



# University of the Witwatersrand Forced Migration Studies Programme

Incident Reporting: Experimental Data Collection Methods and Migration Governance

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Paper Submitted to African Migrations Workshop African migration research: methods and methodology  
Rabat, Morocco  
November 26th – 29th 2008

## **Introduction**

Informal migration is transforming political power and authority in Africa. The growing presence of large populations of undocumented and/or disenfranchised people exacerbates and complicates the already tenuous relationship between 'states' and 'citizens' in this region. When officials have limited obligations to those that move through and reside in a jurisdiction, they are more inclined to reinterpret their governing mandates and act outside the bounds of the law. Informal migrants also possess strong incentives to disengage from formal governance structures and in some cases, to deliberately subvert state agents, particularly those involved in immigration enforcement. These dynamics compel us to reorient the way we study the relationships between governance, informality and migration. Scholars are beginning to recognise that governments do not simply struggle to define and limit informal migration but that migration is increasingly informalising African governance structures.

Understanding these dynamics requires improved data. Unfortunately, our ability to speak confidently about informality and particularly 'corruption' in migration governance is limited by a paucity of reliable and comparable data. The clandestine nature of many of the relevant activities and the characteristic unreliability of individual testimonies compel us to conceptualise new approaches. While ethnographic approaches offer ways around these problems, the acknowledged presence of an observer and the individualistic and idiosyncratic nature of this approach are constraining factors. On the other hand, quantitative studies are rarely grounded in a reliable phenomenological understanding of corruption and so commonly provide us with unreliable explanations. Hence, we need to search for alternative ways of generating reliable and useful information on the informalisation of migration governance.

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This paper reviews an experimental data collection method employed to correct this research gap. This approach, which we have dubbed 'incident reporting', combines a systematic procedure for sampling observed instances of immigration enforcement with a benchmarked process of categorising and coding these observations. The approach goes beyond conventional approaches by: a) decreasing, through the removal of threat of personal or institutional sanction and/or repercussion, incentives for subjects to adjust their behaviour or censor their language; b) increasing our capacity, through the utilisation of GIS mapping, to test causal hypotheses of official malfeasance; and c) linking the study of the nature of official malfeasance in immigration enforcement directly to the study of the extent of these practices. While the replication of the approach in other research sites is limited by safety and ethical issues, the paper suggests that the approach could be usefully incorporated into the study of migration governance across multiple research sites in Africa.

### **How Can We Study Corruption in Immigration Policing?**

As it becomes ever more certain that border controls are not an effective solution to informal international migration, many national governments are calling on domestic police forces to help them enforce immigration laws.<sup>1</sup> In addition to adopting a range of 'external' control mechanisms, including carrier sanctions and burden sharing agreements with other states, governments have increasingly relied on a range of 'internal' controls which limit access to citizenship entitlements and pour added resources into the surveillance of human mobility and residence (Groenendijk, 2003; Guiraudon and Lahav, 2000; Lahav, 2000). In order to implement these policies, US immigration policy-makers have sought to a) empower police officers with the prerogative to conduct inspections of buildings and make immigration arrests; b) support police departments with increased access to immigration databases; and c) coordinate activities with local police agencies to conduct raids or other enforcement operations (Coleman, 2007). Although it is unclear how police departments will ultimately respond to this responsibility for immigration enforcement, it is likely that efforts to increase

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<sup>1</sup> In some senses this represents a return to past practices. Prior to the formation of regularised and functionally separated immigration departments, ordinary police officials did most of the work involved in checking migrants documents and arresting those who did not possess a valid immigration permit (Brannigan and Lin, 1999; Lucassen, 2002). As immigration policies became increasingly separated from 'ordinary' law enforcement functions in the post-war era, many came to regard the immigration policing as an entirely separate state function to the policing of criminal laws. This was reflected in a concomitant retreat of police forces from immigration enforcement roles and in some more extreme cases, the passage of laws which specifically limited the powers of police officers to make immigration arrests.

their involvement will remain a feature of immigration policies for some time. In particular, it is likely that as migration increases in profile as an international governance issue, African police forces will be increasingly called upon to assist in enforcing immigration laws.

### *Work on Immigration Policing*

After a long period of fascination with immigration officials at the border (See, for example Andreas, 2000; Heyman, 1998, 2004), scholars are increasingly turning their attention to the police's enforcement of immigration laws in residential, commercial and agricultural areas and on the streets. While some researchers, particularly those concerned to combat human trafficking, have sought to discover ways in which the police can be capacitated to improve their surveillance of human mobility (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2005; Mameli, 2002), the majority of this work has been critical of the increased involvement of domestic police in immigration enforcement. Scholars have a) interrogated the legal basis upon which local police officers implement federal/national immigration laws (Keblawi, 2004); b) questioned the grounds upon which law enforcement resources are being redistributed (Barbagli and Sartori, 2004; Holmes et al., 2008); c) noted adverse affects on migrant relationships with the police and willingness to report crime (Kittrie, 2006); and d) emphasised the manner in which police enforcement contributes to the negative stereotyping of minority communities (Adler, 2006; Romero, 2006). Unlike immigration officials, police officers often do not possess the necessary language and cultural skills to deal with suspected 'illegal migrants' in a sensitive manner (Culver, 2004). They are preoccupied by other policing agenda and tend to confuse their roles and prerogatives as enforcers of *criminal* laws with their corresponding powers vis-à-vis the *administrative* character of immigration law enforcement (Quassoli, 2004). It is perhaps unsurprising then that research on internal enforcement has identified a range of specific failures by the police to act in accordance with the spirit and the letter of immigration laws. Police officers have been more likely to unreasonably use force to arrest undocumented migrants; commonly verbally abused suspects (Phillips et al., 2006; Phillips et al., 2002); unnecessarily harassed particularly vulnerable migrants; and extorted migrants for bribes (Gulcur and Ilkcaracan, 2002). This latter finding is particularly worrying, not simply because it casts doubt on the utility and implications of internal approaches to immigration, but also because it suggests that such policies may be compromising the integrity of law enforcement agencies themselves.

Journalists and scholars have faced few difficulties in generating anecdotal reports of official malfeasance in immigration policing. Generating reliable, representative and comparative data on this subject is far more problematic. Much has been written about the 'Blue Code', the powerful set of moral norms within the police force that encourage feelings of

organisational belonging. This code negatively sanctions officers who speak openly and truthfully about Departmental practices ensuring that even individuals who are not involved in illicit activity will be disinclined to provide information about their colleagues' activities (Barker and Carter, 1994; Blumberg and Niederhoffer, 1985; Kennedy, 1977). On the other side of the equation, undocumented migrants are also a relatively elusive research subject. They commonly do not report crimes for fear of reprisal or lack of protection (Kittrie, 2006). They underreport in surveys and censuses because of fear of individual and collective discovery (Margolis, 1995). More generally, 'invisibility' is a crucial tactic adopted by undocumented migrants as a basic survival strategy to prevent unnecessary targeting by both officials and antagonistic citizens (Forthcoming Polzer JRS edition). The fact that almost all persons involved in immigration enforcement activities have limited interests in providing accurate information makes research on this subject particularly difficult.

