesburg, Steven Sack, and the ward councillor of Yeoville, Phyllis Mohlala, officially launched the festival. Till 5pm – till dusk –, a wide-range of activities took place on the various stages: music gigs, poetry sessions, dance and theatre performances. In addition, throughout the day, the "Yeoville Studio" ran workshops and exhibitions in the courtyard of the Library, exceptionally opened to the public for the event, while the "Hotel Yeoville" initiative – a public art participatory project that was based in the Library at that time – was launched. All these activities were free of charge and all those who had registered before were allowed to perform that day – and were even paid for it. People from the neighbourhood were also encouraged to sell African art, craft or food on the streets. In accordance with the concept of the festival, the idea was indeed to showcase the diversity of the people from Yeoville in order to give life to the "Pan-African Village".

[13] The YBCDT is a trust, officially founded in 2010 but operational since 2008, which intends to address the needs of the Yeoville community. The YSF is an umbrella structure, which brings together all the organizations of Yeoville. The ADF is a platform based in Yeoville that was created in 2009 as a response to the xenophobic attacks in order to give a voice to the migrants in South Africa.

The carnival was especially conceived in line with this goal. The procession was supposed to parade all around the neighbourhood, inviting people to join the festival. But, it was finally restricted to Rockey Raleigh Street due to a lack of police officers to look after the security of the participants. As a result, the parade just went up and down the main street. The festival's organizers themselves admit that the carnival was not a success, not only because of its scaled-down route but also because there were only few participants and not enough masks nor costumes. Despite the small number of 'official' participants – or perhaps even because of that – the people from the neighbourhood, dressed up for the occasion, progressively became part of the parade and of the festival, rather than being merely spectators (figure 3).

Figure 3: Yeoville residents as actors of the Africa Week Festival

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Thanks to specific clothes, flags, and so on, the festival as a whole was indeed an opportunity for the performers and the passers-by to showcase – and through that to construct – his or her identity. During that day, being South African, Nigerian or Congolese was thus something to be proud of. Fear of the Other gave way to curiosity: people started to exchange about their own customs and to appreciate each others' cultures.

That this event took place in the streets and in public spaces was itself crucial to the process of place and identity building. Marching or parading in the streets is a means to reclaim a place, to make it public by the simple act of occupying it (Staeheli, Mitchell, 2008). By walking in the streets, the people from Yeoville physically and symbolically took ownership of their neighbourhood. It also gave visibility to all the users of the area, foreigners and South Africans, legal and in particular illegal migrants, for whom visibility is often synonym of danger. In that respect, their presence in the public domain can also be understood as an implicit claim for recognition. However, one can wonder about the impact of this kind of event, beyond the event itself. For example, the fact that the festival committee was blamed for having favoured foreigners instead of South Africans may raise questions about the ability of the festival to challenge the stereotyped divisions between the foreigners and

the South Africans, between us versus them. To what extent can the festival really promote social cohesion?

Building social cohesion

Almost all the persons I interviewed in April 2011 – organizers of the festival, artists, residents – agree that the main success of the event was, in their own words, to have been able to "bring people together". Almost one year after its first edition, the festival was still seen as an opportunity for gathering and sharing, beyond national, racial, gender or age differences. However, it is important to assess critically this celebrations of diversity. There could be for instance a distortion between the interviewees' words and their practices. Furthermore, these discourses were produced and delivered within a specific context: an interview conducted by a French White researcher. On one hand, my being French – hence foreigner – and an academic might have given my interviewees the implicit feeling that I sided with the migrants, no matter what. Consequently, the interviewees – South African as well as foreigners – might have inflected their discourse in an attempt to please me. On the other hand, being White and French also meant that people did not always see me as a foreigner. This is actually symptomatic of the particular type of xenophobia that is currently dominant in South Africa, that is xenophobia against Black African people (Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2008).

