

The “Talk of Crime” and the Re-creation of Lived Narratives: Rituals, Tips and Rhythms in the Context of Soshanguve, South Africa.

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The South African scenario is often portrayed as unpredictable, dangerous and difficult to decipher in its complexity, especially in relation to crime and crime stories. Drawing a connection between the South African urban milieus (be it the suburb or the township) and the way they are represented with respect to crime- with particular focus on the gang related crime in the public sphere- brings to surface the importance and the relevance of the “talk of crime”. This kind of talk assigns meaning to unclear events and creates a new lived situation based on the pre-constituted knowledge on gang crime and on the re-working of it melted in a new daily context certainly dictated by a routine but always the result of a new flow of intertwinement among people, talk and actions.

Drawing on a five-month ethnographic research in the township of Soshanguve, Pretoria and on interviews on gangsta culture the paper aims to discuss the continuous swing between the state of uncertainty over safety on the daily basis and the rhythmic rituals made by people in every action. It will be argued that in situation of uncertainty the incessant sway between the meaning given to the “talk of crime” and its production in the course of the actions: a) unfolds the rationalities of the country in dealing with perceived crime, thus it shows the tacit knowledge on how to behave, how to activate contingency plans for any occurrence, to how to change direction, how to know whom to greet, where to stop and where to run through; b) brings to surface the unseen; c) facilitates a strong narration of the country and it re-iterates the national image on crime.

Overall, the interest of the paper is to see how the connection between the daily routines and the narratives of crime are intertwined, the way feeling of uncertainty and safety work in fostering and changing the “talk of crime” and how a ritualized knowledge on how to deal with unexpected situations is based on the idea of lack of safety.