Scholars have employed a range of methodological approaches and techniques to combat these problems. For example, Scott Philipps, Nestor Rodriguez and Jacqueline Hagan chose to survey migrant deportees instead of resident migrant populations (2006). This approach had two advantages: i) providing the researchers with a relatively easily accessed and relatively representative sample of their target population; ii) countering fears of reprisals by asking questions to individuals who presumably had 'little to lose' because they were unlikely to view discovery and deportation at the time they responded to the surveyors. Switching focus to the official side of this equation, Leigh Culver used an ethnographic/observational approach, involving police 'ride alongs' to show how a small town police force has confronted new opportunities for corruption due to an unexpected influx of immigrants (2004). This research relied on the generation of personal trust and high levels of confidence in the nature and potential impact of the research, characteristic strengths of participant observation as a research technique, to provide the researcher with entry into otherwise hidden practices of police officials, including their wide use of, and attitudes towards discretionary enforcement of immigration laws. On other occasions, researchers have been assisted by public and/or political responses to high profile cases of malfeasance which have generated significant amounts of official data. For example, Mary Romero's study of immigration enforcement raids in Arizona benefitted from the negative public response to the raids, which encouraged two separate government agencies to conduct detailed inquiries into, amongst other things, police mistreatment of minority communities (2006).

Despite the considerable methodological creativity and rigour that researchers have utilised to shed light on these complex issues, their studies have produced very minimal data on one

crucial form of official malfeasance: corruption. 'Corruption' may be broadly defined as the 'improper use of official authority for the pursuit of personal gain'. There are several reasons why it might be particularly difficult to generate reliable data on corruption than other forms of wrongdoing. The first problem relates to sampling. Whereas researchers who seek to develop portraits of undocumented migrants' experiences can combat problems of invisibility and limited access by sampling detainees and deportees, it is highly likely that groups and individuals that are successful in utilising corruption as a strategy will be absent from these populations. This makes it difficult to use surveys as a means of generating representative data on corruption. Second, whereas in cases of police brutality and xenophobia, migrants have specific reasons why they might want to provide researchers with information, in corruption cases migrants or their colleagues are invariably implicated in a criminal act, usually one of much greater seriousness than their immigration offence. Hence, there are much stronger reasons for migrants, even those who have already been deported, to under-report or tailor their responses to questions about corruption. Third, while ethnographic/observational research may help to build sufficient levels of trust to encourage police respondents to reveal some forms of rule-bending such as their negative attitudes towards minorities and or their beliefs in the 'virtues' of excessive force, it is likely that the higher level of sanctions and social norms against corrupt behaviour will ensure that these practices remain hidden from even the most embedded researcher. In this respect, it is worth noting that Culver's ethnographic research stories of officials being offered bribes by migrants, but no evidence of instances of police involvement in bribe-taking. Finally, there is little incentive for government officials to attempt to rigorously investigate this topic. Neither pro-law enforcement nor pro- migrant lobbies have much incentive to call on governments to rigorously investigate this form of corruption because it tends to tarnish the reputation of both constituencies. Unlike issues of xenophobia and physical abuse, it is likely that there will be few efforts to publicly document this problem.

#### *Methods for Studying Police Corruption*

This study began by reviewing the literature on police corruption in a search for alternative research techniques. Unfortunately, this literature did not provide much additional guidance. Scholars broadly concur with the proposition that we lack the means to examine corrupt practices in the police force. Unfortunately, this does not appear to have generated a corresponding level of concern with the innovation of new techniques. In this respect, Sanja Ivković's (2003) recent review of various sources available to research on corruption is as exceptional as it is enlightening. Ivković outlines five techniques which, in addition to officially produced data, researchers can utilise to generate claims about police corruption. She evaluates the potential relevance, utility and reliability of each. In doing so, she makes a

crucial distinction between quantitative and qualitative forms of research. Her review leaves the reader with a somewhat more optimistic outlook of scholars' capacity to measure the *extent* of police corruption in a consistent and comparative fashion. At the same time, when it comes to the issue of examining the *nature* of corruption the review suggests more sceptical conclusions. Particularly telling is her review of anthropological (Ivković prefers the term 'sociological') field studies of corruption, which are limited to a handful of seminal but nonetheless somewhat dated works.<sup>2</sup> While Ivković's review is exemplary, it also partially underestimates the interdependence of quantitative and qualitative approaches, and the manner in which the paucity of phenomenological understanding of corruption in the literature impacts on the merits of the broader research agenda. While, the quantitatively oriented literature is more abundant, many such projects have tended to adopt problematic assumptions about the *nature* of police corruption, limiting the accuracy of their claims.

A couple of specific examples will bear out this point. It is not surprising that we find the more parsimonious examples of a quantitatively oriented approach in the field of economics. Here researchers have sought to explain why police officers accept bribes and to use these explanations to differentiate between the potential strength of various policy frameworks for reducing (or deterring) crime. A good example of this approach is Bowles and Garoupa's attempt to develop a model for the optimal level of monetary criminal sanctions within a criminal enforcement regime (1997). Their study focuses on an idealised scenario, what they call a 'once-off' corrupt exchange, where a police officer detects a random motorist's infringement of traffic laws on a highway and engages in negotiation over a bribe *in lieu* of issuance and payment of the fine. While recognising the existence of more densely social forms of corrupt behaviour, the authors suggest that the hypothetical scenario can be utilised to show how law breaking and enforcement agents respond to the framework of laws and sanctions designed to prevent illegal activity. The economics literature is a relatively extreme example of a tendency that extends into the work from other disciplines. A good example may be found in the growing literature focussing on the psychological foundations of corrupt behaviour. The principal aim of this literature is to develop ways of detecting behavioural and psychological characteristics which may pre-dispose a police officer to engage in corrupt behaviour. The instruments that these works have developed to test the various causal characteristics of corruption are often based upon a highly stylised conception of the nature of corrupt behaviour. For example, Bruce Arrigo and Natalie Claussen's study begins with the aim of developing pre-screening instruments which will detect 'anti-social' behavioural and psychological characteristics (2003). They assume that by screening for, and eliminating

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<sup>2</sup> The full force of this summary is revealed in a single sentence where Ivković emphasises the dearth

'anti-social' people from the police force, we can gradually help to reduce the incidence of corruption.

Existing studies based on observational strategies provide us with a range of reasons for questioning the core assumptions on which such quantitative analyses have been built. Several of these works which are epitomised by classic studies like William Whyte's 'Street Corner Society', employ participant observation as their primary research method. This approach is characterised by its intuitive forms of investigation, intensive observation of a small number of subjects, and researcher absorption into the cultural norms of the study group. While not specifically focussing on the police, Giorgio Blundo and Olivier De Sardin suggest that this type of approach makes

it possible to demonstrate the *action logics* of the actors involved, the description of corrupt *processes* and the associated techniques, the analysis of the popular *representations* and forms of *justification* and condemnation associated with corruption (2006: pp. 11-12)

Scholars have used this method to develop telling portraits of the nature of corrupt exchanges and to interpret this ostensibly 'aberrant' behaviour in terms of the basic routines and norms that constitute a police officer's social world. The image of police corruption these studies have generated is of a highly organised activity that may influence and justify police priorities and strategies at all levels of decision-making. Many of the images generated by these studies challenge the propriety of assuming that corruption can be meaningfully described as a 'once-off' affair or that corrupt activity may originate in an individual's 'anti-social' behavioural characteristics. It is likely that even seemingly 'once off' encounters between anonymous citizens and police officers may be far more embedded in the organisation of police work than economists assume. As the authors note, the very reason why junior officials are posted to traffic duty (as opposed to being posted to investigative police work or replaced by speed cameras) may be dependent upon their ability to generate incomes for senior officials through their corrupt activity. On a less sinister but equally problematic note, even if senior officers gain little from the receipt of bribes themselves, they may continue to ensure that junior officials are engaged in traffic duties involving corruption because this serves the interests of senior officers in either harassing particular groups/areas, or misrepresenting their own performance through statistics, or winning the confidence of the public by being visible rather than effective. It may be that these factors

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of data out there: 'the only study of police corruption was conducted by Sherman in the 1970s'.

are what render corrupt activities possible and set the parameters within which individual officers calculate the potential costs and benefits of individual bribes. In short, it is far from clear that anything resembling the economists' stylised version of a corrupt exchange exists in reality. On the other hand, the social-psychological literature faces the problem that the correlation between police corruption may be starkly opposed to their assumptions. A highly sociable person may be more likely to support some of the key practices which undergird corrupt behaviour including: a) establishing non-professional relationships with members of the community; b) prioritising highly personalised forms of obligation over abstract principles of law; and c) maintaining the 'code of silence' required to shield officers from detection and prosecution. By the same token, anti-social individuals may be the most likely candidates to provide information on the corrupt activities of their colleagues, or for playing the role of the so-called 'rat'.