Notwithstanding the apparent enjoyment of having being together during the festival, xenophobic tensions are still a daily reality in Yeoville, one year after the event. The debate that took place in the *Yeovue news* – the local newspaper edited by YBCDT – in March 2011 is symptomatic of these tensions. Obvious Katsaura – the ADF Deputy Secretary and a Wits PhD student working on community policing in Yeoville – published an article entitled "Let difference and diversity be a resource rather than a curse in Yeoville Bellevue" (*Yeovue News*, March 17th, Vol. 4, n°9). To that article, which was in line with the spirit of the Yeoville Africa Week Festival, Thembi Majombozi – a South African resident of Yeovillle – wrote back the week after "Migrants must be more responsible" (*Yeovue News*, March 24th, Vol. 4, n°10). Although Majombozi denies being xenophobic, her article vigorously complained about the migrants' non-respect of the laws and their lack of involvement in the community. This gave rise to another wave of comments about the role played by the migrants in the community (*Yeovue News*, March 17th, Vol. 4, n°11). While this debate is surely a sign that Yeoville is far from being a diverse united "Pan-African Village", the fact that the questions of migration and xenophobia are openly and publicly discussed might itself be a positive sign. It means that xenophobia is at least an issue people can talk about, instead of being something that has to be resolved through violence. In this regard, thanks to the spoken and unspoken exchanges that happened during the festival – through dance, music or just smiles –, the festival might be one of the factors that initiated a dialogue between the people living in Yeoville. But how then to sustain this dialogue? How to transform the euphoria of being together during an extra-ordinary day into an ordinary daily practise of mutual respect?

According to Kamal El-Aloui, a festival should not be looked at nor conceived as an event but as a process:

> *"So what it* [a carnival] *does is that it allows community a platform where it can actually express itself - meaning that the community has to prepare itself months and months before the event in ideas, concept, vision, preparation, production and presentation. That makes*

different elements of the community come together to share ideas, to work as a group, to drive their own vision to the future" (El-Alaoui's interview, April 2011)

For this vision of a festival to be effective, it implies that all the residents of the area should be involved in a way or another in the event. The extent to which the people living or working in Yeoville were included – or felt included – in the festival is actually problematic. For instance, most of the shop owners I interviewed in Rockey Raleigh Street in April 2011 did not feel concerned by the festival: some barely remember it; some declared they could not appreciate it because they had to work that day; and some even said that the festival was detrimental to their business. So, even if they enjoyed it, the shop owners mostly remained spectators of the festival. They did not take part in the organization of the event, nor did they really attend it. They did not even seem to have benefited from it from a business point of view. Ultimately, the feeling that is predominantly shared by the shop owners is one of indifference, if not of exclusion. Moreover, some people were physically excluded from the festival: the street traders – who sell daily on Rockey Raleigh Street – were asked to leave the premises on the day of the festival. The symbolical and physical exclusion of some of the main characters of Yeoville certainly questions the capacity of the festival to be an inclusive event *for all* the people in Yeoville. If the festival did not manage to involve all the people from Yeoville, was it nevertheless able to attract people from outside?

Changing the image of Yeoville to attract visitors and generate income

One of the objectives of the festival was also to change the image of the neighbourhood in order to attract more people and investments from other parts of the city, and even beyond. This implies to look at the attendance of the festival as well as at its capacity to generate income. Unfortunately, there is no study about the people who were present at the Yeoville Africa Week Festival or about its economic impact on the area. My own resources did not allow me to conduct an extensive quantitative research on these matters. My following remarks are thus mostly based on qualitative interviews and observations.

According to the organizers' evaluations and the locals' common perception, between 5000 and 10000 people attended the festival in 2010, the audience being predominantly from the neighbourhood and Black. The small number of Whites during the festival is an indication of the extent to which the festival managed – or not – to attract people despite their negative representations about the place, and then of the ability of such event to change the image of Yeoville. It is also be a first practical way of evaluating how many people from outside Yeoville came to the festival since Whites are now very few in the area (figure 2). As Smithers observed, the few White people who were there were somehow connected to the "Yeoville Studio" and the "Hotel Yeoville" projects (Smithers's interview, April 2011). Even though some of them stayed for the entire festival, this means that the festival in itself did not really manage to attract a new crowd. Finally, the fact that the festival alone was not able to attract a significant number of Whites – and presumably of people from outside – is obviously a sign of the difficulty of the festival to have influence beyond its own area. Yeoville is still today a place most White people avoid, mainly because they are afraid to go there.