While ethnographic/observational research helps to check economic and sociological approaches by interrogating the latter's core assumptions about the nature of corruption, it does not effectively substitute these approaches. As proponents of this approach would acknowledge, the strength of their methods in generating reliable portraits of corrupt behaviour in specific settings is significantly balanced by the context-specificity of the knowledge produced and the difficulties involved in transforming these claims into more reliable generalizations about the relevant phenomena. Ethnographies generally produce knowledge that is not only highly specific to the chosen research site or community, but also highly dependent upon the perspective and 'entry point' of the researcher into this community.<sup>3</sup> The approach provides us with few means, beyond allusion, intuitive association and post-hoc comparison to ascertain whether the image of corrupt practices developed by a particular study has broader relevance beyond the chosen site. This is a problem for scholars interested in building theories about police corruption.

If this discussion makes for compelling reading for anyone concerned with the advance of the academic study of police corruption, the praxeological and practical character of research on police corruption make these findings more deeply concerning. While ethnographic works tend to be more circumscribed in their prescriptive claims, many of the quantitative studies contain specific policy recommendations which, if accepted as valid, could fundamentally reshape the manner in which policy makers and societies more generally attempt to minimise or mitigate police corruption. For example, the economic model put forward by Bowles and Garoupa is presented as a potential guide to allocation of

enforcement resources. The pre-screening model developed by Arrigo and Clausen is presented as potential tool for to be used in the recruitment of police offices. If it turns out that the core assumptions of these models are flawed, i.e. if a) 'once-off' corrupt exchanges are an imaginary/unhelpful construct; or b) sociability is in fact supportive of corrupt behaviour, then the prescriptive elements of these works may have significantly harmful effects on anti-corruption initiatives or the police force more generally – lending credence to the incorrect apportionment of resources or the wrongful exclusion of qualified applicants from the service.

### **Description of the Study**

Given these issues, it appears essential, both for researchers of immigration enforcement in particular, and police research more generally, that we develop new techniques of generating reliable data on police corruption. With this in mind, this paper outlines an experimental research technique for studying various forms of law-breaking activities by police, including corruption in immigration enforcement. It is possible that this research technique could be applied in multiple ways, to answer a range of different questions about policing. However, the Johannesburg study was specifically designed with a small number of research objectives in mind.

This research was conducted as part of a broader collaboration between legal service providers, academic institutions and migrant advocacy groups to build the capacity of South Africa's non-governmental sector to address shortfalls in migrant rights protection. As part of its transition from Apartheid, South Africa adopted a new constitution which provides strong guarantees of protection for various categories of migrant rights. The progressiveness of these laws has been matched only by the incapacity of the government to ensure they are upheld. Officials at various levels have neglected their responsibilities to provide migrants with access to their rightful immigration status, healthcare and education. One of the most worrying developments has been in the enforcement of immigration laws where many reports by the media and independent agencies have noted rampant corruption, abuse and procedural irregularity (CoRMSA, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 1998, 2006). The actions of the police have received considerable scrutiny. While the Department of Home Affairs is officially responsible for the enforcement of immigration laws, the Immigration Act (n. 13 of 2002) warrants police officials to take suspected 'illegal foreigners' into custody pending status determination by an authorised DHA 'Immigration Officer'. In practice, this has resulted in a scenario where police officials do almost all of the 'legwork' of immigration

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<sup>3</sup> While multi-sited, comparative ethnographies of corruption have been attempted before, they have

enforcement, investigating suspected offences, taking suspected offenders into custody and then handing suspected offenders over to the DHA (Vigneswaran, 2007). In a country that last year deported over three hundred thousand migrants, this entails a huge amount of work and, a significant component of police resources.<sup>4</sup> Preliminary investigations of this activity by journalists and advocacy groups have shown that police activity in this area involves significant levels of corruption and worrying examples of physical abuse. Prior to conducting the current research study, our programme was alerted to the possibility that police officials were regularly demanding sexual favours from suspected 'illegal foreigners'. During the course of this study, our partner legal service providers took up two separate cases of migrant deaths in custody where inappropriate and disproportionate use of force by police officers were believed to be a contributing factor. While not necessarily instances of corruption, it is important to mention these forms of abuse because the study took all such practices, along with corruption, as dimensions of a more general body of evidence of arbitrary use of police power in relation to immigration enforcement.

The experimental technique we designed was employed as part of a broader study which aimed to investigate these claims, examine some of the underlying causes, and generate insights that could be directly utilised in a policy-making/advocacy setting. A number of empirical questions presented themselves as crucial to this overall exercise. First, we needed to understand why the police choose to expend time and resources on immigration enforcement. There is nothing in the immigration legislation which compels a police officer to ask an individual for their documents or to take suspected offenders into custody. Was, for example, the possibility of encounters involving extortion a driving factor behind the decisions to interrogate individuals regarding their immigration status? Second, it was not clear what sorts of law-breaking were occurring, how frequently they occurred and to what extent these were specific to immigration enforcement activities. Journalists and migrant rights advocates tended to produce interesting, but nonetheless sporadic reports of police officers breaking the law. However, they could not definitively state which, if any of these forms of malfeasance were common and/or endemic to the immigration enforcement process. Third, we needed to understand to what extent more senior level officials were involved in any hypothesised form of illegal behaviour by junior officers. Was this a systemic issue involving endorsement by higher level actors or a process driven by the more basic needs and/or predilections of officers on the beat?

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not been extended to the study of the police.

<sup>4</sup>Statistics obtained from Department of Home Affairs Annual Reports.

Incident reporting constituted a highly specialised technique that was designed to shed light on specific aspects of these broader questions. From the outset, it was assumed that multiple research techniques would be required to answer these questions. Drawing upon the approaches adopted by migrant policing researchers outlined above, these included: a) elite level interviews at the national and station level to examine how policing policies guided immigration enforcement practices; b) participant observation involving 'ride-alongs' with police officers to gain insights into how 'insider's' interpreted and rationalised malfeasance; c) a survey of immigrant deportees to generate a portrait of migrants' experience of abuses in the arrest and deportation process; and d) the use of Promotion of Access to Information legislation to acquire government records on police corruption. The objective was to use the incident reporting technique to inform and refine each of these approaches and thereby generate a holistic perspective of the causes, character and extent of police corruption in South African immigration enforcement.

### **Incident Reporting Technique**

The remainder of this paper will explain how we designed the incident reporting technique and account for our efforts to pilot the procedure in Johannesburg, South Africa. This discussion will be separated into four parts. I will begin by identifying the conceptual origins of the approach. The second part outlines the technical and procedural aspects of the study, including the sampling procedures, instrument design and mapping process. I will then explain some of the analytical procedures adopted, paying particular attention to the manner in which the combined use of statistical and mapping software helped to generate answers to key research questions. Part four addresses what many will rightly see as the most crucial issue of ethics, and show how this study has navigated the potential problems associated with conducting covert research.