This is something that the organizers of the festival themselves have acknowledged and deplored. In their view, this difficulty to reach a broader audience is principally the consequence of poor

marketing of the event – relying mainly on the local newspaper – due to lack of funding. To tackle this issue, the budget for the 2011 festival was increased from 520 000 to 1 100 000 rands (100 000 euros), with a quarter of the budget reserved exclusively for marketing purposes. The problem is that the festival committee never managed to get the funding for the second edition of the festival. Nevertheless, the *Alliance Française* of Johannesburg – an organization promoting French culture – agreed on giving the Yeoville Africa Week seven films, winners of the Burkina Faso Film Festival, one of the most well known African film festival. Thanks to this contribution, the festival committee hopes to draw attention of some people from outside the area, as revealed by a discussion amongst its members concerning the timetable of the movies. One of the committee members was arguing that the films should start at 5pm, that is to say after work-hours but before it gets dark, in order to allow workers as well as women and children from the neighbourhood to come. Another member argued that the films should start later to give people from outside Yeoville the time to come. In the end, it was suggested that maybe two screenings could be set up in order to accommodate both audiences. This debate is symptomatic of the issues that can arise when targeting audiences that have different and sometimes conflicting expectations. Being a community based event, should the local audience be prioritized? Or should a wider audience be favoured in order to attract attention and money in the area – which can in return benefit the community?

For that matter, the economic outcomes of the 2010 Yeoville Africa Week Festival are controversial. The organizers had assumed that the festival would automatically have a positive impact on the incomes of the traders of Rockey Raleigh Street, which was apparently not the case. The market traders, for instance, estimated that they lost up to 50% of their revenue on that day. According to them, the closure of the roads was very detrimental to their business: firstly, because it disabled their suppliers to deliver them fresh products for the week; secondly because it prevented their usual customers from having access to the market. These allegations are to be interpreted carefully against the background of sometimes conflicted relationships between the marker traders association and other local organizations like YBCDT. Nevertheless, it is clear that the benefits generated by the festival are all but obvious. For example, the *Kentucky Fried Chicken* restaurant in Rockey Raleigh Street had 1117 clients and an average ticket of 33,09 rands on the day of the festival – that is to say the last Saturday of May 2010 – whereas there were 1192 clients and an average ticket of 34,64 rands on the last Saturday of May 2009. The reasons of these under-achievements are still unclear. They might be the result of little attendance of people external to the area and/or with a high purchasing power, as well as the consequence of lack of involvement of the shop owners who did not really take advantage of the festival to make more money – some even closed their shop to go to the festival.

In conclusion, the capacity of the festival to attract people from outside Yeoville and to generate outcome seems to be limited. Surely, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the potentialities of the festival in this regard. Nevertheless, these are issues the festival will have to deal with, if it wants to become sustainable. Because there has been only one edition of the festival so far, the essence and the future of the festival is still an open question, not only at the social and economic level, but also at the political one.

Emergence of a new political voice

As the festival is still in its early stages, its role in the local political scene is still to be defined. Will it be an additional support to the existing local organizations or representatives? Or is it an emerging alternative voice in the local political arena? Is it potentially a channel through which all the people from Yeoville could be represented?

As previously said, the Yeoville Africa Day Festival was imagined as a way to give birth to the new vision of the neighbourhood as a "Pan-African Village". By developing this vision 'from below', the local organizations challenged the top-down approach usually implemented by the City of Johannesburg. However, this does not mean that these organizations contest the metropolitan authority itself nor its 'gentrified' aspiration for the neighbourhood. In fact, the festival needed the support of the City of Johannesburg to concretize their dreams: it is indeed the City who funded the 2010 Yeoville Africa Week Festival. Furthermore, some of the festival organizers do not think that gentrification is necessarily contradictory with their own vision – even though they admit to its potential damaging effects on the neighbourhood and its residents. As said by Aura Msimang-Berton, a cultural activist in charge of the artistic part of the festival:

> *"I want the neighbourhood to stay healthy. I don't want our buildings to be crumbling. It is unfortunate that it takes speculators to fix a place where then poor persons cannot afford it."* (Msimang-Berton's interview, April 2011)

Gentrification is seen as a necessary evil in order to improve the area. Ultimately, the festival is not a means for the local organizations to contest the legitimacy of the City of Johannesburg, but rather to establish a direct link with it, and by doing so to be recognized and legitimized as effective organizations. In this respect, the relations between the City and these organizations are more complementary than conflicting. This process however completely bypasses the ward councillor. Although Councillor Mohlala is the representative of the metropolitan authority at local level and a member of the political party in power, she was not particularly involved in nor supportive of the festival. It seems as if this communicational gap principally resulted from reciprocal misunderstandings – not to say personal conflicts – between her and the main organizers of the festival, rather than from structural problems.