#### *Conceptual Origins*

The logic of the incident reporting technique stems begins with an attempt to reconsider a core tenet of research on police corruption. Whereas most corruption research begins with the assumption that the object of analysis will be extremely difficult to locate, we began by presuming that some corrupt practices might be highly public in nature that can be readily and regularly observed in public places. At first glance this may seem like a strange point to being from in a city like Johannesburg, South Africa. Global surveys suggest that official corruption in South Africa is comparatively low for a developing country and particularly low for sub-Saharan Africa. In the International Crime Victimization Survey 2000 only 2.9% of South Africans reported having been asked or expected to pay a bribe for a service over the past year. While the figure for Gabarone was 0.8%, levels of reported corruption in Maputo

(30.5%), Maseru (19.2%), Mbabane (17.3%), Kampala (34.7%), Lusaka (9.8%), Windhoek (5.5%) were considerably higher. These findings indicated that corruption in Johannesburg was far from rampant. However, our own survey research provided us with reason to suspect that corruption might be more prevalent in immigrant areas. For example, in a survey of asylum applicants, a significant percentage (15.3%) of respondents who had been stopped and asked for their documents by a government official in South Africa reported having paid a bribe to avoid being arrested or deported.

Our hypothesis that police corruption might be more publicly visible in areas of high migrant concentration in Johannesburg was partially confirmed by a relatively fortuitous encounter. As part of our programme's outreach work, we held partnership meetings with several migrant advocacy organisations who were seeking to increase their research capacity. One of these organisations, we I shall call 'Migrant Help' was attempting to mobilise Zimbabwean migrants to monitor and prevent unjust forms of immigration enforcement in the Johannesburg inner city. At time of writing, asylum seekers in South Africa face considerable obstacles to lodging their applications for asylum and obtaining the temporary residence status that this procedure affords. Migrant Help had established registers of individuals who were in the process of lodging applications for asylum but had been unable to do so (Vigneswaran, 2008). The organisation had also established informal agreements with local police agencies to acknowledge the problems at the DHA and to ask their members not to arrest individuals on this register for immigration offences. Finally, the organisation was working in conjunction with legal service providers to secure the release of asylum seekers and other migrants who were being wrongly held in police custody for immigration offences. In order to extend this programme, the association had also moved to set up its own system for monitoring immigration arrests. Using a series of informal contacts and cell-phone communication, this group had mobilised a range of migrant street traders, volunteers and building managers to report cases where police officials had arrested or were arresting undocumented migrants. Migrant Help would send reporters to document what occurred. In those cases where the reporter/researcher believed some form of rights abuse had occurred or that the police had behaved in an improper manner, they would write a short narrative account of their observations.

Soon after meeting with members of the organisation I accompanied some of the researchers while they conducted their fieldwork. Their strategy was relatively straightforward, but at the same time remarkably inventive. Utilising their experiences of a) having lived in the neighbourhoods in question; b) informally observing how the police enforced the law; and c) involvement in local policing forums, the researchers had developed

a schematic understanding of the places where police officials commonly stopped migrants and asked them for their documents. The group became aware of instances of enforcement taking place in one of two ways. First, they had established informal agreements with street traders and building managers that worked in the relevant areas to send an SMS to the group's research coordinator whenever they heard about or witnessed a police raid on a building nearby. At this point the coordinator would either attend the scene personally or instruct another member of the research team to attend the scene and prepare a report. Second, the researchers would, often working in pairs or teams, comb areas where they knew arrests were likely to take place and write reports until they encountered a road block or a patrol car or an officer on the beat. At this point, they would observe the activities of the officials until they stopped and interrogated an individual or group. The researchers often worked without pen or paper, memorising events and words as they went along, and listening to the audible parts of whatever conversations took place. While much more could be achieved in crowded environments, the researchers were able to make relatively detailed observations regardless of the scenario, simply by behaving as normal pedestrians and observing what they could of the enforcement action. In the process of conducting this research they gradually learnt the characteristics of ordinary enforcement activities and settled on a series of visible cues, beyond the obvious exchanges of money, which might suggest that a corrupt or improper exchange had taken place, such as when an official invited a member of the public to enter their patrol vehicle before allowing them to continue, or when an individual placed an object on the ground which an officer subsequently picked up. On some occasions the researchers, several of whom were trained journalists, would follow up their observations by attempting to conduct interviews both with officials and the members of the public involved in the interaction in question. The reports produced by the group contained not only straightforward data such as the racial characteristics of officers and suspects, the nature of the enforcement action and license plate of the vehicle. The researchers had also documented less easily visible characteristics of the interactions between police officers and suspects, such as the amounts exchanged and the types of language used and could use these insights to build a more reliable portrait of the nature of the exchange itself.

Migrant Help had, by reacting in an intuitive and organised fashion to their group's security and rights-based concerns, established a relatively systematic means of monitoring enforcement-related rights abuses in their vicinity. By side-stepping one of the most prominent *a priori* assumptions of corruption research, i.e. that the object of analysis is invisible or hard to access; they had made it possible to look at this subject from a very different angle. Our programme felt that this approach could be utilised to provide broader

insights into the nature and extent of corruption in Johannesburg. However, several large and important questions remained. First, how representative and reliable were the findings? Could the research strategy be refined to provide for comparative analysis? Finally, was this covert form of research ethically sound? The remainder of this discussion will outline the manner in which our programme, dealt with each of these issues in collaboration with *Migrant Help*.

## **Technical and Procedural Dimensions**

### *Sampling*

Our principal aim in working with *Migrant Help* was to increase the capacity of their project to develop reliable generalisations about police corruption. Following their existing strategy, they could confidently claim to have produced reliable individual reports on police corruption in their vicinity. However, they could not determine how representative their data was of policing practices in their vicinity or policing more generally. By only writing up cases where a rights abuse took place, the researchers tended to sample on the dependent variable, excluding other, less problematic enforcement activities of the police. They tended to conduct more intensive research and write more extensively on cases that they were more ethically or morally opposed to, such as examples of abuse over those of corruption. Finally, while their system for identifying enforcement incidents, involving a network of contacts and personal knowledge of immigration enforcement 'hot-spots' was highly innovative, it also biased their selection, causing them to focus activities on certain areas to the neglect of others. This problem left their analyses open to various forms of critique, particularly the argument that they had merely identified a small set of officers engaging in a fairly uncommon set of illegal practices rather than a systemic issue.

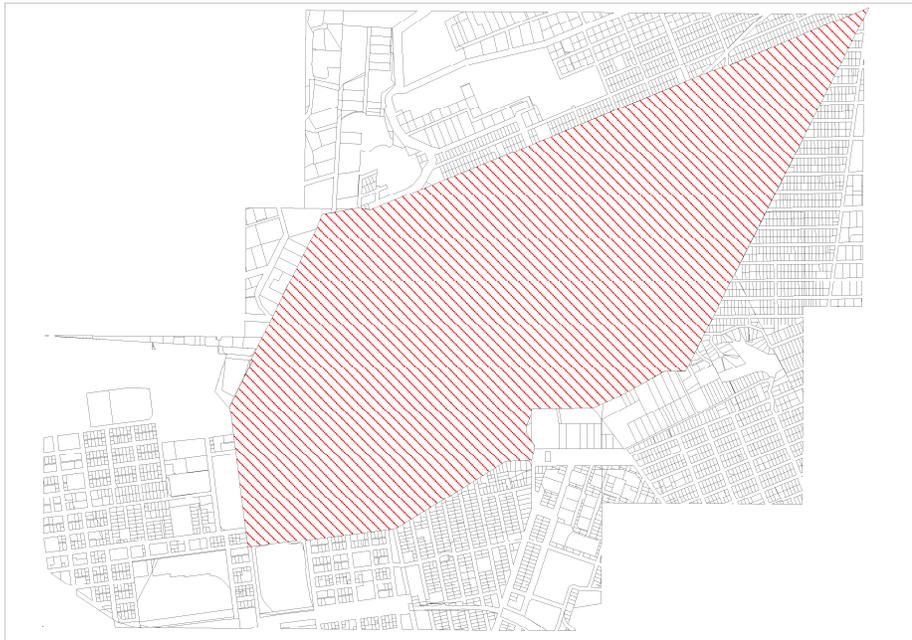
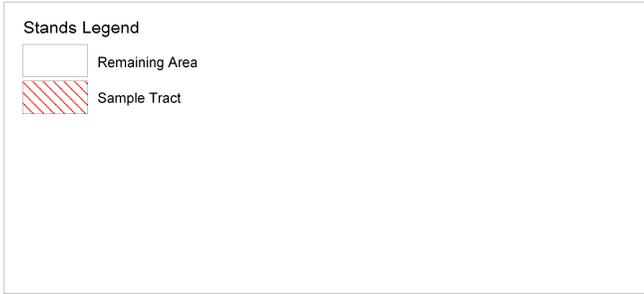
We set out to develop a more systematic sampling strategy for the research project. This was a difficult task because of the lack of an identifiable sampling frame. Unlike most migration and migration policy research, the object of study and point of access was not a fixed population of police officials, or migrants and their stories, but rather a range of enforcement 'incidents' that were loosely defined and impossible to quantify. The people involved were important characteristics of each incident, but were not the unit of analysis. While we possessed some knowledge, based on previous data on police work, about the various categories of police work and the distribution of police labour across these categories, there was no way of identifying a total population of relevant incidents and therefore few ways of determining an appropriate sample number or generating a random sample. Instead of aiming for these more lofty ideals, we tried to incorporate general principles of representativity into the selection process to make it more robust. This began

with the decision to limit the study to a finite area and period, placing spatial and temporal limits on the number of incidents that could be plausibly included in the sample. We then adopted techniques to increase the likelihood that, regardless of its positioning in space and time, each hypothetical incident (whether it involved problematic or routine policing activity) would have a roughly equal chance of being observed by our researchers.

The chosen tract, pictured below, was selected to correspond roughly in terms of size with the resources at our disposal and to include areas of dense migrant residential occupation and areas not dominated by the national group which constituted the core membership of Migrant Help. The selection also had the advantage of increasing the scope for comparison by including areas patrolled by three separate police stations as well as incorporating both residential and commercial areas.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For ethical reasons outlined below, this map has been deliberately kept anonymous.



In order to guarantee roughly equal coverage of the area, we decided to adopt a more systematic approach to how we encountered observable incidents. We discontinued the use of fixed reporters in the field and instead built solely upon the strategy of 'combing' the neighbourhood with roving reporters. We began by identifying 22 possible entry/exit points along the boundary of the sample tract. We then placed these numbers in a random order

and drew a line between each chosen point and the point immediately following it in the selection. These lines provided us with a template path which we could then use to generate a more realistic travel plan that conformed to road and traffic conditions. In order to make this strategy more efficient, we provided the research team with a vehicle. The central idea of the selection strategy, modifying the approach utilised by the monitors previously, remained to move through the sample tract until we spotted a police car or official. At this point two researchers would exit the vehicle and observe the next enforcement action in which this car or official was involved. In order to prevent artificial clustering, the research team would then travel at least three blocks further on the path before beginning to search for the next police vehicle or official. When both teams had completed their observations the vehicle would retrieve them and return to the path.

After identifying the tract and our procedure for combing through it, we chose a period of two months for the study, allowing for inclusion of a broad range of incidents while ensuring that our research did not go on indefinitely. We then systematically selected the hours in which the researchers worked. The 40 days of the study period were divided up into 80 four-hour work blocks. We randomly selected one quarter of these blocks in which to conduct research. This sampling strategy had the added advantage of increasing the coverage of the study in terms of time, while economising on our resources.

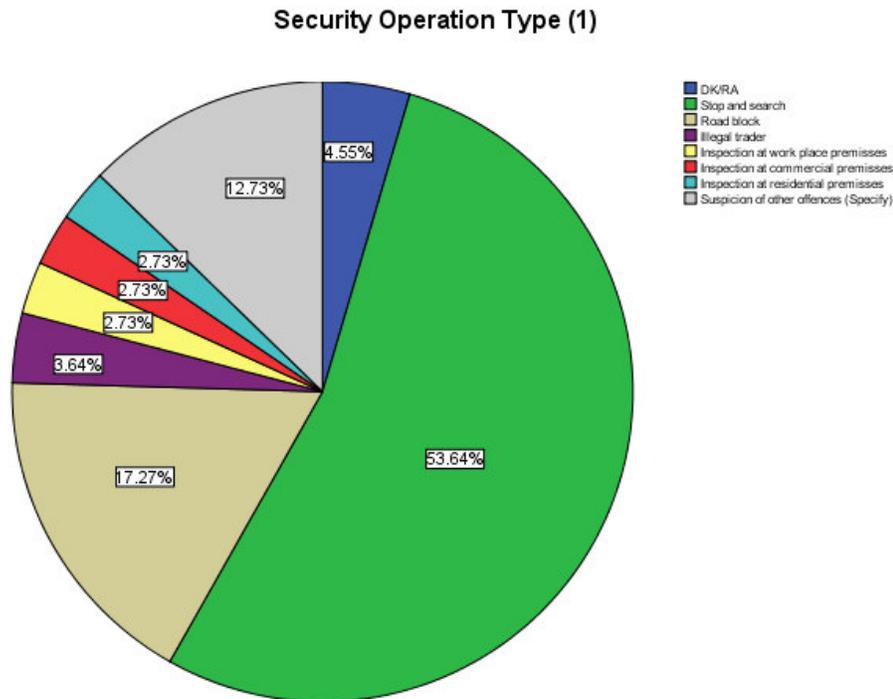
Using this strategy a total sample size of  $n = 111$  incidents was obtained. There is no definitive measure of how representative this sample is. Nevertheless, two characteristics of the sample population increase our confidence in the reliability of the results. The first is the geographic distribution of the incidents. As expected, there are several cluster points, but a broad geographic distribution of cases may be observed.

Sample Tract  
Showing Distribution of Detected Incidents  
● Detected Incident



The second factor increasing our confidence in the sample is the variety of categories of cases observed. While there is an expected dominance in the sample of 'street-level' incidents, several inspections of premises have also been observed. While the researchers observed many incidents where they suspected officers had broken a law of some variety,

these numerically exceptional cases could now be contextualised within a broader family of cases of more ordinary policing activity.



### *Reporting*

In addition to refining the manner in which we selected incidents, the project also needed to specify how these incidents would be observed. As noted above, prior to engaging in this collaboration the researchers had tended to respond in a relatively intuitive fashion to the incidents, making particular note of those aspects of the incidents that appeared most important and then recording these details in a short narrative account. There were significant limitations to this style of reporting. In particular, the resulting reports tended to resemble each individual researcher's own narrative predilections, varying from legalistic to journalistic to police investigative styles. Second, the material tended to reflect the individual researcher's own normative predilections, with particular reporters emphasising cases of police xenophobia and others preferring to fixate on issues of physical or gender-related abuse. These problems were made more complex by the strict practical limits on the amount of data that could be collected. Researchers had a brief 'window' during which they could observe and in some cases hear a small set of interactions amongst police officers and members of the public. On some occasions these could be supported by short informal interviews with the latter.