The relationship between the City and the team of the festival itself is not without ambiguity. On the day of the festival, Sack – the head of the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage – declared that:

> *"The area has such a cosmopolitan vibe about it. I hope more carnivals like this are held here."* (City of Johannesburg website, "Yeoville rocks Africa Day", Ndaba Dlamini, May 31st 2010)

Despite this declaration, the City however decided not to fund the second edition of the festival but instead to support other events such as the Africa Day concert in Newtown. This annual concert, which also celebrates Africa Day, is a very different kind of event. Firstly, it is located in one of the first regenerated and gentrified areas of the inner city, now known as the "Cultural Precinct" of Johannesburg (figure 1). Secondly, its programme is mainly made up of international artists or well-known local ones, in order to attract a large arty middle-class audience. In this respect, the City

seems to prioritize events that comfort the "World-class African City" image it is trying to build. Such events are geared towards the privileged (Sihlongonyane, forthcoming) rather than the promotion of community development. The organizers' reactions *vis-à-vis* this decision were ambivalent: some deplored it while others celebrated the fact that it would force the festival to become more independent. Because of the non-support of the City, the festival committee has had to look for funding from public authorities at a provincial and national level as well as from private companies. Unfortunately, two weeks before the event, the festival team has still not managed to secure any funds. Nonetheless, the team was not prepared to give up: they decided to organize the festival anyway but on a scaled-down version and using all the volunteer forces available. Could this latest development be a sign that local organizations are gaining power and independence at a local scale? Or is it on the contrary evidence that this event is not sustainable and that it is likely to disappear in the next few years? Clear is that the festival participates in the redefinition of the local political forces by giving a new means of expression to the people living in Yeoville. The question remains though whether the festival is able to broaden the process of participation beyond the core team of organizers and beyond the duration of the event.

On the one hand, the festival is organised in such a way to give visibility and a voice to people who do not usually have a chance to be looked at or to be heard – for instance migrants, women or economically disadvantaged people. In this respect, the festival could be a way to initiate an empowerment process for those who are 'powerless'. On the other hand, particular individuals seem to have a strong hold on the organization process, to the extent that some people from the community have felt excluded. The critics raised in 2010 to this regard prompted the creation of a selection committee, which advertised each position of the new festival committee. But, once again, due to lack of funding, those who got the positions where people willing to be volunteers, that is to say mainly people who were already involved in the festival the previous year. This obviously challenges the festival's ability to be – and to be perceived as – an inclusive process. In addition, these members of the festival committee are also involved in other community organizations or activities. How to ensure then that these activists' vision for Yeoville is shared by the whole community? The risk is hence that the festival committee ends up reproducing at a local scale the very metropolitan bottom-up strategy it initially wanted to challenge.

Conclusion

Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the Yeoville Africa Week Festival, this event is in any case interesting from an artistic point of view and foremost from a social, economical or political one. At a global scale, and in a context of 'festivalisation' of urban public spaces, this challenging case study questions the so-called social potentialities of such art performances (Quinn, 2005), as it is planned to be predominantly focused on the community, and not only on place marketing. At a metropolitan scale, this festival is also remarkable because it is one of the few public art projects to be initiated by the community itself and not imposed by the City of Johannesburg in an attempt to promote its "World-Class African City" vision. As such, the festival is a stimulating example to question the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Authority's top-down strategies, and suggests alternatives to it. At a local scale, the festival is also emblematic of how art is used for social,

economic and political purposes. Ultimately, this festival enables us to interrogate the role of art in our contemporary societies.

Nevertheless, the Yeoville Africa Week Festival is already facing challenges in order to be sustainable and to achieve its own objectives. One is obviously the problem of funding, which is crucial if the festival wants to become a regular event, and to initiate a process of community building. Another issue is the festival's capacity to become more inclusive in its process of organization, in order to be a project of and for all the people in the community. The future of the festival will depend on its ability to tackle these issues.

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