In order to refine this approach, we set about reducing the number of categories of information collected. These can be roughly divided into two sets: content data and characteristic data. Content data refers to observations of a particular type of irregular or lawbreaking behaviour on the part of the investigating officers. We decided to collect information on three categories of content data:

- Procedural: whether an individual had been asked for their documents, verbally abused or read their rights and whether the arresting officers were wearing badges;
- Use of force: whether force was used, whether the suspect offered resistance and whether the force used was proportional to the resistance;
- Corruption: whether the officers had solicited payments, whether payments had been made, any amount exchanged, whether any items had been stolen from the suspect and whether the suspect had been taken to a separate venue before being released.

Each of these indicators was laid out as a series of 'YES/NO/DON'T KNOW' questions which the observational team could answer in a checklist fashion. If their answers involved an observed case of potential irregular or illegal behaviour on the part of the police, the researchers would write a narrative describing the events reported directly underneath their completed report.

Characteristic data refers to observed characteristics of the incident which we planned to use to test causal relationships between the observed incidents and broader factors. Each was selected for their potential utility as an explanatory variable for the empirical questions outlined above as well as the relative ease of generating accurate data without the need for lengthy observation. We recorded:

- **Site:** by placing an 'x' on a map. This information was subsequently translated into geographic coordinates. This material was collected in part as a check on the sampling mechanism, but also to allow for spatial analysis of hypothesised relationships. For example, by attempting to establish correlations between, on the one hand, where specific types of enforcement incidents were taking place, and on the other, the zoning, criminal incidence and socio-demographic characteristics of the immediate neighbourhood, we

aimed to explore whether incidences of malfeasance involved targeting of particular activities, lawbreaking activities or groups.

- **Time and date:** by analysing the time of incidents in relation to their temporal proximity to pay days, it was expected that this information would allow us to test the degree to which economic motivations might underlie corrupt activity. For example, if corrupt activities were driven by real economic needs of individual officials, we could expect greater incidences of corruption prior to government pay days when officials are struggling to meet personal expenses. If, however corruption is more predatory in nature we could expect higher incidences of corruption after worker pay days when migrant groups, who are usually paid in cash, are known to carry their pay checks home from work.
- **Type of operation:** based on previous observations and discussions with police officials, we developed six categories of police stop. It was expected that this data could not only help us to check the reliability of sampling but help us to gauge the test the degree to which official organisation and or endorsement lay behind police malfeasance. Officers participating in road blocks are generally likely to have been instructed by a senior official to staff this post and to report on their activities to a senior official. In contrast, officers conducting random 'stop and search' processes usually have greater degrees of autonomy. By analysing which type of policing tended to involve a greater proportion of corrupt incidents, we could indicate the degree of official complicity in corrupt activities.
- **Departmental affiliation:** we also aimed to use this information to determine levels of organisation involved in immigration policing. For example, the regularity of DHA involvement in immigration enforcement actions could be utilised to gauge the extent to which police immigration enforcement was driven by general immigration policy directives, as opposed to the police departments' independent agendas.
- **Socio-demographic characteristics of officers and suspects:** this information could be utilised to detect instances of discriminatory or profiling behaviour by the police.

While these categories helped to rationalise the reporting process, we still faced a challenge in ensuring that the researchers were uniformly translating their observations into recorded information. In our attempts to refine this approach we searched for examples of how other

research exercises had sought to develop generalisations from relatively sporadic forms of human observation and investigation. Unsurprisingly, criminologists provided some inspiration here. The practice of conducting unobtrusive observations of police stops in public spaces is not an entirely novel research strategy, and has been specifically utilised by researchers to examine issues of police-minority relations before in the literature on ethnic profiling. For the most part, this literature has utilised observational strategies in order to generate reliable benchmarks of driver and offender populations which they have subsequently used to aid their analyses of aggregate data of police stops. For example, in one study on the Miami-Dade area, researchers were deployed at traffic inspections and instructed to survey which drivers ran red lights, exceeded the speed limit and made illegal turns and the race and gender of the offenders (Alpert et al., 2007). These observations were then used to generate a baseline of the racial characteristics to examine degrees of racial bias in police officers' decisions to stop motorists. Some studies have taken this approach further to observe police stops themselves. For example, a recent study of racial profiling on the Moscow Metro used this approach, supported by follow up interviews with suspects, to measure the degree to which police were disproportionately and unfairly stopping non-Slavic travellers. Ordinary police data collection processes also provided some inspiration. Many police departments encourage a rigorous process of documentation of both their own activities and reports of criminal behaviour that stem from observations made by individuals outside the police force. Although the coverage of these reporting systems vary, this sort of reporting is often designed to be utilised for the development of statistical generalisations and analysis, as is the case with the US National Incident Based Reporting System. Since police departments have little control over, or capacity to train the citizens who come to them with reports, the key to the reliability of this system is the police officer who interrogates the reporter and records the data. By interrogating the reporter in line with a series of established protocols, police officials ensure that the data collected conforms to prescribed standards.

Building upon the logic of these two data collection strategies, we adopted two procedures for ensuring consistency of reporting. First, prior to conducting the research we held a training workshop for our researchers with legal and socio-psychological experts in order to develop a series of appropriate benchmarks, primarily for the most difficult observations: of content data. Instead of allowing researchers to work independently, we deployed two researchers to investigate each incident who worked in consultation to prepare each report and write observations. A team leader then read through the entire report with them and confirmed how the information was obtained (through observation, over-hearing or interview) and confirmed or denied their reliability. As a general rule, in cases where it could not be

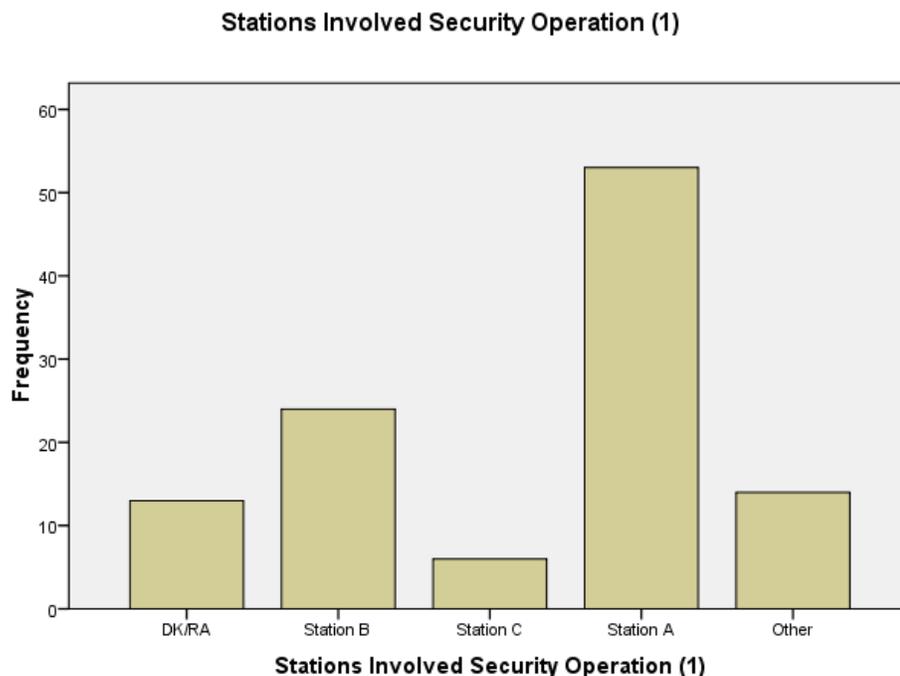
definitively stated whether or not a police officer had acted in a way that could be classified as unlawful, the team leaders were instructed to record 'don't know' in response.

The reliability of these reporting strategies varied depending on the category of the data being collected. As one would expect, regardless of the efforts to rigorously apply a benchmarking procedure, researchers were more capable of accurately recording characteristic than content data. There were also difficulties in ensuring that researchers erred on the side of caution in their recording of data. This was particularly problematic with regards to questions that were framed as basic features of a particular form of interaction, but could not always be adequately answered for every incident. For example, researchers sometimes included figures of how much money was exchanged in their reporting of corrupt practices on the basis of having sighted the money, but without having conducted an interview with the subject to confirm their suspicions. Many of these issues could be effectively addressed through rigorous cross-checking by the team leader. However, these problems meant that there are several categories of data which we cannot confidently report on. More problematic is the fact that it is not clear whether there were specific forms of policing that may have biased the observational process in one way or another. For example, are there aspects of road blocks that make corrupt activities more or less opaque? Do Metro Police officials adopt strategies which make their attempts to use force more or less visible? These types of questions constitute grounds upon which to criticise this technique and where greater refinement is needed.

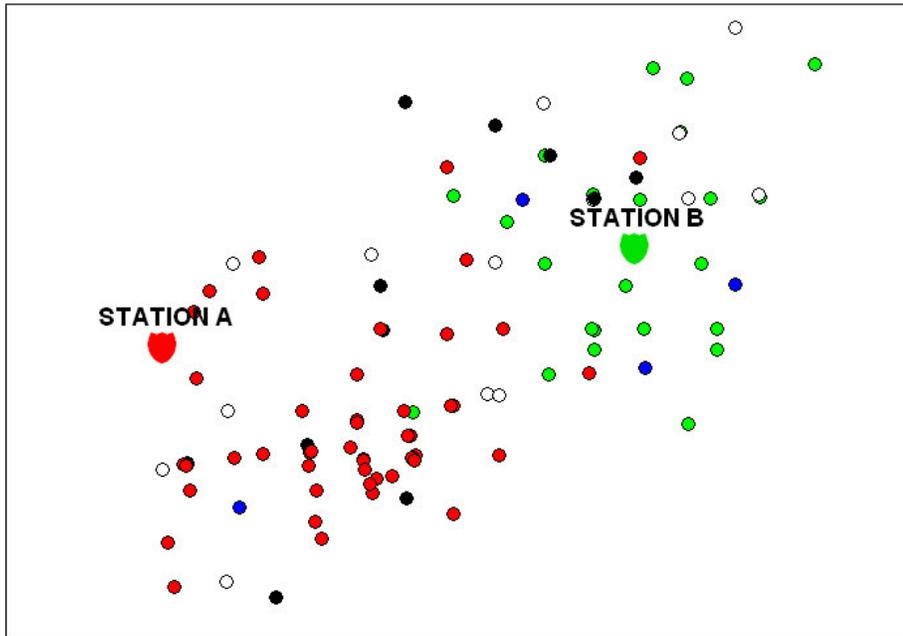
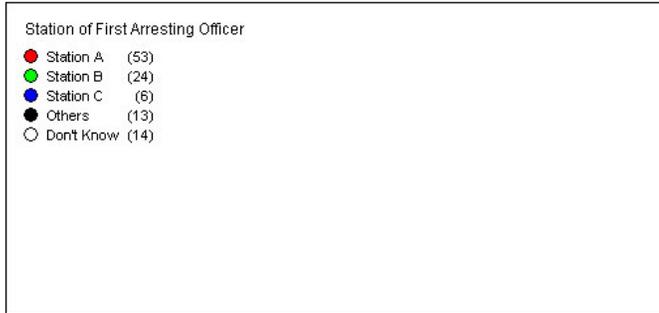
### *Analysis*

Despite these limitations, the study produced a range of data that we can relatively confidently report on, and use to establish some more reliable claims about the nature of informal police immigration enforcement activities. Some of these claims stem from relatively straightforward manipulations of categorical data. For example, we can show that within the sample tract, Department of Home Affairs officials are rarely involved in making street level immigration arrests and that the police more regularly participate in corrupt exchanges than they inappropriately use force in making arrests. Moving to a slightly higher level of sophistication, we can suggest that police officers appear were more likely to solicit payment at road blocks than in 'stop and search' procedures, suggesting a certain level of either brazenness or complicity of other officials. Furthermore, cases where police officers asked to inspect an individual's documents were more likely to involve instances of an officer soliciting a bribe. This indicates a possible correlation between immigration policing and corruption.

A somewhat more novel component of the research outputs are the analytical procedures made available through the utilisation of mapping software. We utilised this approach to test and partially exclude one of our preliminary hypotheses. Several previous interview respondents had suggested that officers commonly travelled to the sample tract from their workplaces in precincts located far away purely for the purpose of extorting migrants for bribes. If proven correct, this theory would lend credence to a predatory model of corruption, which posed personal enrichment as the driving factor of police decisions to enforce immigration laws. In some respects, a simple breakdown of the data on the station of origin and the finding that only a limited number of enforcement actions involved officials from outside the precinct, cast doubt on this hypothesis. We detected few cases of SAPS officers from other precincts ‘moonlighting’ within the sample tract. The majority of those cases of officers who weren’t from the three SAPS police stations with jurisdiction within the sample tract were Metro Police officials who are responsible for the enforcement of the city by laws across the city.



More compelling was the data which showed *where* police officials were involved in enforcement actions. This map showed a close correspondence between enforcement activities and police stations, with police officials from Station A and B rarely participating in enforcement in neighbouring territories.



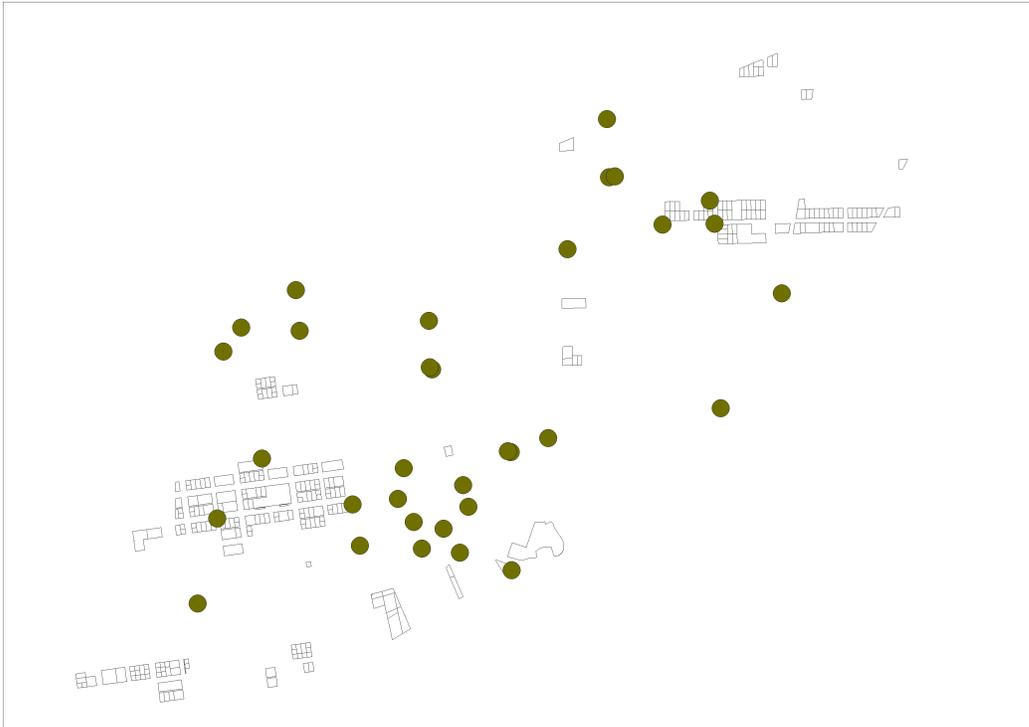
Crucially, this sort of analysis is not restricted to visual displays of information, but can provide numerical measures of relationships. This can be illustrated through a discussion of the findings regarding the relationship between corruption and commercial activity. The pair

of maps below displays the incidents in relation to commercial areas. The first map shows all incidents. The second map displays only the 'suspicious incidents' (where either a corrupt exchange was observed or where indicators of corrupt behaviour were observed). The noticeable difference is that whereas many of these incidents were observed in the heart of the commercial zones, few 'suspicious incidents' took place in these areas. If suspicious incidents did take place near commercial zones, they tended to be located near isolated commercial establishments or the fringes of the larger commercial areas.

#### All Incidents in Relation to Commercial Areas



## 'Suspicious' Incidents in Relation to Commercial Areas



This difference can not only be expressed visually. It can also be measured as an average distance between the incident and the nearest commercial area. The significance of these measurements is dependent upon assumptions about the strength of spatial indicators that haven't been rigorously tested (e.g. that distance from commercial areas or police stations is a meaningful indicator of a particular behavioural phenomenon such as avoidance of oversight or publicity). Hence, one should be cautious in drawing hard conclusions from such forms of analysis. Nevertheless, since these measurements of average distance are a form of continuous data, they open up the possibility of more precise testing of causal relationships, in a way that other forms of categorical data collected do not.

### **Ethics and Safety**

Despite these attractions of this research approach, there are some weighty ethical and safety issues that mitigate the degree to which it can be recommended as a procedure for wider usage. While we were convinced, after informal consultations with a lawyer, that the research approach itself afforded necessary regard to laws on privacy and surveillance, other ethical and safety questions were less easily resolved. Did the study's covert observational strategy contravene professional ethics on informed consent? Did the study expose researchers themselves to unreasonable and unconscionable risk – particularly in the form of potential reprisals? Did the decision to study criminal activity conform with

standards of reporting illegal behaviour to authorities? At a project management level, it was decided that we should begin to address some of these issues by constituting an independent advisory panel consisting of a member of the Department of Safety and Security (responsible for police policy-making in the Province), a Member of the Independent Complaints Directorate (an independent government authority responsible for investigating complaints against the police) a legal professional and one academic researcher from outside our own institution.

This body helped us to think through some key ethical dilemmas and to develop procedures to ensure compliance with relevant research standards. For researchers who are accustomed to regarding the informed consent as a *sine qua non* of research ethics forms, the decision to conduct research in a covert manner might appear to be the most challenging issue. Professional bodies and the broader literature appear have only cautiously accepted the use of covert research in strictly circumscribed areas. The British Sociological Association notes that 'there are serious ethical and legal issues in the use of covert research but the use of covert methods may be justified in certain circumstances'(2002: p. 4). However, as Julius Roth (1962) has noted, almost all scholarship involves certain degrees of non-disclosure or secrecy. Our study faced a considerably lesser ethical burden than studies which have involved researchers intentionally misrepresenting their identity in order to conduct participant observation in private social settings which would have otherwise been impossible to access. Ethnographic researchers have impersonated members of Christian sects (Douglas, 1976), night-club bouncers (Calvey, 2000) and somewhat more problematically, a 'lookout-voyeur' in male toilets (Humphreys, 1970). After surveying the literature, we believed that the main guidelines for determining how and when to employ covert strategies may be regarded as follows: a) that the use of covert strategies be justified in relation to some explicit humanitarian or public good (Douglas, 1976); b) that the information gained through the use of covert methods could not have been otherwise obtained through the use of ordinary means (Liamputtong, 2007; Miller, 2005); c) that the research only adopts covert strategies insofar as this is essential to the research process; and d) that we should aim wherever possible not to deliberately misrepresent of the research in which we were engaged (Erikson, 1967). Surprisingly, criteria (a) has rarely been a topic of discussion in the literature on covert methods. To the extent that the issue of broader purposes has been discussed, scholars have tended to adopt a very general conception of the relationship between research and social change i.e. that increased knowledge about social phenomenon may 'trickle' through into policy and advocacy. We believed that a higher threshold was necessary. This involved the identification of a specific form of harm and/or domination that created strong normative grounds for conducting the study, i.e. the abuse of

migrant rights and misuse of state policing resources. Our approach also involved the incorporation of specific mechanisms to ensure that the research findings would have an increased chance of being used to address these forms of harm in the design and dissemination phases of the study.

To some extent issue (b) has been dealt with above. This paper has already described the set of specific barriers to other known research techniques that have prevented the generation of knowledge on the subject of corruption. Notifying police officers in advance of the nature and purpose of the study would almost certainly have led them to alter their behaviour and would possibly have exposed our researchers to greater risk of reprisals. At the same time, this did not imply the need for total secrecy. For example, we made our research purposes and design transparent to senior police officials through our advisory panel and ensured that all interviews of non-police officers took place in line with standard principles of informed consent. Furthermore, we set in place a procedure which permitted disclosure of the nature and purpose of our study, without directly placing all of our researchers in a potentially precarious situation in the field. Our protocol was as follows: in the case that a researcher was interrogated by a police officer about their activities, they were instructed to provide a general account of the study and to provide the officer with details of a senior researcher whom they could contact for a more thorough explanation.

The second issue related to the potential danger to which our researchers might be exposed. Given the high crime rates in the area, all decisions to conduct research on human subjects in Johannesburg involve the acceptance of a significant level of risk of harm to researchers, risks that studies adopting more conventional research methods such as surveys or participant observation rarely think through or seek to effectively mitigate. 'The study of policing would appear to be a field where threats to personal physical safety are inevitable' (Westmarland, 2000). However, for our purposes, the study clearly involved an additional type of risk, that of potential reprisals from police officers or other persons who have strong motivations to prevent the collection and dissemination of information relating to their involvement in a criminal activity. As academics, our responsibility for potential dangers was not in any way lessened or mitigated by the fact that the Migrant Help research team had been engaged in this study prior to our involvement. Measuring the level of the risk posed to the researchers was not a straightforward task. Our approach began with the assumption that there would be incidents where the research activity was regarded as suspicious by officers and researchers interrogated about their activities. We put in place a series of safeguards and protocols to minimise the potential for any such events to result in harm. This involved ensuring that the researchers were all equipped with mobile phones and

able to contact a legal representative and a senior researcher at the university. As noted above, we then established a protocol for responding to questions from the police that involved being relatively candid about the researchers' identities and responsibilities. Finally, in order to guard against potential reprisals we established a rule that if in the case of any discovery the research team would conclude research and convene a meeting of senior researchers to decide on whether and when the research should continue and/or whether the relevant members of the team should be removed from the study. In total, the researchers were stopped by police officers on two occasions during the study. On one of these occasions the officers became suspicious upon detecting the use of clipboards in the vehicle and made inquiries about their purpose. After informing the officials of the identity of the researchers and providing them with a letter describing, in broad terms, the nature of the study, the officers appeared satisfied and allowed the vehicle to proceed. Based on these brief experiences, we cannot definitively state whether the procedures adopted were adequate. However, it would not appear that the risks faced by virtue of conducting research in a covert manner were of an entirely different order to those presented by more conventional social research strategies in Johannesburg such as survey work and participant observation.

The final issue related to our responsibility vis-à-vis disclosure of information. Obviously, given that the focus of the research was on criminal activity, the research broadly conformed to the research principle of reporting findings of criminal behaviour. However, it would not have been feasible or ethical to report on every incidence of law breaking we observed. For instance, given the power dynamics involved, would it have been ethical for researchers to utilise a covert research strategy to collect and disseminate data that could assist in the prosecution of an undocumented migrant for bribing a police officer? If we could not justify this type of intrusion, could we justify similar sorts of intrusion into the affairs of individual police officers? The principal questions appeared to be a) whether we should deliberately set out to collect information that could be utilised to incriminate individuals engaged.

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